ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION IN A

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING

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ABSTRACT

English Language Learner Engagement and Retention in a Community College Setting

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This multi-method study explored English Language Learner (ELL) enrollment and engagement in a community college to address a dearth of research on ELL retention in this context. Quantitative analyses were performed on four fall semester transcripts of ELLs ($N = 161$) and on samples of ELLs and non-ELLs ($n = 139$) matching in age, enrollment status, and race/ethnicity. Quantitative analyses were also performed on The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) instrument for another set of ELLs ($N = 45$) and matched samples of ELLs and non-ELLs ($n = 34$). Qualitative analyses of interviews with a third set of ELLs $(N = 28)$ were also conducted. Results suggest that ELLs overall do well as implied by their high GPAs and engagement scores, yet most do not persist long enough to complete the ESL program or graduate. GPAs were well above the minimum for graduation (2.00) and significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the non-ELLs. ELLs scored higher than the nation in all five benchmarks, and significantly higher than the non-ELLs in the support for learners benchmark. However, even though the majority of ELLs expressed that they wanted an associate's degree, only 43% successfully exit the ESL program and 13% graduate from the college. The graduation rate is significantly less ($p < .05$) than college (23%) and nation (25%).To explain, certain groups presented higher risk. Students who began in lower levels of ESL

were five times less likely to complete the ESL program ($p < .05$). Nontraditionally aged

ELLs had lower GPAs, persisted fewer fall semesters, and graduated less than their

counterparts (all significant at $p < .05$). Also found were risk factors to which students

attribute their leaving college: lack of finances, full time work, and family obligations.

Interviews revealed implicit risk factors of linguistic challenges and their ELL status at

the college, both of which affected their engagement, as well as a lack of procedural

knowledge for navigating US colleges that could enable their retention. Students who

persist, graduate, or transfer attribute this success to seeking tutoring and investing extra

effort. Implications for practice and research are given.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The community college is an important research site since more than half of the

nation's first-time college students begin their higher education there (Townsend,

Donaldson, & Wilson, 2005; Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005). The mission of

community colleges is to provide access to education for an often academically under-

prepared student population at more affordable tuitions (Belcher, 1988; Dowd &

Melguizo, 2008). With this mission, then the retention of the students who attend them is

a pertinent issue in this area of inquiry. It would be unethical to recruit students but then

let them fail or drop out (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The first aspect of the problem that

will be addressed here is that even though community colleges play a vital role in society

by providing accessible and affordable education and training, they are not as visible as

other institutions of higher education in research studies published in higher education

journals, as documented by Townsend, Donaldson, and Wilson (2005), who conducted a

content analysis on articles published between 1990 and 2003.

Furthermore, whereas there is a dearth of studies focusing on community colleges,

especially on topics that are essential to them and not simply used as convenient research

sites, there are even fewer studies on English Language learners (ELLs), students who

begin college by taking English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. ELL issues should

be part of the discussion on community college retention for at least two reasons. First,

community colleges tend to enroll more ELLs than four-year institutions since the

community college offers programs aimed at helping new immigrants in the community

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as well as college bound students who still need to hone their academic English levels (Kuo, 1999). ELLs also account for many first semester students who are known to be lost to attrition (Maxwell, Hagedorn, Cypers, Moon, Brocato, Wahl, & Prather, 2003). Although there are numerous studies of retention at four-year institutions of higher education, especially that illustrate the importance of student engagement (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), only recently have researchers started applying similar approaches to research at community colleges (Marti, 2009). The gap that still exists in community college retention literature, especially with regard to ELLs, is another side of the problem that my study will attempt to address.

Second language learning research is not immune to this gap in ELL retention studies. Since SLA research has taken on more social influences of language learning (as noted by Block, 2003), there has been some attention to a broader scope of language learning such as access to linguistic resources (Pavlenko, 2000). However, there is little attention to what happens to learners after they gain initial access into an ELL program. One research report that did look at ESL community college retention, conducted two decades ago, showed stark figures in persistence (Belcher, 1988). Not only were ELLs less likely to graduate than students who had not started in ESL, a mere 16% finished the ESL program with a grade point average (GPA) of 2.00 or higher. However, causes behind these findings were not explored. Since then, there have been a scattering of studies that address ELL retention in community colleges, but that provide only pieces of the whole retention picture. In the following introduction, I will discuss the significance of this study by showing how it will add to the previous work on retention in community colleges, and by illustrating another way to broaden the scope of ELL inquiry.

