

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUSLY ACADEMICALLY
DISQUALIFIED STUDENTS AS THEY RETURN TO THEIR STUDIES

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By
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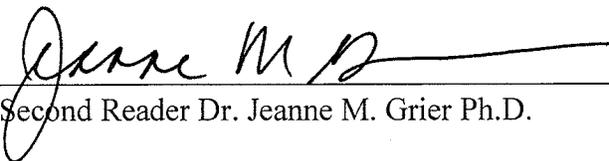
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Abstract

Navigating the university system given the various policies, procedures, and expectations can create anxiety and confusion for some students. These experiences will affect a student's overall academic performance and success while in attendance at universities. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students who were academically disqualified and then, after pursuing a reinstatement process, were reinstated to the university and returned to their studies. Each of the participants in this study related in some way to three themes, namely familial support, transfer from a community college, and choice of academic major. The mentioned themes were contributing factors to the experiences of the six participants who were invited to contribute in this study. Their stories augment the conversation about disqualification and reinstatement, as well as efforts geared toward the development and maintenance of policies and programs aimed at supporting student success and retention efforts. This study was guided by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism and Schlossberg's (1974) transition theory. It was important to capture the stories of the participants in order to further understand the factors that contributed to their academic struggles. Was it the courses they were enrolled in? Were they exposed to a higher educational setting before attending a four-year institution? This study sought to seek these answers. The study was conducted at a public, four-year institution located in southern California. Utilizing a qualitative, narrative research design, this study is based on data collected during semi-structured interviews. Recommendations for further research, policies, and programs are included within this study.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to
Jon, Adriana, Camila, and Caesar

Acknowledgements

As the years passed from the time that I received my bachelor's degree, 7 years to be exact, I knew that if I was going to pursue a master's degree, I would need support from others so I could embark on a journey that was foreign to me. All the while with a two-year old daughter and five months pregnant with my second daughter. Additionally, we had just moved back to California after nine wonderful years in Las Vegas and completely uprooted our lives. Why not complicate the equation further and apply for a master's program? That's exactly what I did and none of it would have been possible without the support from others.

I take my hat off to the six participants who allowed me to interview them and to talk about their disqualification and reinstatement experiences. This study would not be possible without you. You did not let a stressful situation block your way. You have overcome and you will graduate! Thank you always, for sharing your stories with me and for supporting my academic journey.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Students in attendance at universities may face many obstacles and challenges as they pursue their journeys towards a college degree. A student's educational experiences and motivation can be dependent on certain factors such as their social and cultural environment that may, in turn, affect learning outcomes (Vygotsky, 2012). Therefore, it is important to recognize what motivates students to return to their institutions after being academically disqualified.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies. This project is guided by the following research question: What are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students and their return to their studies? This study is viewed from a social constructivist lens. Without doubt, individuals working at institutions can benefit from understanding the experiences of these students in order to promote a successful college experience (Sogunro, 2014). When students do not feel motivated or are struggling with other factors such as transition issues, financial trouble, personal problems, or educational struggles, they may not always succeed. At the institution where this study was conducted, when a student does not perform up to the university's academic standards they may first be placed on probationary status. If they continue to struggle, they may then be academically disqualified or dismissed, each institution has its own terminology. The institution in which this study was conducted uses the term disqualification. As an academic advisor with professional experience at two vastly different universities, I have worked with both students who have made the choice to no longer attend after being disqualified as well as those who decide to return to their studies. Indeed, there is a link between motivation

and academic achievement (Sogunro, 2014). When an individual in any aspect of their lives performs strongly, they will be motivated to work harder (Sogunro, 2014).

It is anticipated this study will provide Academic Advisors, Counselors, Faculty, Faculty Advisors, as well as students with an understanding of the experiences of previously disqualified students and their motivations. This study also makes recommendations about how to better serve and meet the needs and interests of reinstated students. Students who struggle academically may be dealing with any number of transition issues such as transitioning from secondary to higher education. It can be expected that a student's motivation will and can change once in college as there are both challenges as well as opportunities present (Kyndt, Coertjens, van Daal, Donche, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2015).

Universities face a breadth of challenging issues when speaking directly to student academic success. Academic dismissals or disqualification standards are set specifically to each institution's mandates and policies. Students who struggle with these dismissals need to be considered individually as their experiences differ given the contexts in which their lives unfold. Specific standards define a student's good standing depending on the institution. The institution where this study was conducted requires the maintenance of a specific grade point average dependent on student class standing such as, freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. In the event that a student falls below their class standing grade point average requirement, they will be academically disqualified. Academic disqualification means that the individual is no longer able to attend the school as a regular student. If the student would like to attempt to be reinstated, as the university terms it, students must complete requisite conditions to be considered.

The procedure at the university where this study was conducted requires a student to take courses as a non-admitted student in which they must wait until the first day of instruction to

attempt to add courses. There is no guarantee they will be enrolled in the courses that they need to retake in order to raise their grade point average. In addition to not being guaranteed a seat in the course, the cost as a non-admitted student almost triples that of the normal cost. If, in the case that a student is able to successfully navigate the re-taking of courses in order to raise their GPA and be considered in good academic standing, the next step is to write a letter requesting to be reinstated to the university. These policies have important and far-reaching implications for students attempting a return to their studies. Given an academic disqualification, one might predict that persistence rates may be affected resulting in a more lengthy time-to-degree completion.

Time-to-degree and academic disqualifications are important issues faced in higher education (Wessel, Bell, McPherson, Costello, & Jones, 2006). This study considered the various conditions that may be associated with a student being academically disqualified. Factors include being the first in the family to attend college, low-socio economic status, major choice upon admission, transition issues, and exposure to a new environment to name just a few of the issues affecting students' ability to resume their studies after an academic disqualification. Students are struggling between their new environments and the old lives that they once knew (Wessel, et al., 2006). Many of them have not had any family assistance due to lack of knowledge of the higher education system as they are among the first to attend university. Oldfield (2007), among many others, refers to this phenomenon as cultural capital. He writes, “[C]ultural capital is the knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages a person has that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar environment in which he or she can succeed easily” (p. 2). Those who work directly with students must address the linkages that connect these struggles. How can we develop and work as an institution to alleviate the challenges that

are faced by our students? This study has sought to understand the experiences of previously disqualified students in an effort to better position universities to meet their commitment to student success for all students.

In the event that a student is reinstated to the university by adhering to all procedures that were required in the reinstatement process, there is a new-found hope for some of them, and perhaps new and improved sense of motivation to complete the degree. It is my hope that the stories that are shared in this study may assist advisors, counselors, faculty advisors, and students in understanding the experiences of students who were given a second chance. As Angelina stated, “The whole process taught me to communicate with my professors and I learned how to network with classmates, that was something different for me”.

Several themes from the semi-structured interviews conducted for this study emerged. Instances of pursuing the wrong major are identified within this study. Brost and Payne (2011) attribute the fact that a discrepancy does exist between a student’s ideal choice of major and the process of completing the major requirements. Students need to be informed and educated to understand that their choice of major will not always result in a direct correlation to career aspirations. A breadth of elements need to accompany those aspirations such as building a network of professionals who can assist in job placement.

Oldfield (2007) explained that the sharing of stories by students who are first-generation can encourage current students to survive and navigate the system so they don’t feel alone. When a student can relate to another student who is experiencing or has experienced the equivalent, it may result in enhanced motivation to pursue their studies. Academic disqualifications have lasting implications for students. In fact, despite the obvious Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act (FERPA) implications, some study participants said that if

they had been matched with a disqualified student who had been reinstated they may have experienced hope earlier in the process. Lack of knowledge of academic terminology also contributes to confusion and further questions among disqualified students. Perhaps if students could be paired with a peer or faculty mentor who shared the same experiences, this could provide a sense of belonging (Oldfield, 2007).

A student's motivation for what they learn will have an effect on their quality of learning as well as their educational outcomes (Kyndt et al., 2015). It is important for faculty and staff to be strategic in promoting high levels of critical thinking, advising, and mentoring for students who are returning to the university (Brost & Payne, 2011). A student's educational motivation can be dependent on many factors and can be greatly affected when a student does not succeed in college after a first attempt. Therefore, it is important to recognize what motivates them to want to return after an academic disqualification.

Chapter Two of this study provides a review of the literature to support the depth of this study. Chapter Three sets out the methodology used to obtain the information necessary to complete this study. Chapter Three also describes the research design used to analyze the data. Chapter Four provides the data analysis and findings. Findings are discussed and explored through the emergent themes stemming from personal narratives from each of the participants involved in this study. Lastly, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the major concepts and findings arising from this study. I also offer recommendations for policies and programs that work directly with students who may be struggling academically in order to better meet the needs of this population.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Chapter One identifies the purpose of this project and identifies the research question. Specifically, my research question is: What are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies? In this project, I share the stories of students who have navigated an academic disqualification and returned to their studies. I do this in an effort to advance understanding among those professionals advising students within the field of higher education through a social constructivist lens. The social constructivist perspective conceptualizes the idea that an individual's motivation to learn is socially integrated within the learning environment (Sivan, 1986). I also rely on Schlossberg's student transition theory (1975, 2011) as a secondary framework since it speaks directly to the experiences of previously disqualified students.

In this second chapter, I provide a literature review that supports the idea that student learning theories provide a solid conceptual framework in support of students' academic success as a whole. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn (2010) state that, "...educators must be familiar with an extensive literature base focusing on student development and be able to use relevant concepts and ideas effectively in their daily interactions with students" (p. 2). The literature that informs a researcher's perspective has direct implications for praxis, especially in their interactions with students. It is also important for administrators, students, and their families to understand that changes will occur throughout a student's college career that will require their support (Evans et al., 2010).

The theory of social constructivism was originated through the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the way an individual learns is linked to their childhood.

Pedology per Vygotsky (1978), is the study of the nature and development of children.

Vygotsky was particularly interested in understanding how an individual learns throughout their lifetime. Cognitive development and the act of learning greatly relates to how an individual will succeed in their studies according to Vygotsky (2011).

Social Constructivist and Support Theories

McClellan (2016) posits that the term *theory* can have several definitions and understandings. McClellan (2016) suggests that, “(a) theory is a plausible explanation of observable, oftentimes social, phenomena” (p.138). Thus, theory is used to describe, explain, predict, produce outcome, assess programs and practices, and generate new knowledge through research (McClellan, 2016).

Social Constructivist Theory has its roots in understanding the development of children in their learning processes (Vygotsky, 2011). In an article about how the elements of teaching must be performed at a level that is appropriate for a student’s level of development, Vygotsky (2011) explained the relationship between progression and cognitive development. Vygotsky (2011) stated, “...everyone is aware of the simple truth that it is impossible to teach some subjects prematurely” (p. 199). Teaching and learning relationships have an optimal period in which a deviation will be apparent. Vygotsky (2011) expressed, “the deviation from this optimal period in either direction can be lethal” (p. 199). A significant concept advanced by Vygotsky (2011) is Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For Vygotsky, ZPD refers to “those functions that are not mature yet, but are currently in the process of maturation, the functions that will mature tomorrow. These functions are not fruits yet, but buds or flowers of development” (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 204). Thus, children may only be capable of doing what their developmental stage will allow and need to be taught how to understand the problem in more depth. Furthermore, students

going from secondary to tertiary education need to be taught how to learn in their new environments (Vygotsky, 2011). Social constructivist theory supports the idea that what an individual can learn for themselves, can only be amplified by what they learn from others.

Vygotsky advances the notion that while intellect matures, the maturity rate is unknown. For example, one would not attempt to teach arithmetic to either a 3-year old or a 12-year old since these are not the ages appropriate for learning such a skill. Undoubtedly, this research had far-reaching implications for student learning theory and provides an impactful explanation of that theory.

Clearly, it behooves educators to understand that development occurs at different times and in various ways for all individuals (McClellan, 2016). This is not only true for children but for adult learners as well. Schreiber and Valle (2013) provided a historical and foundational background of Vygotsky's theory. The study was performed in a small, undergraduate group communications class taught by one of the authors. Very specific pedagogical techniques were utilized in the teaching of the course. The techniques included: conscientiously choosing groups, grading students on individual, group, and peer evaluation, testing was done in groups and individually, two papers (one analysis and one synthesis), and finally, a comprehensive service learning project. The purpose of the group collaboration was to investigate the notion that student learning is shaped through the impact of social and cultural influences.

In selecting groups, there needed to be access to some basic demographic information such as sex, major, age, and race/ethnicity. The professor strived to create groups that were diverse in their membership to result in richer experiences. The article provided survey results from the National Association of Colleges and Employers that stated, "...the top quality (outside of major specific knowledge) that employers seek in prospective employees is the ability to work

as a team” (cited in Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 396). The students were then asked to share three strengths and three weaknesses about themselves so that each member could discover something new about their group members. In addition, the groups were asked to establish a set of governing rules that they would follow throughout the entire semester. Schreiber purposefully placed all groups within a close proximity of one another so that groups could observe and see the evolution of work. The idea that it is challenging to communicate with others who share different worldviews was a primary learning outcome for this course. The goal was to teach them how to learn to effectively work with diverse people and factors.