Using multiple data sets, I used a mixed method approach to the study of ELL student engagement and ELL student retention in East Penn Community College (EPCC, a pseudonym). The terminology used throughout this study is explained as follows. *ESL* is often the term given to community college programs that teach English language learners and will thus be used interchangeably with *ELL. Engagement* here will be defined in terms of student involvement in activities that have been associated with higher retention rates and GPAs in college. These activities include putting effort into their studies, feeling challenged by coursework, seeking support, and interacting with peers, faculty and staff. The term *involvement* had been used for this concept by theorists in retention literature (Marti, 2009), but engagement is the term adopted by the organization, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) which provided the survey used in the present study, the Community College Student Report (CCSR), and thus will be the term of choice when discussing the concept. Engagement will be operationalized here by the activities of students and other individuals at the college (faculty, staff, and peers) categorized in five CCSSE *benchmarks*: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners (CCSSE, 2003c). It is argued that the positive outcomes of this engagement include persistence in college enrollment from semester to semester, higher graduation rates, and higher GPAs. *Retention* is an umbrella term that is used broadly to refer to the body of literature that looks at students remaining in college and not lost to attrition. *Persistence* will be used to mean continuing in college from one semester to the following semester.

The study occurred in three phases using a different set of data for each phase. In the first phase, using quantitative measures, I examined overall enrollment trends of first-time freshmen (FF) ELLs who began at the college in the fall semesters 2001-2004. First I looked at ELL students by level to see whether there were differences in number of semesters persisted, ESL program completion, graduation rates, and GPAs between ELLs who began in the higher versus the lower levels. I also looked for patterns in demographic data. I then compared the persistence, graduation rates (i.e. completing an associate's degree, certificate, or specialized diploma), and GPAs of students who began their first semester in the ESL Program to the rates of FF at EPCC as a whole.

The second phase of the study explored student engagement of a different set of ELL participants at the same college. I examined the self-reported engagement practices of ELL responses to the items and then compared them with non-ELL responses by analyzing results of the standard survey instrument, the CCSR, of students enrolled and surveyed in 2006 and 2007.

Finally, a qualitative approach was taken aiming to link the first two phases. Interviews were conducted with a different sample of students, except for four students from the retention data, who either dropped out before, persisted through, or transferred out of two thresholds: completion of the ESL program in 2008 and graduation at the college over the course of a five-year period. Participants were asked to explain in their own terms their experience of what influenced them to either remain in college or not.

The purpose of this design was to explore the retention and engagement of ELLs by comparing ELLs and non-ELLs in their academic journeys and potential causes reflected in the CCSR survey instrument, both through quantitative measures, and then to

get a deeper look at ELL students' voices at possible reasons for individuals' decisions about persisting in college through interview analysis. The comparisons between ELLs and non-ELLs are not made to use non-ELLs as the ideal model, especially since in some cases ELLs outperformed non-ELLs. Rather, comparisons shed light on associations between engagement and retention; even though they are different groups of data (for retention and engagement) the student demographics at the college and the ESL program have been fairly consistent over the years, so if one group has consistently stronger retention and higher engagement throughout the data, it is possible that there is a link between them, a link that will be explored more directly in the interviews with individual cases. The implications of these results can assist advisors, instructors, and administrators to look for early warning signs of attrition and develop ways to intervene and help students continue learning advanced English or obtain a college degree, either of which increases the chances for their other potential goals such as gainful employment (Ignash, 1995).

Context of the Study

The study took place at EPCC which has both noncredit free ESL courses as well as a four-level credit ESL program. The credit program will be the research site in this study since its purpose is to prepare students mostly for credit academic programs. The students in a given semester represent 35 countries of origin and about 28 languages, although Spanish is spoken by about 40% of the students. About 20% of the students come with international student visas, and the rest are recent immigrants or immigrants who spent a portion of their K-12 education in North America, often called generation 1.5 (Harklau, 2000). Ages have ranged from 17 to 65 years.

For the most part, students self-select into the ESL program. EPCC is considered an open enrollment college, meaning their admissions process is not selective, except for a few programs such as nursing program. This also means that student may *stop out* by taking time off and reenrolling again at a later time. However, the college requires students to take placement tests for math, English, and ESL. There is no policy that requires ELLs to take ESL rather than remedial courses (which are explained below) if they do not pass the college English placement test (EPT) for native speakers and place into the mainstream college writing course, "English I." However, if a student scores very low on the EPT and answered that their first language (L1) is not English, the advising staff may ask them if they know about and may be interested in ESL. Remedial instructors also look for students who may benefit more from ESL and make referrals. In a few cases ELLs take remedial reading or writing courses after they complete the ESL program since they still have to pass the EPT at the end of the final level of ESL. Conversely, students are not required to complete the ESL program and may test out of ESL at any time by taking and passing the EPT.