The textbook assigned to the students included concepts that were applicable and helpful for what they were experiencing. The professor stressed that it was vital for the students to participate in the reading as they would be discussed in groups. This ensured individual accountability. As mentioned prior, students were tested as a group that resulted in higher scores than the scores on individual exams. Schreiber and Valle (2009) aimed to support the benefits of collaborative test taking such as increases in achievement, retention, accountability, social skills, and critical thinking. Schreiber and Valle (2013) strived to create a course that would empower and develop confidence in students and teach them to contribute to the world.

Faculty, advisors, and counselors may find it essential to understand that a student’s transition and acclimation to that transition within their learning environment can take time. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1975), “...provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact of a given transition will have at a particular time” (cited in Evans et al., 2010, p. 212). It is vital for students entering college to connect at some point in their college journey to an element of the institution with which they feel close.

Schlossberg (1975) described an educational program designed to assist adults by utilizing a practice of transition through transformation. Learning can be challenging especially for those who have not encountered a learning environment for an extended period of time. Schlossberg explains the idea that adults go through role transformations when they return to school including changes in work, family, intimacy, and community engagement. These changes can be either anticipated or unanticipated (Schlossberg, 2011). Moreover, change can create positive or negative thoughts and emotions dependent on the situation and the individual. Schlossberg explained that when an adult is considering re-entering a learning environment, they might question their capabilities. Feelings of being inadequate or paralyzed in their current status can overcome the desire to return to school. For those who have made basic decisions about their lives such as job and educational attainment, it can be difficult to perceive doing anything differently. The author supported the idea that people who are either attending or not attending school may be facing some type of transitional experience.

Obtaining the necessary information and learning how to navigate an educational system can be difficult. For those outside of that system and wanting to return, there may be an informational void. Schlossberg (1975) posits that without sufficient guidance or counseling those who want to enter an educational environment have no way of obtaining that information on the outside. Thus, institutions of higher education are encouraged to ensure that information about its programs and services is readily available to community members both on and off campus.

Lastly, the research also provided support for guidance located within the community. The idea of community-based guidance centers was introduced, the guidance centers provided services to those wanting to attain an education. These consulting businesses act a bridge

between the student and the institution that they attend. One such program is The Regional Learning Service (RLS), based out of New York. The RLS reaches out to individuals who may be seeking to earn a high school diploma, college degree, or those interested in a career change. Learning consultants are hired by the RLS not for their academic backgrounds and/or credentials but based upon their personal qualities. While, consultants can be trained on the focus of their mission and services, training cannot be provided for personal qualities (Schlossberg, 1975). Selecting goals and creating an educational plan that can be created to focus solely on what that individual may need, can create a sense of mattering for a person. Perhaps this focused plan provides the assistance that an individual needs in order to complete their degree. Clearly, assistance that supports student success can result in retention and completion.

Schlossberg's (1975, 2011) information provided researchers with an understanding of the complexity of adult emotions and transformations as they attempt to learn how to obtain and complete their educational goals. When a student is assisted during their attainment and completion process, they can feel a sense of mattering from the institution.

Change and transitions may be viewed as opportunities for growth and development, although it cannot be assumed the experience will be positive. McClellan (2016) echoed the concerns raised by Vygotsky (1978) in the idea that, the time it takes for learning and development integration to be successful, will vary depending on the individual. For those students whose experiences may not be positive, practitioners may look to theoretical research that is relatable. Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1988) theorized that the likelihood of a student leaving college is the highest during their first year of college enrollment. This is especially true during the first six weeks of instruction. Tinto (1988) stated that student persistence is most necessary during the first year in order to pursue into the second year. Tinto

(1988) stated, "...the process of student departure, can be envisioned as being made up of distinct stages through which new students must typically pass during the course of their college careers" (p. 439).

Students who do not receive assistance withdraw early in the academic school year (Tinto, 1988). It is important for educational professionals to understand that, "...retention and departure are primarily the reflection of individual actions and therefore are largely due to the ability or willingness of the individual to successfully complete the tasks associated with college attendance" (Tinto, 1993, p. 85). It is equally important for students to seek out the resources necessary to assist in their academic success. Many institutions have developed resources to support student success. As practitioners we might also take into consideration that students who are struggling academically may not feel comfortable reaching out for assistance. In addition to feeling uncomfortable, a student may not know how to seek out the resources necessary to be successful. Tinto (1988) explained that persistence within the first year is more than half of the battle for students who are pursuing their degrees. Further, retention and persistence to graduation are deeply compromised when students are put on academic probation within the first year of studies or who are disqualified because of consecutive semesters of low grade point averages.

Tinto (1993) echoed Schlossberg's (1975, 2011) idea of transition in that a student may not feel acclimated to their new environment or community. Transition can affect the ability to learn and retain. Tinto (1993) stated that when a student moves from being a member of one group (family/home), into another group (school/peers), this can create a great deal of concern for some individuals (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) referenced Arnold van Gennep's (1960) *The Rites of Passage* to describe the stages of the transmission of relationships as separation,

transition, and incorporation. The separation stage, "...involves the separation of the individual from past associations" which may decline their interactions with members of the new group (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). The transition stage, "...is a period during which the person begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group into which membership is sought" (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). An individual will need to understand where they belong within the new group. The last stage of incorporation, "...involves the taking on of new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and the establishing of competent membership" (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). If a student confronts an issue within any of these stages, it may affect learning and the ability to stay focused. Tinto (1993) posits that student learning experiences in higher education can be valued for some students but perhaps not for all. Even for students who may feel college is not stressful, they may also feel it is not enriching, which may void the social and intellectual rewards related to college attendance.

Tinto's (1993) work explained that student departure views share a common idea, "...namely that retention and departure are primarily the reflection of individual actions and therefore are largely due to the ability or willingness of the individual to successfully complete the tasks associated with college attendance" (p. 85). Student service professionals must commit to the understanding that attending college presents more of a challenge for some students. It is imperative to hear the stories and to understand the history and background of a student who is considering departing from their studies. Considerations for student departure may be that a student is suffering on a personal level in light of systemic inequities and incapable of handling the demands of college life.

As explained by Vygotsky (1978), Tinto (1993) also related social experiences to college attrition. Institutions can be insensitive to the varying situations in which a departure will occur

but need to consider these factors when looking at retention rates. Tinto (1993) provided researchers with layers of reasoning for student attrition. Future and current leaders may regard current resources and programs, and determine if those resources and programs are doing everything possible to retain students. Tinto (1993) provided researchers with explanations to account for student departure namely, external influences, commitments, and obligations beyond the demands of university.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism related student learning to an individual's social and cultural environment and how they conform to that environment. Schlossberg (1975) and Tinto (1993, 1988) assist professionals working in higher education in understanding the various factors that contribute to transition and academic departure. As such, these theories offer a rich trifecta of concepts to advance understanding of the experiences of students. When taking into consideration why students depart from their institution, great consideration also needs to be taken when they perhaps decide to return. Motivation is an area that results in an abundance of research results when dealing particularly with students who are attending colleges and universities.

Motivation and Student Success

Sivan (1986) intertwined the concepts of motivation and social constructivist theory and presented the idea that student success and motivation within the classroom are integrated through socialization. The author discussed motivation understood in the psychological functioning view, but extended thinking to focus on motivation and student agency. When a student is situated as the agent, they are responsible for the manner in which they process environmental, cognitive, and affective information. These thought processes might enhance the

student's ability to demonstrate motivational tasks within the classroom or educational setting (Sivan, 1986). A social constructivist perspective on motivation and learning was outlined.

Sivan's (1986) work is founded on the principles of Vygotsky's framework. Motivation and learning within the classroom placed the individual as the sole meaning maker. When learning takes place in a social constructivist environment, it will occur with the assistance of the more mature (more knowledgeable) members within the environment. Cultural meaning, tools, and signs can be considered dynamic elements for motivation. Sivan (1986) considered three elements of social constructivist theory: cognitive activity, cultural knowledge, and assisted learning. Sivan (1986) suggested that these three elements be separated in order to understand how social constructivism and motivation interrelate.

Constructivist theory viewed cognitive development as a process that is enlightened by another member of society, such as a classmate or instructor. These collaborations can result from a direct stimulation in the learning environment. The evidence that cognitive activity integrated within culture provides knowledge to a learner is supported within this work (Sivan, 1986). The dynamics of cognitive activity will only become more complex and enhanced when experienced with other members of society (Sivan, 1986). Social interactions within the classroom can augment the learning experience for some students.

Cultural knowledge within the learning environment is the second element of social constructivist theory. Sivan (1986) defined culture as, "...the features in a group of people, such as beliefs, social forms, knowledge, and the means of transmitting knowledge, that distinguish those people from another group" (p. 213).

Lastly, assisted learning is the third element of social constructivist theory that related to the process of motivation within the educational environment. Sivan (1986) explained the

relationship between the individual who is being socialized and the member of the culture that is more knowledgeable. The author utilized the term scaffolding to describe the exchange of interaction. Sivan (1986) referenced Vygotsky (1978) to support this theory. Vygotsky (1978) suggested regarding the zone of proximal development that, “It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration between more capable peers” (p. 86). Assistance within the learning environment supports students in their endeavors to retain and demonstrate educational results.

This literature provides researchers with an in-depth understanding of motivation in learning. For practitioners in higher education, constructivism offers a vital and coherent framework for understanding student motivation and its connection to learning.

Cuseo (2007) examines the educational component of student success and asks three questions relating to student success: 1. “What constitutes student success (defined or described)...? 2. How do postsecondary institutions promote student success (what processes contribute to the increase of success)...? 3. How can student success be measured or assessed (evidence)...” (p.2). Cuseo (2007) defined success as being a “favorable or desired outcome” in the educational setting. More specifically, student success is understood in terms of student retention, educational attainment, academic achievement, and student advancement (Cuseo, 2007).

Cuseo (2007) provided a more comprehensive definition of student success as, “...a holistic phenomenon that embraces the multiple dimensions of personal development and the multiple goals of higher education” (p. 3). This work also contributes to the principle of a student’s holistic development, in that the individual develops as a whole during their college

experience. Holistic development is described by Cuseo (2007) as having multiple dimensions that included intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical, and spiritual growth. Many of these dimensions can be traced back to the basic elements of social constructivist theory as noted earlier. It can be argued that the holistic development of students implies one main desirable outcome namely student retention. Practitioners should consider the reasons why a student is self-selecting out or being forced out of higher education or any combination of reasons. Whether the reason is academic, relating to poor conduct, financial, or personal, there are many factors to be considered. Understanding student experience invites practitioners to devise appropriate responses to best meeting the needs and interests of both students and the institutions in which they work.

The second step in promoting student success in Cuseo's (2007) view is to identify key evidence-based principles that can lead to positive outcomes. The processes of personal validation, self-efficacy, sense of purpose, active involvement, reflective thinking, social integration, and self-awareness are all considered to be supported by higher education. The literature provided supporting evidence that the principles named above contributed to a positive relationship that supports student success. Cuseo (2007) specifically referenced Vygotsky (1978) when defining social integration describing the relationship between conversation and thinking as related activities. When humans interact and collaborate with one another the opportunity for teaching and learning are apparent. As Cuseo (2007) stated regarding social integration, "human thinking is shaped by social interaction and conversation, an individual's thought process is largely an internalization of these external dialogues" (p. 6). Social constructivist theory is considered within this article and the theory can provide professionals

with a deeper empathy for assisting students who may encounter struggles within the learning environment.

Cuseo's (2007) work consisted of various positive elements that define, support, and assess student success. Social constructivist theory is supported within this literature and provides researchers with meanings and foundations for creating and maintaining effective practices and programs. Programs that include encouragement as well as providing learning that is active, interactive, reflective, and mindful is considered effective.

Motivation is an area that results in an abundance of research results when dealing particularly with students who are attending colleges and universities. Sogunro (2015) focused directly on motivating factors for adult learners in his article. Sogunro (2015) provided a clear introduction and explanation of eight top motivating factors for adult learners. The author provided information regarding the interrelationships between adult learning and motivation. The idea that the struggle for a student is not in the admissions process but in the achievements of their academic success was the focus of this article. This article was deemed useful to this study to further understand the motivations for adult learners specifically. Eight top motivating factors were presented, namely, quality curriculum and instruction, relevance and pragmatism, interactive classroom and effective management, progressive assessment and timely feedback, self-directedness, conducive learning environment, academic advising, and quality instruction. Sogunro effectively and quantitatively provided the reader with direct feedback from students and how they felt about each of the eight motivating factors. He clearly identified specific points for academic professionals as well as faculty members to adapt in order to assist students with motivation. Though all of these elements are important for the student while in school, the article did not provide any information regarding external factors that can motivate a student

such as values, family, work, etc. Sogunro (2015) concluded there needs to be an understanding of what motivates students externally aside from university factors.

Kyndt, Coertjens, van Daal, Donche, Gijbels, and Van Petegem (2015) undertook a longitudinal study that examined motivation development in students transitioning from secondary to higher education. Using self-determination theory as a conceptual framework to understand student motivation, the study provided a deeper understanding of the differing expectations and requirements for a student as they enter higher education. The idea that students are expected to be more independent and autonomous as well as responsible for choosing their own respective areas of study can greatly determine a student's success. The authors discussed the implications of social displacement, essentially the idea that the student does not belong and is amongst new peers and school staff. This longitudinal study followed students for 25 months and included an assessment by multiple indicator latent-growth analysis. There is a respect to be held for researchers like these to spend an extended period of time to conclude the development of a students' motivation. Unlike other studies, this study set itself apart by including an investigation of several demographic types of students and not just at-risk students. The article quantitatively concluded several elements of longitudinal measurement invariance which showed that when considering elements that motivate a student to return to a university after academic disqualification, it is vital to consider their cultural and racial backgrounds. Also, it is necessary to consider whether or not they are first generation college students.