At the time of the study, there were three remedial English courses: Basic English, a pre-college writing course, and Reading Fundamentals and Critical Reading, which are two levels of courses that focus on instructing reading comprehension. Most ELLs pass the EPT after finishing ESL, but the ones who do not pass usually take either Critical Reading or Basic English. Any student who passes the remedial courses can then enroll in English I without having to take the EPT again. In addition to the remedial reading and writing courses at the college, there are three remedial math courses that any student could test and place into before taking a college level math course.

Students enrolling in the ESL program are given an ESL placement test for the administrator to determine the appropriate level of ESL the student would take. The test includes a listening, reading, and grammar section on the computer, in addition to a writing sample on paper. Students do not need to take a test to attend the beginning level, ESL I, but this course is taught with the assumption that the student has L1 literacy. This first level is a six-credit course that meets for seven and a half hours per week for fifteen weeks and combines traditional skill areas of reading, writing/grammar, speaking and listening. Levels II and III are separated into skill focus areas and contain three three-credit courses that all meet for about four hours per week for fifteen weeks: ESL Speaking II and III, ESL Reading II and III, and ESL Writing II and III, the latter of which also have a heavy grammar focus. The most advanced level is one three-credit course called ESL Level IV which combines the skill areas of reading, writing, grammar, and discussion.

ELLs are encouraged to take only ESL courses if they place into levels I or II, and may combine some college level courses from their majors when placed into levels III and IV. The academic advisor tends to assist in advising until ELLs are more advanced in their majors whereby they would have a major advisor. Tutoring is another service for all students at the college for ESL and college level courses. Tutors are hired and trained by the college to assist students one-on-one with coursework for up to one hour per week. ESL tutors work with students in a center in the ESL department, and content tutors work in the "Learning Center." Tutors are required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, unless they are peer tutors who simply need to have passed the course they tutor with a high grade.

Students may go on to seek an associate's degree, certificate, or specialized diploma at the college. The degrees can be an associate in arts or science, intended for transfer, or associate in Applied Science, intended for immediate employment upon completion as are the certificates and specialized diplomas. Only nineteen out of the ninety-six programs of study are transferrable.

The ESL Program is part of a community college that serves approximately 10,000 students each semester. Although they are classified with CCSSE as "urban," the population is predominantly White (80%) and the county they serve has a population of about 300,000, 92% of whom are White ("U.S. Census Bureau" 2010). Therefore, ELLs of color and even White ELLs with accents may be perceived as different from the majority at the college. Instructors at the college tend to teach five courses in two fifteen-week semesters. We now turn to an overview of the research in community college settings as relevant to the present study.

Background

ELL Inquiry in Community College Research

As mentioned above, research needs to address ELL student retention issues in a community college setting since it is often here that is these learners' initial point of entry into higher education (Kuo, 1999). Belcher (1988) published the seemingly first research report on ELLs in a community college which she conducted as a response to the growth in ELL enrollment by 10% in ten years at her college. Following that report, ELL issues received some attention in the 1990's but more in terms of overviews of ESL programs rather than research on their retention (Ignash, 1995, Kuo 1999). The report and overview documents were not based in a retention theory and thus did not attempt to answer why

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the retention was low. Conversely, studies in retention literature have stronger theoretical underpinnings, but do not focus on ELLs except to say there is a need to build on this inquiry (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005; Maxwell, et al., 2003). Retention studies will be further explored in the next section.

Overall, in the literature that focuses on ELLs in community colleges, we see that learners may face multiple challenges. As a group they are quite diverse where some include certain variables in demographics and student behaviors that are associated with high dropout rates according to the retention literature below and some do not. There exist potential challenges more specific to ELLs, however, such as the stress of living far from home for international students (Chen 1999), the need for more "personal-emotional social adjustment" to college (Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman 2005), and the language issues involved (Kuo, 1999). Even the ways ELLs are represented in college versus high school, or taught with content that serves students with particular characteristics in a diverse classroom may act as factors impeding their willingness to persist (Harklau, 2000). For example, Harklau (2000) observed that teacher's views of students had consequences on students' attitudes and behaviors. Those who had gone to high schools in the U.S. were often bored with a curriculum that treated all ELLs as newcomers and drew on home country experiences or learning about U.S. cultural topics.