Petty (2014) conducted a study focused on first-generation students and their motivation to succeed and complete college and explored the struggles that can prevent first-generation students from being successful. The study was completed by incorporating two theories,

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and McClelland's Need for Achievement (nAch). The author discussed how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can play a big role in students' success and completion rates. The idea that most first-generation students are also low-income was discussed and that this can lead to a student working more hours than spending time to study or dedicating time to school. Petty reiterated the point that first-generation students tend to have difficulty becoming or staying motivated by family since the family is unable to relate to the students' academic struggles. Petty's research supported the notion that it is important to understand that certain students who are considered at-risk need more attention than those who are self-motivated. The idea that first-generation students may be psychologically less prepared than their counterparts is further explained. The author suggested that this may be due to the fact that their counterparts' parents may have attended college and can provide guidance. Petty also included the explanation of students experiencing one culture at home and another culture in their institution. These experiences may be challenging for students to try and intermix.

Petty's study provided an array of insights that are directly related to the subject matter at hand in this thesis study. The article provided the reader with an understanding of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and how each is developed either separately or how they overlap.

Traits like confidence and independence can cultivate engagement between student and teacher (Wells, Jones, & Jones, 2014). Wells, et al., (2014) explored the idea that learning is a process of change and adaptation. Wells, et al., (2014) used Motivational Interviewing, an approach used in health care studies at their institution and applied it to higher education. The authors included an analysis of the teacher's role and explained their many responsibilities. The result was a holistic study in which student and teacher experiences were both taken into consideration. The authors suggested that it is necessary for higher education professionals and

scholars to understand not only what motivates a student but also what motivates a teacher. Fostering collaborative relationships between students and teachers is an interrelationship that requires engagement from both parties (Wells, Jones, & Jones, 2014). The authors discussed the idea that it can be useful for reluctant students to have relationships with their professors where the student may challenge, engage, question, and critique. This view is not to enforce a negative or resistant interaction but to encourage a productive learning pattern. The motivational interviewing piece encouraged students to channel their intrinsic motivation and help them realize why they want to succeed. The idea that student motivation can be determined by their successes as well as their failures is also explained. Motivation can fluctuate over time and the element of change, whether it be too much or too fast, can affect that motivation. Research is insightful and can be useful for educators who are working directly with students in classroom settings. The study provided additional information, guidance, and ideas for counselors who need to understand why some students succeed and others do not. Student services programs are recognized for implementing practices that support student success. The authors suggested that the effectiveness of support programs must be analyzed to reflect if all students were positively engaged.

Retention, Engagement, Self-Efficacy, and Resiliency

Retention is a hot topic in higher education. Institutions of higher education that are not retaining students will be a reflection on the overall accountability of schools (Lonn, Aguilar, & Teasley, 2015). Lonn, et al., (2015). investigated the motivation provided by summer-bridge programs offered to students by their universities between their senior year in high school and their first semester in college. The authors suggested that not all summer bridge programs were effective or successful for the students who participated in those reviewed in this research. By

contrast, there were summer bridge programs that greatly assisted students in feeling acclimated, connected, involved, and guided. The authors referenced Astin's and Tinto's Student Development theories that highlighted the historical underpinnings related to how well a student adjusts in college, as well as the institutional elements that affect their adjustment. Lonn, et al., (2015) suggested that summer bridge programs may result in more of a social advantage than one that is academic. The advantages gained by student participation in a summer bridge program will benefit the student by giving them a greater sense of belonging, forming friendships, enhanced confidence to enter college, and provides them with strategies to be successful students (Lonn, et al., 2015). The authors emphasized the importance of students gaining these strength skills and guidance at the beginning of their college careers, specifically even before they have matriculated. The authors suggested that, given their quantitative study, they were unable to report findings relating to student motivation in learning and success but were able to report on data that supported an effect on student learning. This study advanced understanding of how to track when a student begins showing signs of decline in their academic efforts. A student's motivation or lack thereof, are factors that must be studied to understand their success while in college. Lonn, et al., (2015) produced a study that can benefit those working in higher education student services to build a bridge program that will positively affect students as they transition to college from high school. To understand what motivates a student to return to university studies after academic disqualification, it behooves professionals working directly with these students to understand what motivated them to attend in the first place. In addition, we must understand the experiences and factors that contribute to retention, engagement, and persistence.

Coll and Stewart (2008) conducted a study that focused on student retention and how

academic and social integration play a part in the lives of students when attending college. The authors utilized theories by Tinto, Pascarella, and Terenzini (1983) and examined two groups of students; those who were considered at-risk and those who were considered high performing. The objective of the study was to elaborate upon the importance of collaboration between college counselors and undergraduate institutions. They presented an interesting perspective on student departure suggesting that at-risk students who were exposed to academic and social integration programs but who departed from the university remains a phenomenon that is difficult to explain. If a student, whether at-risk or not is being provided with support services from several institutional areas and still departs; there must be extrinsic factors responsible. Coll and Stewart in using Tinto's Theory of Integration explained how and why students choose their institution. They suggest that choice of college may be made in terms of family college attendance, race, academics, and location to name a few. In certain instances the institution of choice may not be a fit, this also can lead to institutional departure. The authors acknowledged the importance of collaboration between departments including faculty involvement and argued that student success does not have to be based solely on their integration of the two areas, social and academic. Rather, if one is apparent it can benefit the student (Coll & Stewart, 2008). Moreover, have a sense of belonging and mattering is an ongoing study element. Students who demonstrate a commitment to their goals and career decidedness were more likely to be successful and persist toward graduation (Coll & Stewart, 2008). The correlation between goal commitment and career aspirations provided a sense of direction and motivation. Coll and Stewart (2008) utilized a model called initiator-catalyst (IC), in that two areas can collaborate to work on the same objective. This idea can be interpreted as the practice of institutional commitment where several departments work to achieve the same results. This study discussed two completely different

student types, at-risk and high achieving students, and suggested that if each type develops a sense of mattering and purpose within the institution, there may be opportunity for retention. Coll and Stewart (2008) targeted a first-year teacher education course to introduce their study, obtain permissions, and begin their assessments. The purpose for targeting this specific group was the authors looked at this course as an entry point for students who are sure of their career choice. It is necessary for professionals working in higher education to consider retention efforts but to understand that a student may depart for one reason yet disclose another.

Sloan (2014) in a series of exit interviews along with the integration of a college coaching student service, investigated the reasons that students depart from institutions. Sloan (2014) presented a strong case for students' stating their departure was due to finances when perhaps the student is only stating that to complete the exit survey. Sloan suggested that not many people would argue with a student stating it is not about money even if this is not the case. A focus on retention and engagement was the foundation for this article, both of which are necessary to keep students at their institutions. The article explained the change in students' attitudes towards remaining at the institution once they have returned from breaks where they were home with family for extended periods of time. The time spent at home can trigger feelings of doubt in returning. It explained that it takes some time for a student to realize these thoughts once they have returned to their studies. Hence, why students may choose to attend schools that are close to home. Sloan (2014) acknowledged that all individuals on campus are responsible for retaining students. Sloan effectively provided an opposition and acceptance model by providing a "this" or "that" scenario. It is important for researchers to understand both sides of what they are witnessing on campus. Communication between students and higher education professionals is another important element that was reflected upon. Sloan explained that students who may

come across as rude or disrespectful may simply not know how to articulate their needs. This is an important item to consider, although, a student needs to be cognizant of how they are addressing professors and professionals.

Sloan (2014) advocated that inclusivity for students is a vital element for their success while in college. The article provided an understanding that students do not enter college expecting to fail, there are many factors that can deter a student from completing a degree. The author suggested that resiliency, self-efficacy, and persistence are factors to be considered when looking at student populations.

Garza, Bain, and Kupczynski (2014) focused on Hispanic students, specifically when looking at resiliency, self-efficacy, and persistence factors. Results were provided through a mixed quantitative/qualitative study. The authors presented a study that is focused on college seniors and how their resiliency, self-efficacy, and persistence contribute to their college success. The study focused specifically on both first-generation and continued-generation students. The term, continued-generation student is described as a student who is from either a middle or upper class family and already holds a set expectations or ideas of what the college experience may be like. These students are familiar with certain expectations since their parents have attended college and provided guidance as well as assistance in researching information about prospective institutions. Continued-generation students have been exposed to planning and researching the school(s) they would like attend even before high school graduation. This article described the two groups and their individual experiences regarding their success once they have entered their senior year in college. The comparisons of the two groups showed that first-generation students face more obstacles than those whose parent(s) may have attended university (Garza et al., 2014).

The statistics that were presented showed that 13 percent of Hispanics (13%) have obtained Bachelor's degrees, which is the lowest percentage in comparison to African Americans (14%), Native Americans (17%), and Whites (33%) (Reed, 2005 as cited in Garza et al., 2014). The consequences of Hispanic students who do not complete degrees, does have a negative impact on economy as well as social climate (Garza et al., 2014). The study provided supportive ideas to assist student services professionals in understanding individual factors that contribute to first-generation student successes. Factors such as relationships, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, high self-efficacy, and resiliency were presented. Though the study lacked a proposed focus to attract first-generation students in high school, it suggested that self-efficacy, resiliency, and persistence are necessary in order to succeed in college.

First-Generation, Low Socioeconomic Status, and At-Risk

In evaluating and assessing student needs, academic professionals may consider a student's motivation to attend college. First generation, low socioeconomic status, and at-risk students may be at a higher fail rate than their counterparts due to their backgrounds (Brost & Payne, 2011). Brost and Payne (2011) conducted a study that included first-generation students (but not limited to) and their learning outcomes after a dismissal from being academically disqualified. In addition, testimonials were included to understand the students' feelings once they returned to campus. A self-assessment survey was conducted to collect data through phone calls and in-person interviews. The survey included questions that were designed to measure the learning outcome differences between first-generation and non-first generation students. Questions included elements to discover learning outcomes associated with cognitive complexity, inter/intrapersonal competence, and practical competency. Student testimonials and quotes were included to enhance the breadth of the study. The authors concluded that a majority

of students who were dismissed reported that although the dismissal review process was tough, it did encourage them to reflect upon their areas of difficulty. The inclusion of internal and external factors that lead to the students' academic disqualification resulted in having a better understanding of all elements for researchers. While reviewing literature pertaining to student performance, consideration should be taken to understand the many elements that contribute to student success as well as those factors that may hinder their success.

Wessel, Bell, McPherson, Costello, and Jones (2007) developed a distinct approach to the explanation of academic disqualification based on financial aid and financial need along with academic ability. Wessel et al., (2007) approached their study by including two specific yet diverse factors. They provided an understanding that low-income does not necessarily equate to at-risk. The authors explained through a quantitative study, how a student's academic disqualification and persistence may be affected by either financial aid/need or academic ability. First-generational factors included, lack of family support or family understanding. As previous research has shown, these factors are contributors to an unsuccessful college experience. Wessel, et. al., (2007) explained that students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds face additional challenges when trying to fit in and adjust to life in college. The study resulted in suggesting that a challenge is present not in the college acceptance process, but in the completion process. If a strong family commitment is present, the dedication to family can greatly affect a student who is attempting to complete a degree. A student's economic and educational backgrounds were presented as contributing factors in determining a student's time to degree completion. Wessel, et al., (2007) provided an in-depth study based on financial aid/need and academic ability and considered their linkages. The authors have quantitatively identified the differences between student success and financial need.

Connections to Literature

Student development and success strategies cannot be interpreted in a vacuum. What applies to one student will not apply to the masses. Elements that motivate a student to return to a university after an academic disqualification will vary for each individual. In researching this topic there also needs to be an understanding of student experiences before their dismissal. Motivation, retention, engagement, resiliency, self-efficacy, first-generational status, and socioeconomic status are all factors to be examined. Student development and epistemology are also factors that contribute to a student's' success and failure rates. Each of these elements should be considered when academic professionals are creating and implementing new programs.

Wessel, et al., (2007) suggested that students who are identified as at-risk are not necessarily from low income backgrounds. A student can, at times, be identified as both but the classifications should not always be correlated (Wessel, et al., 2007). Gaps in literature are apparent in that little research has been performed in obtaining information pertaining to a student's' performance after they return to a university after an academic disqualification. It will be important to discover and understand ideas behind why a student may be disqualified for a second time or why a student may underperform for several semesters resulting in various semesters on probation. These items will contribute to future studies on this topic. Discovering elements that motivate a student to return to school after being disqualified can be considered essential to understanding the future successes and motivations of students.

This literature review contains an overview of two theories that affect student learning, namely, social constructivism and student transition theory. The literature building upon and derived from a social constructivist theoretical lens was explored. As well, this review

incorporated works relating to student motivation and student success learning and support literature. Seminal theorists and their literature werejjj also included within this review. Current and future leaders, along with higher education professionals striving to advance student success may benefit from this review. Most importantly, this literature review will support the main research question which is, what are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies?

The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology for this study. It will outline the research design, participants and setting, data-collection procedures, data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness for this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies. Chapter One described the purpose of the study and the complexities relating to the students and their transitions to university. The research question that guides this study is, what are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies?

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature that will support the investigations of this study along with providing support to the central research question. I explored literature that addressed various circumstances contributing to student difficulties transitioning to university in addition to motivational factors that assist those students. The survey of literature revealed that various factors influenced student transition including but not limited to, being the first in their family to attend a university, or coming from a low socioeconomic background. According to Vygotsky (1978), student educational motivation may be dependent on certain factors such as their social and cultural environment that may affect learning outcomes. Social constructivist theory as established by Sivan (1986) argues a connection between motivation and social integration in the classroom.

Chapter Three outlines the research design, participants and setting, data-collection procedures, data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness for this study. Each of these components is deemed necessary as they affect the quality of the methods (Maxwell, 2005). The methodology described herein is consistent with the research conventions necessary to provide for replication (Kornuta & Germaine, 2006). Furthermore, participant confidentiality was given great consideration and several strategies were utilized to safeguard the privacy of informants.

These are discussed below. In order to capture the participant's stories, a qualitative design was used consistent with the epistemological framework that seeks to understand student motivation within the broader context of the university.

Research Design

This qualitative narrative study focused on the stories of students who return to university studies after being academically disqualified. I have also sought to understand how they feel their experience has been different since they have returned to their studies. Creswell (2012) posits that, "...when people tell stories to researchers they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education" (p. 501). Literature suggests that motivation that is focused in learning environments can manifest engagement and promote student success (Sivan, 1986). Maxwell (2005) argues that for a study to be workable and productive, the method must be compatible with the other components of the study such as the research question and purpose of the study. Consistently, it is also important for the interview questions to be aligned with the central research question in order to provide the data needed (Maxwell, 2005).

Motivational elements for students will vary depending on their previous exposure or previous experiences with college. It is necessary for academic professionals to understand the nature of those elements. It is especially important to understand the experiences that motivate a student to return to their studies after an academic disqualification. As an academic advisor and, thus, an insider in the field, it has been valuable for me to hear the stories of these students. I anticipate that this project will help inform policies and practices to better assist those who may be in similar situations.

This study is viewed from a constructivist theory advanced by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky (1978) supported the idea that learning, instruction, and development are the most positive forms of instruction. Students in attendance at universities will have varying experiences whereby most will result in positive outcomes while others will challenge the student and may result in more difficult experiences. It is assumed that students who find themselves struggling academically, and for whom these struggles result in an academic disqualification, have had a negative experience. It is incumbent upon staff working at universities to understand the motivations of, and the conditions that encourage persistence among students. In doing so, institutions are better able to provide students with a successful college experience. In addition to Vygotsky's (1978) work, I call upon Transition Theory supported by Schlossberg (1975). Transition Theory provides a framework to explain student academic difficulties or successes. Specifically, transfer students from community colleges may find it challenging to adapt to a new system when they have started at a four-year institution. The idea that these students are reformulating educational plans and attempting to clarify life goals may contribute to their transitional experiences (Schlossberg, 1975).

The narrative design of this study provided participants with the opportunity to share social, academic and personal experiences. Narrative research design, according to Creswell (2012), includes some major characteristics that were utilized in this study namely a focus on individual experiences, collecting individual stories, coding for themes, context or setting, and collaborating with the participants. By believing in the strength of narrative design, I set out to seek and listen to students who may struggle with confusing and difficult to navigate policies and procedures that lie within the disqualification and reinstatement processes at a particular

institution. My attempt to capture these stories sought to align with the characteristics of the narrative design as set out by Creswell above.

Participants/Setting

Participants included students who have been granted reinstatement to university after an academic disqualification. Participants fitting within specific parameters were recruited through purposeful sampling allowing the researcher to understand the central research question (Creswell, 2012). The recruitment parameters centered on inviting currently enrolled students who had been approved to return to the university to participate in this study. Although, these individuals were identified, not every student decided to return to the university. The reasons a student does not return to school even after an approval were not explored in this study since I only recruited those students who had, in fact, returned to campus. During recruitment of participants, I made sure to confirm they were actively enrolled in courses by narrowing down the list and identifying their academic status.

A query that identified students who had been academically disqualified then granted reinstatement to the institution was the primary recruitment strategy used to seek out participants. The reinstatement process requires that a student request an exception to return to their studies after a disqualification. The campus is a Hispanic-Serving Institution. It is a small rural institution in the pacific region of the United States with a majority of the students drawing from local and neighboring cities. It is considered a commuter campus although there is housing available on campus.

The pool of potential participants included approximately one hundred students in which six volunteered to participate. Consent and safeguarding were secured using a consent letter (Appendix A) signed by study participants at the beginning of the interview process. The

participants were fully informed of all safeguarding processes. I paid careful attention to disclose that all information they provided would be kept confidential and that their actual identities would never be disclosed. In part, confidentiality was assured by utilizing pseudonyms for each participant. When undertaking qualitative research, it is essential to protect the identities of individual participants, their privacy and to safeguard confidentiality to minimize any potential harm deriving from the study (Creswell, 2012).

Data-Collection Procedures

The primary step in conducting this study was the submission of an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the institution where the study was conducted. As Creswell (2012) states and as is the convention, all proposed studies must be viewed by the campus IRB where human subjects will be sought. In addition, Creswell (2012) mentioned that one important element of the IRB proposal is to inform the Board of how the study will provide the opportunity to “give back” (p. 211). To this end, it is anticipated that this study will benefit not only institutions but also, students who may find themselves struggling academically.

In an effort to recruit participants, a query of student files was made by a managing official seeking contacts of those students who had been reinstated to the university and asking for their assistance and willingness to participate in this study. The query supplied the contact information of students who had been reinstated ranging from the most current semester to two years prior. Once students fitting the parameters of this study were identified, an email was sent to them that mirrored the consent letter. In addition, the email emphasized that student participation might benefit future efforts and serve to enhance best practices within the field of education. As well, the informed consent letter provided an explanation that participation was completely voluntary and that they could recuse themselves at any time without penalty.

As mentioned above, I also emphasized that all information, including personal identifiers, would remain confidential. The initial email served as a drawbridge to gain the trust of these students. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, I confirmed their interest through an additional email that offered them the opportunity to meet at a time and location that was convenient for them.

As I prepared for the interviews, it was important for me to consider the following items relative to qualitative inquiry provided by Matteson and Lincoln (2009). First, it was essential for me to provide a comfortable setting in which to conduct the interview. In an effort to make participants feel at ease, interviews were conducted in a quiet and private study room in the Library on campus. At the beginning of the interview, participants were invited to complete a demographic questionnaire. I made sure to present myself in a professional yet friendly manner to create a comfortable environment and to establish trust between myself and participants. I established rapport by discussing the background and purpose of the study with all participants. In addition, I provided them with an explanation of my position on campus and of the potential benefits of the study to better serve students who may have similar experiences. As an academic advisor, it may be inevitable that I encounter these students around campus or even near my office location. It was important for me to assure the participants that their stories would be used for the greater good of the school, within the fields of advising and in education more broadly.

Semi-Structured Interviews. Data were gathered in this study through semi-structured interviews consisting of three questions (Appendix B) and through completion of a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire was completed before the start of the interview. The interviews were voice recorded utilizing a voice recorder application (voice memos) on a password-protected cell phone as well as a tape recorder to assure that the interview

would be securely and safely recorded. I utilized more than one device for security in case of a malfunction. All recordings were securely housed in an office that is locked. The office requires key access to enter, therefore the interview findings are not accessible to anyone other than myself.

The interview process lasted approximately 30-60 minutes depending on the willingness of participants to talk and given the depth of the participants' answers. During the interviews, I sought further details from participants by asking probing questions such as, "please explain", "tell me more about that", "am I understanding this correctly?" and "how did that make you feel"? Creswell (2012) suggests that, "Probes are sub-questions under each interview question that the researcher asks to elicit more information, they can be used to clarify points or to have the interviewee expand on ideas (p. 221). Creswell's (2012) checklist for interviewing was also utilized as a cross-reference for proper interview protocol.

The first checklist item that was considered was the interview setting. After careful consideration it was determined that the interviews would be held in a quiet study room behind a closed door to ensure that only myself and the participants would be able to hear what was being discussed. A second checklist item provided by Creswell (2012) was to consider the amount of time that I spent talking to ensure that I listened more and spoke less. Lastly, all questions that I asked the participants were developed to be open-ended and asked in a manner that did not lead the participant to a specific answer.

Interview Protocol. When conducting the interviews, it was important for participants to feel comfortable and at ease. Though the spoken word is sometimes ambiguous, interviewing is one of the most powerful methods in which to gain an understanding of one another's stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I began each interview by informing each participant that it would be

recorded. Additionally, I explained the purpose of the study and my role as a student researcher and what I sought to accomplish. I expressed my sincere appreciation to each participant for granting me their time and willingness to share their stories. Each participant was given a gift card to show my appreciation. As previously mentioned, this study involves considering student experiences and their motivation to return to post-secondary studies after an academic disqualification. Not surprisingly, consideration was given to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors for returning to school, as reported by participants. To gain insight into student motivation, I specifically asked participants about the conditions that led to their disqualification, how their current experience as a reinstated student is now different, and what advice they would provide to a family member, peer, or friend who may be struggling in college. The development and purpose of these questions was to identify experiences of disqualified students. Motivation for students is a key factor in their success while in school. Professionals working in higher education need to consider this when working directly with students (Sogunro, 2015).

Undertaking a narrative research design is consistent for a study guided by this research question since it captures the participants' stories. Furthermore, the narratives revealed in this study provided background and support to inform the development of programs that involve students who return to campus to continue their degree progress, especially after an academic disqualification.

During each interview it was vital for me to recognize that each student is different and that their answers, as a collective, may result in both similarities and differences among the participants. Paying attention to the individual experiences of participant stories, on the one hand, as well as to the broader collective experience, on the other, is at the center of narrative

studies (Maxwell, 2005). As the participants were speaking, I was documenting highlights of their responses in a journal. Creswell (2012) supported the practice of having a specific interview protocol in order to obtain the instructional processes of conducting an interview. To ease the participant out of the interview, I reminded them that we had just a few minutes left but that I would appreciate any insights or recommendations they would like to make to better serve students who are experiencing a disqualification. I closed interviews by asking each participant if they had any questions for me or if there was anything they would like to add that had not yet been shared. Some of the participants thanked me for the opportunity to listen to their stories. Polkinghorne stated (as cited in Saldana, 2016), “stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes”. Some participants provided suggestions about how individuals working with disqualified and reinstated students, can better serve them. One suggestion was providing them with a student who had the same experience. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Demographic Questionnaire. As mentioned above, before the start of each interview, the students completed a demographic questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect basic descriptive data about participants. The questionnaire also allowed me to become better acquainted with the participants. Specifically, I asked participants about their age, sex, ethnicity, and first-generation attendance information. Consistent with Creswell (2012), I was mindful that respondents could easily answer my questionnaire. In addition to explaining the purpose of the study, the questionnaire served as an ice-breaker before beginning the interview. One of the questions I asked each participant was whether they were the first in their family to attend a university. Specifically, the answers to this question will guide the study in determining

the experiences of first-generation or continuing-generation students as highlighted throughout the literature.

Data Analysis

This study interprets qualitative data by listening to the participants' stories stemming from their interviews. Data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data, exploring and coding the data, forming themes, representing and reporting findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings, and validating the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and included pauses, ah's, um's and stutters. Oliver, Serovic, and Mason (2005) support the opportunity of keeping transcriptions in their natural state to allow participants to speak for themselves. The inclusion of the specific sounds while listening to the interviews was to consider how some participants reflected or paused for either longer or shorter periods of time, dependent on the question that was asked. A company that provides professional transcription services transcribed the audiotapes and converted them to written word. I reviewed the transcriptions six times as I embarked upon my analysis. The reason for reviewing them six times was to become familiar with the information that stemmed from interviews and to become more personally connected to the study. In addition to reviewing the transcriptions, note taking allowed to accurately analyze the information that was provided (Creswell, 2012). While reviewing the transcriptions, I also referred to my journal notes that were taken during the interview. This was helpful to recall extremely specific feelings and statements that were shared by the participants. The preliminary transcription analysis provided the framework to define codes and, ultimately, themes of the study in support of the central research question.

Coding. Coding is the process of labeling text that stems from the transcriptions in order to form descriptions that can be utilized when analyzing data (Creswell, 2012). The coding process is extremely involved and required my attention to detail in order to locate where similarities as well as differences among participant discourses emerged. The first review of the transcriptions centered on highlighting key words and phrases that stood out to be essential for the study as well as items that stood out to capture the narrative framework and to answer the research question. This initial review followed this same pattern for each interview that was conducted. In order to identify preliminary codes and, later, themes, I used a variety of colored highlighters to assist with theme identification. The choice to identify codes by using highlighters in lieu of coding software, was to gain a direct, hands-on experience of coding and identifying emergent themes. In subsequent reviews of the transcriptions, I coded the participants' statements and words into sub-themes which I later collapsed into larger themes acknowledging both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that motivated the students to return to university. Saldana (2016) suggested, that through the iteration of analysis, full sets of codes are reorganized into categories and then condensed into the central themes that will guide the study.