A couple of recent studies looked directly at attrition from advanced academic ESL courses within a semester (Song 2006b; Curry 2001). Song (2006b) interviewed students and the instructor of an academic reading/writing ESL course that a number of students failed and noted a need for more dialog between students and their instructor. Curry (2001) found that the students who were the first to leave the academic writing

course did not have the same economic and social capital as the ones who stayed. For instance, students who had more experience with higher education in their backgrounds outlasted the other students in the class. Having students with little academic experience studying juxtaposed to those with more academic experience is a challenge in community colleges across the board (McJunkin, 2005). However, some would say this is particularly applicable to ESL classrooms that have international students and recent immigrants from lower SES backgrounds (Peterman, 2003). Even these two groups can include a great deal of diversity which Peterman (2003) also notes. Studies have also observed the benefits of ELLs who go through an academic ESL course as opposed to not going through an ESL course. Song (2006a) and Goldschmidt, Notzold, and Miller (2003) both tracked ELL students who took an ESL content course or took an ESL academic preparation course, respectively, and compared them to ELLs who did not take these courses and found that students who had the ESL instruction performed better than those who did not.

Overall, there is a gap in the literature that tracks students from the beginning of ESL to graduation or that compares their retention to the rest of the college students. But there is an underlying commonality to these studies. Song's (2000b) call for more teacher-student interaction and Harklau's (2000) bored students point to engagement theory. Students in these studies are less involved in their learning due to a number of factors. This will be explored further in the theoretical section.

The methods involved for these studies show a divide between quantitative measures of transcript analysis and test scores (Belcher, 1988) or uses of questionnaires (Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2005), and qualitative measures such as ethnographic data

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collection of classroom observation and student and teacher interviews (Curry 2001; Harklau 2000; Song 2006b). We will see more of a variety of data collection techniques in the retention literature that will provide a better model in this line of inquiry.

A Tradition of Retention Studies at Community Colleges

Attention to student retention in higher education began in four-year universities (Tinto, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) but have since turned focus to community colleges (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Key issues in early retention literature in community colleges included retention on college students as a whole rather than on special groups (Lewis & Middleton, 2003; Lujan, Gallegos, and Harbour 2003). Then the focus started narrowing in on student populations with achievement gaps such as remedial students (Kolajo, 2004; Perin, 2004), first generation college students, students of low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Alford, 2000; Dowd & Melguizo, 2008), gender, age (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008), and students of various ethnic backgrounds such as African American (Alford, 2000), Hispanic (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain 2007; Santos, 2005), and Asian (Chang, 2005). Since ELLs share some of these characteristics, a few authors mention the need to explore ESL issues further (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005; Maxwell, et al., 2003). More recently, community college researchers have started framing studies in engagement theories which originated in four-year institutions. For example, the creators of the CCSR survey instrument are making a relatively new national initiative dedicated to looking at engagement of different groups. A recent dissertation study used CCSR data to look at the differing engagement practices between remedial and non-remedial students (Noel, 2006). However, ELLs are still not part of the conversation in any of the

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articles on CCSR data even though there is a question on the survey that asks whether students have taken or plan to take an ESL course. The present study will be situated in Astin's (1985) engagement theory and will use the CCSR to see if the theory can account for ESL student retention.

Research methodologies have also been varied in the retention literature. Lujan, Gallegos, and Harbour (2003) noted that early studies started with large scale statistical approaches to look for overall trends. But in their overview of seven studies, the authors asserted that barriers which impede Latino retention at two-year institutions are best investigated using qualitative approaches. Studies have also been using mixed methods successfully. Noel (2006), for instance, used the CCSR survey instrument and conducted focus groups to add more substance and depth to her questions. Tovar and Simon (2006) used surveys for students on academic probation and observed counseling sessions to see how students respond to intrusive interventions. Some researchers who used only quantitative approaches mention that mixed approaches would have benefited their studies. Miller, Pope and Steinmann (2005) lament not using some qualitative ways to get definitions of success from students to help interpret the survey results they reported. Estrada, Dupoux, and Wolman (2005) also make a call for a qualitative approach to make sense of their survey study.