During preliminary coding I identified six sub-themes. These sub-themes included; self-authorship, motivation, self-agency, communication, self-esteem, and complexities of policies and procedures. Ultimately, three themes were identified to in response the central research question and that emerged across all interviews. Themes included, familial context, choice of major, and transfer from a community college. Though these themes were apparent in each interview, it is important to distinguish to what extent those themes appeared for each participant. The first theme, familial context, refers to the participants and their relationships with their immediate family members which included feelings and emotions about the

disqualification experience. The theme, choice of academic major, speaks to the major that the participants declared upon admission to the university and how that had an affect on their college experience. The fact that students are expected to be more independent and autonomous as well as being responsible for choosing their own respective areas of study can greatly determine a students' success (Kyndt, Coertjens, van Daal, Donche, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2015). Lastly, the theme of transfer from a community college coincides with student transition theory and how those elements presented themselves within the lives of participants. Creswell (2012) suggested that it is best to write a qualitative study that contains detailed information about a few themes rather than write a general report about many themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an attempt to ensure the quality of the study. In order to establish trustworthiness, I engaged in a process of triangulation. Triangulation is necessary when assessing methods in order to adequately increase the validity of a study. Additionally, triangulation ensures a more fundamental understanding of the issue that is being investigated (Maxwell, 2005). As a novice qualitative researcher, I am considered a co-participant of the research that I am conducting. Maxwell (2005) posits that the establishment of research relationships may either facilitate or obstruct other areas of the research. In triangulation the researcher must expand on various sources of information and data in order to accurately assess and validate the findings of the study (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). In this study, triangulation was accomplished through three strategies: member checking, journaling/note-taking, and bracketing.

Member Checking. Trustworthiness was established by performing member checks. Collaborating with the participants also included member checking in order to confirm the

accuracy of the interview and of what was meant by what was said. After the interviews and as I was reviewing the transcripts, I emailed participants with any questions or clarifications that I had regarding the information they provided. This practice was also helpful to avoid any biases or assumptions that may have come from reviewing the transcriptions. Member checking is supported by Creswell (2012) can provide the opportunity to assure the accuracy of the findings by collaborating with the participants. Member checking also allows the participants the opportunity to hear how the researcher has interpreted the information to avoid any biases (Creswell, 2012). Seemingly, as I performed the act of member checking, I learned from participants that it was important for me to clarify any questions or inquiries that I had to confirm the accuracy of the interviews. I continuously reassured the participants that without their willingness to take part in this study, there would be no study. In addition to the importance of their participation, their stories must be heard.

Journaling/Note-Taking. Another strategy to enhance trustworthiness that was used in this study was the action of note taking during the interviews followed by a review of the notes and then journaling an analysis of the notes I'd taken. Taking notes during an interview can also be essential in the event of an audiotape malfunction. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that interview notes may be incomplete since it can be difficult to ask questions and write answers simultaneously (Creswell, 2012). I kept a series of notes on the interview questions sheet while expanding upon those comments in a journal. It was important for me to perform deep listening all the while maintaining rich and descriptive notes. While note taking and listening, I simultaneously and purposefully made a point to observe body language, voice tone, and reactions to the questions and probe questions. This allowed me to reflect on their feelings

and emotions regarding their experiences. Observing the participants enabled me to draw a deeper interpretation of their perspectives during the interview.

Bracketing. Lastly, the third strategy I used to ensure trustworthiness was the process of bracketing. Since qualitative research is intrinsically subjective, the method of bracketing is used to mitigate any biases or preconceptions that may be related to the study (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Taking into account the depth of this study, the experiences that were shared regarding individuals' beliefs and values towards education, bracketing allowed me to be aware of any biases that may be present. Tufford and Newman (2010) advise that the researcher maintain constant self-awareness throughout the study and deterring from intertwining any emotional reactions, experiences, or biases from the stories of participants. Bracketing was forgone as a tool for my role as a researcher while taking into consideration that interview material may be emotionally demanding. To that end, I worked to pay attention and reflect upon my own biases as I considered the experiences of participants. My thoughts, biases and feelings were recorded in my journal to which I returned as I undertook an analysis of the findings.

Role of the Researcher

As a professional academic advisor with more than 12 years of experience working in higher education, places me as an insider within this study. Since this study relates to, and includes a population with which I have direct experience, I had to completely remove myself from the role of academic advisor to the role of graduate student and researcher. Students, who have been reinstated to the university after a disqualification, are the same individuals who are required to come to the office in which I work to obtain an academic plan. With careful regard and intention, I informed participants that we would meet strictly for the means of conducting

this study. My role within this research allowed me to connect on an individual basis with the participants who volunteered to partake in the study.

Limitations

This research study has some inevitable limitations. Creswell (2012) described limitations to be those factors in which the study measures inadequacies. One such limitation for this study included the sample size of participants. The number of interviews conducted for this study included only six participants in total. The findings of my study may not reflect the experiences of all previously disqualified students, conducting further interviews may have yielded new information. A second limitation may be the time of year that participants were being sought out. The email describing the study and invitation to participate was sent approximately one month before the end of a semester. It can be assumed that students were focusing on the end of a semester and finals commitments, in addition to the anticipation of the winter break. Thus, had I recruited participants earlier in the semester I may have had a higher yield. Despite these limitations, my personal position as an insider in the university and as a novice researcher may have implications for analysis and findings. Hence, to minimize personal bias I made every effort to bracket my experiences, and engaged in journaling and other forms of continual self-reflection.

Chapter Three included the methodological practices and procedures I used to collect and analyze the data. I also explained how my choice of methods is aligned with the research question and with the phenomenon under investigation namely, student experience with academic disqualification. This chapter also outlined the strategies I used to minimize researcher bias and set out the limitations of my project. The next chapter elaborates upon the findings and

results of this study. In Chapter Four, I share the narratives of participants and attempt to (re)tell the stories of their experiences with academic disqualification.

Chapter Four

Findings

“I’m glad it happened, [the disqualification] was a really good wake up call. You need that in life sometimes” – Angelina.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies. Chapter One described the purpose of the study and the complexities relating to the students and their transitions to university. The research question that guides this study is, what are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students and their return to their studies? Chapter Two provided a review of the literature to strengthen and support the validity of this study. Chapter Three described the qualitative research design that guides this study in order to identify common themes and to capture the participant’s voices. This chapter will present the findings that surfaced from the collection of data that was analyzed to support the theoretical framework of this study. This study is viewed from a constructivist theory advanced by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky (1978) supported the idea that learning, instruction, and development are the most positive forms of instruction. Student Transition Theory established by Schlossberg (1975) accompanies the framework to better understand how change affects students or any human for that matter. The study was conducted at a small, public, four-year institution in southern California. All of the participants involved with this study experienced an academic disqualification. Per their requests, they were then approved by committee decision to be reinstated to the university to complete their studies and pursue their paths towards graduation. This chapter will (re)tell their stories.

I will begin by providing demographic data that represents the participants. Subsequently, I will (re)tell the stories of each participant individually in an attempt to ensure each of their voices are being heard in their individual journeys. Pseudonyms were issued to assure the security and anonymity of each individual. Lastly, I will describe three emergent themes that were identified during data analysis. Themes that were identified include: 1. Familial context: 2. Choice of academic major, and 3. Transfer from a community college. The interview transcriptions provided me with the material that I will be presenting along with direct quotations from each participant.

Demographic Data

General criteria to participate in the study. In order for participants to partake in this study they were required to meet a criteria in which they had been disqualified from university. In addition to being disqualified, they needed to have submitted a request to be reinstated and that request to then be approved by a board. Each of the participants in this study successfully obtained permission to pursue their studies towards the completion of a degree. Before the interview, participants were requested to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The demographic data (Table 4.1) represents information for all 6 of the study participants.

Age, gender, ethnicity, and familial university attendance of participants. The average age for the 6 participants was 24 years, ranging in age from 20 years to 29 years. Collectively, there were a total of 5 female participants and 1 male participant. Three of the females and the male identified as Hispanic and 2 of the females identified as Caucasian. In terms of familial university attendance, participants were asked if they had been the first in their families to attend a university. A majority of them stated that they were not the first in their families to attend a university. They did not disclose whether their family member completed a

degree. Although, they were not specifically asked a question pertaining to a family member's degree status(es). Two of the participants are the first university-going individuals in their families. See Table 4.1 for demographic information:

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Overview: Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Familial University Attendance

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	1 st to attend university
Angelina	20	F	Hispanic	No
Carolyn	26	F	Hispanic	Yes
Lauren	24	F	Caucasian	No
Max	22	M	Hispanic	Yes
Sara	29	F	Caucasian	No
Harmony	24	F	Caucasian	No

Meet the Participants

The phenomenology that is enmeshed within social constructivism has been explored herein. Angelina, Carolyn, Lauren, Max, Sara, and Harmony shared their stories regarding their experiences and journeys after a disqualification as they pursue towards the completion of their bachelor's degrees. Creswell (2012) postulated that in qualitative studies, the researcher will have a tendency to be more present in the foreground when presenting findings. Please, take a journey with me and meet the participants as they share their experiences.

Angelina. University classroom settings can present challenges for some students. When those students are not acclimating to the environment they may not obtain the learning results that were expected (Sivan, 1986). Angelina stated the following when she explained her

new college experience, “When you start college I don’t think you realize, this is serious. You cannot mess up. You can’t afford to slack off, you need to be on it. I think once I got disqualified it was really like, okay, this is it”. Angelina expressed her excitement when I was interviewing her because she hoped that this study could perhaps help those students who may one day, find themselves in her same situation. When Angelina started at university she was set on graduating in the presumed four years and did not expect that the first major she declared would not be the one she would graduate with. She started as a nursing major. When she was in her sophomore year she began to realize that the course work was not of any interest to her. She shared the following when discussing her courses:

I took a Biology class and I ended up failing that class and I remember sitting back in the lectures and really not being interested at all. I would try to do the work, but I wasn’t really interested in the course but I still kept going. I remember even some days I wouldn’t go to class and we would just go to the beach.

The choice of academic major theme is emergent within Angelina’s experience. The realization of not being content in the program she declared was apparent to her. This realization caused her to question her academic future as well as her major. Once the disqualification occurred, Angelina shared the following, “I was looking at scapegoats, it’s my family, it’s work, it’s not me”. She shared that her parents paid for her schooling and when I asked her if they were aware of her status she explained that her mother knew something was going on. “Mother to daughter, you could tell if something is wrong with your daughter”. Angelina’s mother was supportive and refused to allow her daughter to not attempt to be reinstated and supported her emotionally and financially.

As Angelina was in the process of retaking courses, in the attempt to raise her GPA, she enrolled in an introductory education course. The interest in taking the course came from her professional experience working with children. Sogunro (2015) concluded, there needs to be an understanding of what motivates students externally aside from university factors. Angelina's job exposed her to an educational setting working with small children with special needs. After experiencing the education course, Angelina shared, "I switched my major to Liberal Studies. It was really that class that I took, [me quitting my old job] and working out in the field that told me, you were in the wrong major, which is okay". Angelina successfully managed to raise her grade point average increasingly above the minimum 2.0 that was required for her to be reinstated. She said that she felt good since she only had to spend one semester as a disqualified student. When I asked her about how her experience is different now since the reinstatement she shared this narrative by reflecting back to the beginning of her college experience:

I think at first I was excited as a freshman [like] hey this is so cool, meeting new people...but then as it started to sink in, you feel overwhelmed a little bit because you don't have that support and you're on your own. Which is good because you get to be independent, but at the same time, you have to be the one to [take] initiative and say, I am going to schedule an appointment with the counselor, go to the [writing tutor], I am going to do this or that. I think I definitely learned to be more organized with my school work, because as opposed to someone telling you, okay your assignment is due Friday, or you have to see your counselor in two weeks, it's more of, here's your syllabus and the assignments are due on [the dates listed]. So, procrastination happens and all these other factors...it was definitely overwhelming. But, as time passed, I turned the overwhelming

feeling into more of a proactive [feeling] and learned to push forward and you have to do this on your own. Of course, there is help, you just need to go find it.

Consistent with Schlossberg (1975), Angelina was learning to navigate a new environment in an attempt to gain a sense of mattering within that environment. In addition, the life transition and experiences that she endured provided her with a sense of accountability and responsibility. Angelina talked about her continued familial support system and that she is very thankful for the support that her mother, father, and partner have provided to her. She stated that their support has helped her each step of the way. She also said that she enjoys her schooling and working with children so much these days that she tells her partner, “I’m going to school”, whether it may be her college courses or the school in which she works. She said she loves both so much she refers to both school and work as school.

When asked, what advice would you give to a family member, friend, or peer who may be struggling in college she said, “know your resources”! She also shared that she wished that there was some sort of program when a student is disqualified that pairs you with another student who had experienced the same thing. She said, “this way you can talk to someone who can let you know it’s all going to be alright”. Angelina is enjoying her courses, new major, and working with children and is looking forward to completing her degree.

Carolyn. The first semester after transferring from a community college posed some challenges for Carolyn that resulted in her academic disqualification. Carolyn shared that the following led to her disqualification status:

Failure of classes for the first semester of being at the university right after the community college. The classes seemed a lot harder than at community college and there was a distraction...with my mother being ill, having to take care of her and my siblings,

since I'm the eldest. I didn't put a lot of effort in [to] school, having to still have an income for the family, work, and take care of them.

Oldfield (2007) provided the idea that institutions need to offer first-generation, working class students with social support systems during their attendance to assist with estranged feelings. Carolyn shared that she has always worked and that education had always been a second priority for her since she had to work. She stated that she has always paid for her own schooling and that no one has provided her with any financial assistance. Carolyn simultaneously juggled multiple responsibilities all while attempting to succeed in college. Caring for her mother and family resulted in an immense amount of stress and greatly affected her studies. Her taking on of a mother role included, assisting her brother in taking care of his child. Carolyn stated that, "...I had to get my reading done, I had homework to do but I would get interrupted so I was stressed trying to take care of the younger kids and not be able to get my studying done". Carolyn was providing the familial support to her family and was taking care of household to-dos and working, her grades continued to drop. Due to the fact that she was juggling various responsibilities she decided to take a few years away from school. When I asked her about her current experience she provide me with this narrative:

It's been different because I am older now and going through that stress made me learn how to deal with it. Now, that my mother [is] better and my siblings are older as well, I feel like they can have some sort of responsibility in helping out my mom. Therefore, I moved out from my mom's house. So, now I live with a family that's supportive towards my school and I have time to study with no interruptions, motivation to do my homework and just being focused on school.

Carolyn came to a realization that if she remained in her current home environment that her studies would continue to appear at the bottom of the priority list. This was not an option for her, therefore she removed herself from her environment in order to succeed in university. Schlossberg (2011) claimed that even desired transitions can be upsetting in that, the transition itself may not be critical, but the manner in which that transition alters an individual's roles and relationships.

Carolyn has thus been reinstated and said that she is now able to focus on herself and knows that she can succeed on her own. Her discourse displayed a strong sense of confidence and self-worth since she made the executive decision to remove herself from a situation that was not benefiting her college career. When I asked her the question of, what advice she would provide to someone who is struggling in school, she declared:

Just keep going, keep working on it. Even if it takes you a long time, as it has [for me], the goal is there and as long as [the goal] is there, there's a pathway to go ahead and accomplish it. So, keep going, don't give up, just find another route towards that goal.

Carolyn told me that everyone who assisted in her reinstatement process were welcoming and helpful.

Lauren. Lauren along with Angelina and Carolyn also experienced the struggles of not being in a major that was fitting for her. She shared that the difficulty of science courses lead to her disqualification. She began by saying, "I wanted to be a biology major and what happened was I realized I wasn't in the right major. I was taking bio classes my first semester as well as chemistry". Vygotsky (2011) identified the idea that, when students are exposed to an altered learning environment, they need to be taught how to learn in the new environment. Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) explained that students need to be developmentally and cognitively matured in

order to learn specific subject matter. In addition to not doing well in her courses, Lauren said that she experienced frustrations with her admissions process. She said she was dealing with two different issues that were creating vast amounts of stress in her life. Seemingly, each of the participants disclosed that varying stresses did contribute to their experiences.

Lauren provided this narrative when she explained her admission being granted days before the start of her freshman year:

School started that Monday and it ended up working out that I could start, but I had to crash basically anything that was open. I was in bio, chemistry, math, and like sociology or something my first semester. With the bio and chemistry, that's where the hardship started. I got all D's and one F. The second semester it was the same thing. It was another three D's and one F, it just was not working. That's what happened with the disqualification.

Choice of academic major was emergent in her narrative as she sought introductory courses in a new subject in order to narrow down a potential new major of interest. Lauren spoke often of her mother and the continual support that she provided. She also shared that growing up someone told her, "you'll just go to community college and that's pretty much all you will really do". Her mother believed differently. Lauren shared this story when speaking of her mother and sister:

My mom and my sister more than anything. My mom has always tried to do anything I needed in order to help me get [to this university]. She drove up with me on the day they told me I could be here. She got in the car and she drove five hours to school with me. My sister, she's just as supportive. She's always said I will graduate from [this school], like I know you can do it, it may be hard but you can persevere. You can do it! So,

without the family support it would be a totally different situation. It's sad because I was telling you about my best friend and her family had never told her she can go to college. So, looking at my family, it's just crazy, like they're really supportive and really there for me. Every step of the way they have been there.

Lauren's narrative aligns with the information provided by Garza, Bain, and Kupczynski (2014) that continued-generation students have a stronger college-going support system than first-generation students.

After having a positive experience with the subject matter and the professor in a psychology course, Lauren changed her major to psychology and has been working diligently towards completing her degree requirements since her reinstatement to university.

Max. Accountability is a noun that best describes the lesson that was learned by the participants in this study. The difficult process in which a student has to engulf in order to be reinstated after a disqualification, can be trying. Max provided this statement when asked what conditions led to his disqualification, "I guess it wasn't the greatest day of my life. But, I can't say I was surprised by it". Max reflected often on the fact that he was the person solely responsible for his actions which led to poor grades and the disqualification. His previous exposure and attendance at a community college linked his transition to university with the mind-set that:

At community college, it's very easy to just get by and the workload isn't that demanding [there]. So when I got here, I was like okay, I could still have that mentality of it being community college and I could just scrape by. I'm sure that good grades just kind of fall from the sky or something.

When sharing that last sentence, Max chuckled as he indeed realized that there was a problem and that good grades do not fall from the sky. He claimed all responsibility. Going out often and being too tired to complete homework or attend classes, were the contributors of the disqualification. You will see in this passage:

I would go out all the time, go party all the time. So, school was like a secondary compared to my social life. Of course you don't just get [disqualified] after one semester. It wasn't just one semester, it was one semester and then the next and I remember there was this one semester where I just stopped going to one of my classes. So when I got [disqualified] I had no one to blame but myself. It's not like most people, who get angry with the school and tend to blame everybody else, you know? I messed up and it's time for me to fix my mistakes.

Max's narrative is congruent with findings provided by Schlossberg (2011), that when one is coping with the struggles of a journey, they must learn to live through it and learn from it. Schlossberg (2011) also contributed the four S's, situation, self, supports, and strategies as tools in assisting with transitions. Max seemed to identify with the four S's indirectly. He was aware of the fact, that only he could fix the problem.

When Max spoke to familial support he talked about his mother. He shared that he preferred to keep his grades to himself as to correlate bad or good grades to his actions by saying, "Only because I felt like if I had to [get good grades] it was for her and not me". He wanted to relate his successes to his desires, not for others. His grades were a reflection of himself and for himself, he disclosed this:

I have to get good grades because my mom's going to ask for them and I want to make her happy, but in theory, then I'm just doing it for her and not me. But when it comes

down to it, you have to just do things for yourself and I feel like people need to start doing that.

To conclude our interview Max said that he would advise those who are struggling in college to complete their studies at their own pace. I was pleased by this advice as it was a wise remark. Max said, “At the end of the day you don’t have to get your bachelor’s degree in four years, the degree doesn’t say how long it took for you to get it”. We both laughed in agreement about this because it’s true and I really appreciated Max’s direct and to the point interview about his experience.

Sara. Early on in the interview the themes of transfer from a community college and choice of academic major were introduced. Sara was experiencing both a transition from community college and an unfit major choice simultaneously, as we also discovered with Lauren. The conditions that led to Sara’s disqualification were elucidated by the following:

When I was at [my community college] I was a sociology major and the plan changed when I decided to transfer to [this school]. I wanted to switch to a chemistry major. I was already exhausted of being in school and when I got [here] I was just going through the motions and not really putting my effort in to it. I had a job, I always had a full time job. Now, I’m only working one to two days a week. I didn’t want work to come first anymore. I worked too much and I was too tired to do my homework or to read.

Sara, like Max, came to a realization that the current way of doing things needed to change and that priorities needed to change. According to Schlossberg (2011) people experiencing transitions falter between their old and new roles. It would take time for Sara to adjust to being at university, specifically when it came to policies pertaining to academic disqualification.

For Sara, a substantial obstacle that emerged was when she was working to raise her grade point average in order to apply for reinstatement. She expressed:

Because I was disqualified I wasn't able to change my major. So, my understanding from being academically disqualified, I thought I was able to retake the classes I did bad in outside of [this school]. So I retook those courses at [my old community college] not knowing I had to do them here. So at that point, when I [applied] for reinstatement I was denied. I was discouraged because I worked so hard to do well in those classes. It was just kind of this back and forth. It was one of those things where I was like whatever, I'll just retake the classes here.

Despite Sara's frustration with the policy and the procedure of attempting to get reinstated, she did what was required and retook the courses yet again and successfully raised her grade point average and was approved to be reinstated after her second request.

She was emotional when speaking about the experience of receiving correspondence regarding her reinstatement. Sara spent years under the disqualification status. Her excitement quickly turned to frustration as she learned there were still more steps that needed to be completed before she was fully reinstated. She shared this, "It was so hard for me to get back in. I didn't know I had to go through the whole admissions process again, pay again. I'd never wish that on anyone". Sara disclosed that she continued to be frustrated with campus resources and that it was worse when she was disqualified. She mentioned that when a student is disqualified that is when they need the most help, but the university limits or even eliminates providing any resources to this population. "When you try to use your resources, you can't".

Sara concluded that certain professors were responsible for keeping her motivated to do well in her courses and in her new major. Sara's experience aligns with aspects presented by

Cuseo (2007) that, when students have positive interactions within the learning environment, they will be motivated to achieve success in the classroom. Sara is getting closer each day to completing her degree and has been actively involved with her major department.

Harmony. The likelihood of a student departing college is the highest during the first year but especially true during the first six weeks of instruction (Tinto, 1988). It can also be difficult for students to obtain the knowledge necessary in locating the appropriate resources, in order to guide them, depending on the issue in which they are experiencing. Schlossberg (1975) and Tinto (1993) provided linkages between student retention and time to degree by connecting a student's academic status to their degree persistence. If a student was placed on probation within the first year of their studies or those who have experienced a disqualification will not persist as they may have expected, upon starting their education (Tinto, 1988). Harmony began the interview by discussing her transition from community college along with being in a new area geographically. She also mentioned that she was 21 years of age when she started going to the university. She stated, "I could do whatever I want. I'm gonna go out. I'm just gonna do whatever I want". Harmony was confident in her statement and although she experienced an unpleasant situation, she seemed to have a ray of confidence about her. She said that when she started attending the university she lived in campus and wanted to make sure that she met everyone within her living domain. After experiencing one year of university, she stated the following regarding living on campus:

By the end of the year I pretty much met everyone at [my residence hall] but that has a downfall too because I focused way too much on partying, [I] didn't really study that much. Like, if there was an activity, a social activity, I was just like yeah I'm down even

though I had a test the next day and told myself I should study. No, I want to go... and I was a bio major, too.

Consistent with themes identified in this study, transfer from a community college and choice of academic major emerged immediately. Harmony was experiencing several transitions simultaneously, relocation to a new city, transfer from community college, living on campus, sense of self-authorship, and pursuing a degree. Individuals may flounder when their identity, relationships, and sense of purpose are going through a transition in life (Schlossberg, 2011).

Harmony spoke often about the individuals in which she was associating with in her residence halls and around campus. She disclosed the amount of time spent with friends surpassed the hours she should have spent studying. The following narrative speaks directly to her choice of academic major and social life:

I underestimated the science and math, especially a lot of math in chemistry. That definitely took effect and I had an eight a.m. class every Friday, and we went out every Thursday, I always went out on Thursday. Yeah, way too much social scene. I was focused too much on friends and meeting new people [rather than] focusing on why I was actually here. Especially calculus and chemistry, I didn't think they would be that hard but the math part was so hard and I didn't really focus that well on it.

Harmony, along with Max expected the rigors of a four-year university to mimic those at the community college. She was an honors student at her community college. Her words on that topic were, "I was honors over there, it's going to be easy. Just do what I always do". Her level of learning was diminished while attending university and her old study habits were no longer in practice. When she was attending the community college she would take the bus where she had the time to complete her readings and homework assignments. She said this, when discussing

homework habits, “I did my homework on the bus going home, and here, home was two minutes away, I just had to walk across campus and when I got to my room if I heard something going on, I was going to go”. Although Harmony was not adapting to the learning and developmental aspects of attending a university, she was adapting within her social and living environments.

Harmony made an important self-discovery while experiencing her new life in college, she was more confident at that point, than she had ever been before. I discovered this fact when she told me:

I was comfortable with myself, finally. I had never been [confident] before. This is who I am and I’m actually pretty cool and that’s like, this is so cool. I’m going to meet people, be fine and not be afraid to talk.

Her smile when talking about this was bright and energetic, I was pleased to share this moment with her. It was an interesting moment in which we were discussing her struggles, a positive enlightenment came to be. We continued by talking about her major.

After some time as a biology major, Harmony did not care about pursuing this path any longer. When a student is academically disqualified they are not allowed to change their major until they have successfully been granted reinstatement. Harmony expressed her frustration with the process by commenting:

I tried to change to Sociology but it was too late. I had to keep up with the science and that was definitely hard because it was like, I don’t really care about this. It’s not going to matter next year when my major is actually going to change. I retook my calculus class that I got an F in to help with my GPA.

After three semesters of attempting to raise her GPA to where it needed to be, Harmony was successfully granted reinstatement to continue her studies. When asked how things are different

this time, she told me that she no longer lives on campus. She commutes over one hour to and from school. As this poses stress in other ways, she stated that it was the best decision for her.

Familial context emerged when she spoke to the reactions of her mother and sister regarding the academic disqualification by sharing:

My mom said, “it’s your life, do what you want”. But my sister was actually the one who was just like, what are you doing”? She got mad, we didn’t talk for a while. She graduated with a bio degree from this school. Yeah, she got real mad and she didn’t want me to try and [complete the process] to get back in. She was like, “no, you messed up already, find another school”.

She followed that story by telling me, her and her sister are now on better terms since her reinstatement. Harmony is extremely fond of her new major in Sociology and has been enjoying her courses. She provided the following statement when speaking to advice she would give others who are struggling academically, “Just take it week by week”. Consistent with findings provided by Kuh (1994), out of classroom experiences and student learning outcomes are linked. Harmony invested a vast amount of time in the interview identifying her personal attributes that contributed to self-confidence, despite her academic struggles. Her new found confidence can be linked to her academic successes through the new choice of academic major. She is not sure how many more semesters are ahead of her and she is fine with that. Following her own advice, she is taking things week by week.

Emergent Themes

In an endeavor to answer my research question, regarding the experiences of previously disqualified students and their current status as returning students, three themes emerged within this study; familial support, choice of academic major, and transfer from a community college.

Several participants shared the importance of family by sharing stories about the support they did or did not receive by their family members. The term family in this context also refers to those who are technically friends but who are also considered family, for example, a participant moved out of her home and lives with a friend who provides emotional support to her. All participants shared similarities when discussing choice of academic major since they all changed their majors from the original declaration upon admission to the university. The third emergent theme, transfer from a community college was discovered. Student transition in this study, refers to an individual's transitional experiences whether they are transitioning from secondary to tertiary education or from a community college to a four-year institution. Coping with any type of transition in life, may be easier if little or no stress exists within the individuals environment (Schlossberg, 2011).

Themes that emerge from data are discovered through codes. Codes in which are utilized to build and describe themes in order to understand the central phenomenon and to answer the main research question (Creswell, 2012). Each theme is described below, along with participant's connection(s) with emergent themes.

Familial Support. External factors such as parental and peer influences may have an effect on an individual's motivational frame of mind. The combination of motivational influences and the environment in which an individual is embraced in, will have effects on their experiences (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Participants in this study shared with me, enriching narratives as you read above, pertaining to familial relationships and how those relationships were affected before, during, and after the course of their academic disqualification. Lauren, in an emotional state, spoke of her bond with her mother and sister by saying:

I tell my mom all the time, I am going to graduate. I am going to graduate from here.

My family has been there for everything and they are really supportive, especially my ` sister. My sister has been super supportive.

Not the first in her family to attend a university, Lauren felt that she had the support needed to pursue her path to the completion of a degree. The support that she received contributed to her determination and willingness to complete the rigorous reinstatement process.

Incompatible to Lauren and Angelina's situation, Carolyn was experiencing counter-support. Carolyn was spending a majority of her time caring for her ill mother along with her brother's baby. Commendably, she enveloped their problems as her own, while neglecting her studies. She was able to successfully reconcile having a non-support system by removing herself from the home and moving in with a friend who greatly supports her studies.

Max confidently told me that he was doing better in school for himself and not specifically for his mother. He wanted to do well for himself as that is a reflection of his determination and academic successes at this point in his college career. Max enlightened me several times during our interview as he really thought a lot about life and why certain things are important for people as individuals and not as groups. I will speak more to Max's insights when I discuss themes regarding choice of academic major and transfer from community college.

Harmony, contrary to experiencing a strong familial support system like Angelina and Lauren had sustained, did not receive a welcoming response when she disclosed to her mother and sister that she had been academically disqualified. This had even greater effects on her relationship with her older sister, since her sister had graduated from the same university that she is attending and where this study was conducted. Although she may have not received the support she had anticipated initially, Harmony did leave campus housing and moved back home

since students who are disqualified are not permitted to live on campus. Despite the previous situation involving her sister and mother, Harmony shared that she is able to focus on her studies more living at home, although the commute is stressful.

Choice of Academic Major. A vital point that is embedded within this study is in regards to students' choice of academic major and is a theme that has emerged herein. It is not egregious for students to change majors whether it is due to the lack of interest in the previous major, or, due to an opportunity of being exposed to a new one (Deitz, 2010). Students also need to be aware that upon graduation they may not find work that is directly related to their major, dependent on major choice and career path. For example, Angelina changed her major from one helping field major (Pre-Nursing) to another helping field major (Teaching). Her major choice directly correlates to the type of career that she would like to pursue. If she had continued as pre-nursing and went on to become a nurse, she would be required to have a nursing degree in order to be a certified nurse. When Angelina became exposed to teaching small children, she changed her major to teaching in order to obtain the knowledge necessary to thrive in the classroom. In addition to the teaching major, she knows she is required to complete certifications and credentials in order to be in the classroom.

All participants said that once they changed their majors to an area that was fitting for them, they began to do better in school. As previously mentioned, choice of academic major does not always equate to career. We learned with, Lauren, Sara and Harmony, that their original majors were in the science fields and they each changed to a major focusing on social perspectives. Lauren shared this statement when discussing her new major, "I took a Psychology course with [professor's name], who I freaking love and I have her again right now, she is the reason I am a Psychology major. Lauren's new found passion and interest for the major can

connect with Tinto's (1988) theory of student departure, in regards to incorporation within the environment. Lauren can be associated with having positive interactions with a new group and feeling a sense of belonging.

Similarly, Harmony felt that she belonged in her newly chosen major of Sociology by stating, "I'm not too sure what I'm going to do with that major but I love learning about it". Her excitement was apparent as she spoke of the new learning environment. Dietz (2010) included a statement provided by E. Neville Ivester, former CEO of Coca-Cola, the statement was, "I would want to teach students to understand different backgrounds, cultures, religions, and perspectives"...the statement went on to support the idea that leaders are required to have good business skills, although that is not considered enough to be a successful leader, one must also be curious. When participants decided on new majors, they did so thoughtfully in order to study a subject in which they felt passionate towards. They also chose these majors by exposing themselves to introductory courses within the major in order to determine if the subject matter was indeed interesting and enjoyable.

Transfer from a Community College. The third theme that emerged from this study was that of, transfer from a community college. We learned from some of the participants that when they transferred from community college to their current university, they were expecting the workload and rigor to mirror that of the two-year institution. As some of them disclosed, they were awakened by the opposite, the workload was that much more intense. What did some of the participants say about this? When I asked Carolyn specifically about the circumstances leading to her disqualification she told me this, "...it was my first semester after being at the community college. The classes seemed a lot harder than at the community college". The demands that are required from students at institutions of higher education are indeed factors that

lead to student departure (Tinto, 1993). Correspondingly, Max, Sara, and Harmony all shared that when they left their community colleges to attend their current university is the time when they began to struggle academically. As we learned from Harmony, she was on the honor's list at her community college and assumed the following about the work at a university, "It's going to be easy. Just do what I always do".

Participants not only discussed the difficulty of coursework but some of them mentioned the difference in services and assistance that was received at the university. Some stated, although they experienced difficulty in locating the appropriate services in which they desired, once those services were located they did get the help that was needed. However, while some services were helpful, Max and Sara felt differently regarding some of the services. Sara stated this when she spoke about a service that she needed, "I didn't really have any [direction], anytime I tried going to the [service], I wasn't able to because they wouldn't allow me to. So when you don't have those resources..." As some of the participants experienced positive interactions with some services on the campus, other participants had reflected differently upon the services that were sought during the time they were disqualified.

The adjustment period varied for each participant who experienced a transition from community college. For some, the falling grades were reflective immediately upon introduction to university courses and for others, the effects were not visible until some semesters after their matriculation. Overall, each of the participants succeeded in obtaining reinstatement to the university and are proceeding towards the completion of their degrees.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the narratives of students who have returned to their studies after experiencing an academic disqualification. I (re)told the stories of the

participants in an effort for their voices to be heard by professionals working within higher education but also by those students who may find themselves in similar situations. This chapter sought to explore the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism and student transition theory, as these frameworks were embedded within the lives of students, specifically the students that we have learned to know as the “participants” in this study. Three themes that were identified and examined included: 1. Familial context: 2. Choice of academic major: and 3. Transfer from a community college.

Significant findings were, not every participant spoke directly to familial context as being one that was supportive. Some participants said they would not have been able to endure the stresses of the disqualification and reinstatement process if not for their families. Whereas, others received no support and negative reactions when they disclosed the disqualification to family members. It is also significant that all participants treated their situation as a learning experience in which to grow and obtain a sense of self-authorship. As we discovered they all sought to declare new majors, which allowed them to pursue subject areas in which they could relate to and also do well when completing the work. Overall, this study discovered the reality that, transitions into new environments do bear effects on individuals, as they attempt to adapt within their new institutions. Compelling findings were identified when participants shared advice they would give to others who may be struggling in school. They all advised that, one must take things one step at a time, know and enjoy the major you are in, and ask for assistance if you feel it is deemed necessary.

The next chapter will present further discussion and conclusions relating to this study and will provide future recommendations to assist and support services that cater directly to students and their academic needs.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

“Just don’t focus on the future. I know it sounds weird, but the future is kind of scary and uncertain. So, if you just focus on what you need to do now, you’ll do better. Just take it week by week” – Harmony.

Chapter Four offered the (re)told of stories of students who experienced an academic disqualification and who have returned to their studies, continuing on a journey towards degree completion. I identified three main themes that emerged from participant interviews. Themes included: 1. Familial context, 2. Choice of academic major, and 3. Transfer from a community college. Each theme was described and explored given participants’ stories and in their own words. In addition, the similarities and differences among participant experiences were discussed and acknowledged. As human beings, though we may share similar experiences, we each react differently to those experiences.

This qualitative study was conducted at a 4-year public university in southern California. The study included a total of six participants that included one male and five females. The research question that guided this study was:

- What are the experiences of previously academically disqualified students as they return to their studies?

In Chapter Five, I conceptualize this study in an attempt to interpret the varying experiences of college students as they proceed towards graduation after a disqualification. I sought to gain an understanding of the experiences of these individuals as they strived to be reinstated to university by adhering to policies that may be interpreted as creating impediments for students. I will discuss these impediments further within this chapter. This final chapter will include a review of the theoretical framework and its assumptions, the methods and research design that were

utilized to gather the data, study limitations, and a discussion and recommendations for future research and policy.

Theoretical Framework and Assumptions

The theoretical lens that guided this study from its conception included two theories, Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory and Nancy Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Theory. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning does not modify an individual's ability to focus but that it assists in developing various abilities so that attention may be devoted to a variety of activities. Students in attendance at universities are faced with various expectations and requirements that are necessary in order for them to understand and navigate the system successfully. Moreover, as students work to understand the policies and academic requirements, they must also be knowledgeable of the subject matter in which they are studying. This research study includes specific examples of subject knowledge and is embedded within the emergent theme of: Choice of academic major. Participants shared their stories regarding the difficulties they experienced when their first choice of academic major did not suit them for one reason or another. For some participants, the choice of academic major was informed by their experiences after attending a community college without fully understanding the implications as they transitioned to university. Indeed, participants shared that the level of rigor associated with the work at the university was far more difficult than had been anticipated.

Vygotsky (1978) declared that learning and development are linked to our childhood experiences. Vygotsky (1978) assumes that the role of play, for example, may result in pleasure for a child even though it is, in fact, the enacted work of learning. Play may result in unfavorable results for some children if they are not pleased with the outcomes of the game in which they are playing (Vygotsky, 1978). Perhaps if a child loses a game they are playing, they may not be

pleased with losing and no longer want to participate. As adults, not all activities or experiences will be viewed as positive. When a student chooses an academic major, they may realize once they have taken a few classes or after some preliminary experiences in the program that the field of study does not suit them for whatever reasons. In other words, only after they have had some lived experience in the major might the student be inclined to make a change that is better suited to their interests. Angelina said the following when she spoke of the courses she was taking for her new academic major, “I wanted to go to class. I wanted to go to class and learn. I wanted to go and see what the next chapter was going to be on. I wanted to go”! Her interest was significantly higher than previously when she was pursuing a major that was an unsuitable fit for her.

Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory explored the varying types of transitions that individual’s encounter throughout their lives. Additionally, she examined the factors that affect transitions as well as the different forms of transitions individuals may experience. Schlossberg introduced the concept of the 4 S’s which include: situation, self, support, and strategies. The 4 S’s can be utilized as coping or survival mechanisms to assist with the adjustment of change within one’s environment. The emergent theme, transfer from a community college, highlights the fact that students do experience significant shifts as they enter a four-year institution. One of the participants, Max, reinforced this notion when he discussed his move from community college to the university:

I think the thing that faltered me the most was my inability to adapt. Plus, it was also the first time I was living alone. I couldn’t depend on anybody when I moved out here. So, I don’t think I handled that independence very well at all.

Students who attend college after high school will also feel the same affects in regards to transition. As human beings, transitions are undoubtedly inevitable throughout our lives. Schlossberg (2011) suggested that there are anticipated and unanticipated transitions, along with transitions that are considered events or non-events. Anticipated events may be experiences like graduating from high school or college or getting married. Unanticipated events may include a car accident or an illness. Event transitions include occasions like graduating from a university after working on the degree for several years. A non-event transition is an expected event that ceases to take place (Schlossberg, 2011). Finally, transitions are considered to be experienced in phases, those phases are known as “moving in”, “moving through”, and “moving out” (Schlossberg, 1989). The participants in this study relate directly to the transitional phases mentioned above. Each participant experienced the admissions process and were admitted to the university (moving in stage). Each of them started their academic journey and were presented with struggles as they attempted to navigate the university system (moving through stage). As they found themselves struggling academically, then placed on a probationary status, remained struggling, and then disqualified, they were faced with a choice. The choice between, do I continue or do I stop going to school? Every participant is currently in the “moving out” stage, by seeking out reinstatement and striving to graduate.

The theoretical frameworks contributing to this research study by Vygotsky (1978) and Schlossberg (1984) complimented the methodology in which the data was collected, analyzed and discussed. As such, there is alignment between the research question, the theoretical framework for this study and the methods used.

Design and Method

Chapter Three outlined the methodology that was utilized to conduct this study. Specifically, I used a qualitative narrative design to focus on the experiences and the stories of students who have returned to university after a disqualification. Creswell (2012) provided, that when people are able to tell their stories to researchers, they feel like someone is listening. I wanted the participants in this study to know that I was listening to them and that I wanted to know more about their experiences as they confronted the policies and services and policies at the institution. I was also concerned with knowing more about their views on how best the university may support students in meeting their needs and interest.

The central research question informed the interview protocol in order to obtain the data needed to undertake this study (Maxwell, 2005). Research questions included: 1. What are the conditions that led to your academic disqualification? 2. Do you feel that your educational experience is different since your reinstatement to the university and if so, how? 3. What advice would you give to a family member, friend, or peer who may be struggling in college? The complete interview protocol is available in Appendix B. By asking these questions I strived to understand how these students felt about their academic struggles, how things could have been different, whether as individuals or different in regards to the institutional policies and practices in place.

Trustworthiness. I conscientiously engaged in a process of self-reflexivity in order to avoid any internal biases in this project especially considering my role at the institution as an Academic Advisor. Crimmins (2016), suggested that the process of self-reflexivity is perhaps, not a primary impulse but something that needs to be embodied in researchers. To be self-reflexive we must be aware of biases and confirm those biases when conducting and analyzing

our research. I assured participants that I was approaching the study and interviews from the location of a graduate student. In addition to self-reflexivity I engaged in the process of triangulation in which I engaged in member-checks with participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. If necessary, I also emailed participants to clarify any assumptions I may have made when reviewing the interview transcriptions. The second element of triangulation included journaling and note taking. During the interviews, I took detailed notes in order to accurately and thoughtfully analyze the information when the time came to code the data. I also kept a journal where I was able to further reflect upon the initial notes that stemmed from the interviews. The third and final strategy of triangulation that I practiced was bracketing. Bracketing is a form of self-reflexivity in which the researcher mitigates any biases or preconceptions that may have any relation to the study itself (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Any notions of biases or feelings that I experienced during analysis were recorded in the journal in order to self-identify my relationship to the study. In order to ensure trustworthiness with participants, triangulation assisted me in authenticating the purpose and practice of this study.

Limitations

Limitations of this research study included the number of informants that volunteered to participate. From a total of approximately one hundred individuals who were contacted to participate, a sample of six individuals agreed to be interviewed. Although a small sample, the voices of participants were heard loud and clear. An analysis of participant interviews is central to informing and to shaping the discussion within this chapter as well as recommendations for policy and procedures. A second limitation to this study, is my position as an insider at the university. I was both a professional academic advisor and, at the same time, a graduate student at the university where the study was conducted. My status in the university may potentially

inform my biases by any past encounters I may have had with participants. Interestingly, when I went to meet with one of the participants, they remembered me from a previous advising appointment we had in the past. The participant stated when we met, “I didn’t know you went to school here”. Though clearly all of the participants knew that I was a graduate student conducting research from the consent email that was sent to them. Before the interview began with the latter participant, even before recording started, I assured this person that I was wearing my graduate student hat and that any biases or preconceptions were being bracketed. I did not recognize the individual and for me, I considered this a benefit. It was a benefit so that I could maintain my purpose and position as a researcher.

Findings and Discussion

It is problematic to assume that all students and their families will understand the many rules, policies, procedures, and expectations of the university system. This is especially true for those students who are considered first-generation as they travel an unequal pathway compared to their counterparts whose parents or family members have attended university in the past (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Although it is necessary to understand inequities in cultural capital, one must also understand the experiences of students who struggle in their academic journeys. This study invited participants who were first-generation as well as continued-generation students yet, all of them found themselves in the same position; academically disqualified and then reinstated to university. Both Carolyn and Max were the first to attend university in their families. The other four participants all stated that they were not the first in their families to attend university. Perhaps, as mentioned in the limitations section of this chapter, if the study had resulted in more participants a case could be made pertaining to the differential experiences of first-generation and continued generation, and student success. This narrative study provides

for individual stories that suggest similar perceptions among students confronted with both individual and structural impediments during their disqualification.

Institutional impediments were present for these individuals and can be considered barriers in promoting student success and a timely graduation. Students at the university where this study was conducted find themselves trying to navigate these hurdles. When a student is initially disqualified from the university, there are specific criteria that must be met to attempt to register in courses in an attempt to raise their GPA. One specific challenge is that the students are not able to register for courses until the first day of instruction. If the course(s) that is needed has reached capacity by the first day of school, then the disqualified student will have to wait until the following semester to re-attempt the adding of the course--ultimately affecting their time to degree. Furthermore, if a disqualified student does not meet minimum grade point average requirements after repeated attempts, they may then be subject to a second disqualification resulting in permanent absence from the university. Thus, the most successful way to raise the grade point average is by retaking courses with the lowest grades. In other words, if a student failed a biology course and that same biology course is full by the first day of instruction, then the possibility of raising the GPA by a substantial amount is virtually non-existent in the immediate future.

Additionally, there is no guarantee that if the student retakes the course they failed the first time it will not happen again. To that end, faculty, advisors, and counselors working with these populations must be considerate of the fact that it is not always beneficial for students to retake every single course in which they underperformed. The emergent theme, choice of academic major speaks to this quagmire directly. Professionals and students alike must determine when and if retaking certain courses will not result in a positive outcome. Lauren said

in her interview, that when she started as a biology major, it was early on when she realized she was not in the right major. Even after this realization, it still took two semesters for her to finally make the connection that, if she did not find another major soon, it may take a boundless amount of time to recuperate her GPA. She said this in regards to changing her major, “Maybe I should try out [this new major] and see how I do. Once I took the first class it just felt right”. Lauren did retake some of the courses she initially failed, as she knew this was the most efficient way to raise her grade point average. Although, it took her almost two years to be reinstated, she did it and is currently succeeding in her new major.

The bombardment of information pertaining to a student’s disqualification in the preliminary stages can be enough for some students to refuse to bother in completing all of the necessary steps to complete their degrees. If institutions can somehow tighten or streamline these policies and procedures, then perhaps disqualified students can be more empowered to get back on track and feel like their successes do matter. Similarly, students specifically, need to gain a sense of self-authorship and accountability to seek out their resources and to ask questions when deemed necessary. Baxter Magolda (2016) found, in a longitudinal study that, after students graduate there is a need to establish their internal voices. Since during college, students tend to rely on individuals within the university, they need to establish an existence of self-authorship. There is a partnership between student and professional that exists within institutions and this partnership needs to be equally advocated, respected, and acted upon, by both parties.

Lastly, I want to reiterate the concept of Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development coincides in the larger social context in which learning occurs and was a vital consideration for this study. Researchers may benefit from understanding the cultural and political ideologies that affect cognitive development. As

Vygotsky (1978) concluded, some cognitive concepts are not yet in maturation and will take time to present themselves. Therefore, an understanding of the concept of Zone of Proximal Development can assist individuals who work directly with students. Some students may take more time than others to embrace and understand specific cognitive concepts.

Recommendations

Attempting to navigate the higher educational system may not come as easily for some as it may for others. Perhaps even when a student assumes that they are understanding the requirements, they may be false in those assumptions. The findings of this study clearly suggest that students get confused and overwhelmed when it comes to the academic disqualification processes. The information that is given to them is lengthy and intimidating. Professionals may consider reevaluating the policy for disqualification by offering students who are at-risk access to their mid-semester grades. Some education professionals believe that a student knows when they are succeeding in courses and when they are not. Still, it seems reasonable to create systems that may identify a lapse early on so that students might rethink their educational commitments earlier.

Another recommendation stemming from this study is to offer mid-semester or modular courses so students can withdraw from the course(s) they are struggling in and add a course that may be of less difficulty for them.

In terms of research, further consideration must be given to those students who were disqualified from institutions and never returned. Future research dedicated to illuminating the experiences of previously disqualified students would expand our understanding about their decisions not to return and what is it that institutions can do to assist them. The assistance should be considered fluid throughout the process in order to accurately assess the various stages

of disqualification. Perhaps conducting an assessment of the initial drop in grade point average, assessment of resource utilization by students, assessment of major versus non-major course academic success, and assessment of the students' performance upon reinstatement to the university might advance stated institutional commitment to student success and to enhance graduation rates.

If systems of higher education and individual institutions strive to graduate students in a timely manner or to rank in top tiers among other institutions, then funding, personnel, assessments, evaluations, and most importantly, time needs to be dedicated to developing programs and policies that focus on academically disqualified students who have been reinstated to their universities. Lastly, future research may also include studies of the experiences of academic professionals who work directly with students to understand the differences between the way a policy may be enacted and the way it may be interpreted by a student. As mentioned previously, a partnership must exist between both student and professional, and it must be supported by the university.

Conclusion

My attempt with this study was to (re)tell the stories of students who struggled academically and were disqualified from their university. Not surprisingly, participants indicated some shared similarities as well as differences among the reasons why they were not successful in their first attempt at their studies. The three emergent themes clarified why the students were not performing at sustainable levels. These themes included a focus on their family situations, previous enrollment at two-year colleges, and the choice of an academic major that was unsuitable. These central themes were highlighted by participants as foundational reasons for their disqualification.

From a micro and individual perspective, one must consider the lesson to be learned. As Max stated, “It’s better to learn the hard way than no way, right”? I wanted to further understand the “student side” of an institution’s enacted theories related to student success as exemplified in the policies and procedures relating to academic disqualification. As a professional who works directly with students and who comes from an outside higher educational system, it was vital for me to understand the individual student, the professional perspective and institutional commitments. This was important so I could gain the knowledge to successfully and programmatically recommend and potentially create, services, policies, and procedures that present fewer impediments for students, especially those who find difficulty in navigating the higher education system.

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Appendix A

Participant Informed Consent

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Claudia Sitlington. I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts, Educational Leadership program at California State University Channel Islands.

For my Master's thesis study, I will be conducting interviews exploring the experiences of students to return to their studies after being academically disqualified and then reinstated to their university. The interview will seek to discover the story of your current journey towards degree completion. I would like to ask your permission to participate in this research study. Your participation is voluntary and there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that you will be asked.

All of the information that will be gathered during the interview process will be kept confidential. Your real name will not be disclosed nor will the university name or location. Only the researcher will know your identity. You may stop participation at any time without penalty. To stop the interview, simply tell me that you do not wish to answer any more questions. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim for accuracy and validity. All records will remain confidential throughout the study and all data will be destroyed after five years.

It is expected that participants may experience minimal risks from this study. People react differently to stimuli, and it is possible that some may react negatively to the interview questions. If you experience any discomfort, you can terminate the process at any time and you have access to Claudia Sitlington and Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément should any issues arise.

Participation in this study may assist professionals working in higher education to better understand and support students who have been academically disqualified. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before, during, or after the process. The expected benefits of this research study will support students, their educational success, and other endeavors toward degree completion.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact Claudia Sitlington at: (805)-750-4200 or claudia.sitlington@csuci.edu and Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément at: npement@callutheran.edu. For questions or issues regarding your rights as a subject, please feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 805-437-8496 or via email at irb@csuci.edu

I have read the information provided above. I understand that by agreeing to be interviewed, I am agreeing to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this form to keep.

By selecting this box, I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

By selecting this box, I do not agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

Signature

Date

Appendix B
Interview Questions

- 1) What are the conditions that led to your academic disqualification?

- 2) Do you feel that your educational experience is different since your reinstatement to the university? If so, how?

- 3) What advice would you give to a family member, friend, or peer who is struggling in college?

Sub-Questions or Probe Questions to help participants clarify and make explicit their meaning.

- 1) Please tell me more about that...
- 2) Am I understanding this clearly?
- 3) How did that affect you?
- 4) Why was this important?

Appendix C
Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Information

1) Age : _____

2) Gender (circle): Male Female

3) Ethnicity (circle one):

- African-American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Caucasian
- Other: _____

4) Are you the first person in your family to attend a university? (circle): Yes No