Theoretical Framework

The earliest studies on attrition, as noted by Bean (1982), were data driven but with no theoretical underpinnings, much like the report by Belcher (1988) mentioned above. Since then there have been a number of theories used to drive such studies, such as critical race theories to discuss discrepancies in attrition for ethnic minority learners

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(Maxwell & Shammas, 2007). Many of the studies mentioned above work in the framework of engagement theories. Using two surveys, Schmid and Abell (2003) looked at how students participated in study groups, spoke with faculty outside of class, and participated in school clubs and compared these activities in three cohorts: students who dropped out, students who were currently enrolled, and students who graduated. Chang (2005) observed that an influence on student-faculty interaction may rest on race relations as he found less interaction between students and faculty of different ethnic origins. The present study will draw on one engagement theory from the retention literature by testing one of its propositions that has worked at four-year institutions and at least one community college (Noel, 2006), but not yet with ELLs: "The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (Astin, 1985, p.136). Although student learning and personal development are not readily operationalized to be measured, Astin's proposition has been interpreted to use retention and GPAs as a measure of that learning and development as noted by McClenney and Marti (2006).

Engagement

Like some other studies that look at engagement (Noel, 2006), the present study will use CCSSE's operationalization of engagement that had drawn on various theories of student involvement (Marti, 2009).[1] One theory that seems particularly relevant is Astin's (1985) involvement theory which purports that students learn "by becoming involved"

[1] The term engagement here refers to students in a macro level of involvement in activities that promote persistence in college, as defined in chapter 1, and to be distinguished from its use in other educational studies such as reading engagement which on a more micro level refers to processes in reading as Wigfield, Guthrie, Perencevich, Taboada, Klauda, McRae, and Barbosa (2008) have used the term.

and by devoting "physical and psychological energy…to the academic experience" (p. 133-134). Chaves (2006) notes that this theory was originally developed for four-year schools and needs to be tested in a community college setting. Noel (2006) had a chance to use the model in her research in a community college and found that "students who [were] actively engaged in their learning [tended] to be more successful" (p. 222). The present study explores how this construct works for ESL students in a community college which is a much more diverse setting compared to the four-year university setting where researchers have used it before. CCSSE draws on Astin's (1985) theory as well as other engagement and retention theories and aims to account for the issues related to community college students, like high risk factors such as working full time or having financial strains. The direct links will be further explored in the theoretical framework in chapter 3.

CCSR

The CCSR survey instrument was derived from the National Survey of Student Engagement instrument (NSSE) which was used at four-year colleges. The CCSR diverged from the NSSE by focusing more on the experience of community college students. "Development of the community college version involved the deletion of inappropriate items (for example, those that assume on-campus residency) and the addition of new items — including more emphasis on items pertinent to technical education, student and academic support services, and student retention, for example" (CCSSE, e). This addition of support centers to adjust the survey to fit for community colleges may have contributed to its overlap in items gauging student support that are part

of two separate benchmarks, support for learners and student effort. This overlap will be

discussed in chapters 6 and 7 when presenting results from the survey and interviews.

It is based on a blend of theoretical approaches to engagement, an important one

being Astin's (1985) perspective, that associates positive educational outcomes and

student engagement (Marti, 2009). Marti asserts that although the survey draws on

theories that differ in their approaches, "student engagement plays an important role in

each of the theoretical frameworks, so the frameworks provide impetus for measuring

engagement" (p. 3). Astin was interested in students' academic and social involvement at

a college. The questions on the survey ask directly about such experiences.

The survey categorizes key issues of student engagement into five benchmarks

which are "groups of conceptually related items that address key areas of student

engagement" (CCSSE, 2003c). The first, *Active and Collaborative Learning*, asks

questions about students' interaction with other students within and outside of class. The

second, *Student Effort*, asks questions about students' activity working on assignments

and activities that reinforce what they are learning. The third, *Academic Challenge*, asks

about if and how they feel challenged rather than uninterested in their coursework. The

fourth, *Student-Faculty Interaction*, asks about how students communicate with their

instructors and vice versa. The fifth, *Support for Learners*, asks about students'

perceptions of the social and academic support that the college provides. A total of one

hundred items are related to these benchmarks; the distribution therein will be further

explicated in the theoretical framework in chapter 3. The survey has been used in its

current form since 2005, and has been attested to have "reasonable internal reliability and

test-retest reliability" (p. 1, Marti, 2009). Validation research has also indicated that there

are associations between the test's predictor of positive student outcomes in terms of high GPA, persistence, and degree completion (McClenney & Marti, 2006). However, some of the reliability findings seem questionable as noted in chapter 4.

The Study

Purpose

Using a mixed methods approach, this study bridges inquiries of ELLs and community college retention by 1) examining the retention rates of ELLs (at various levels and with various demographics) and comparing them to the rest of the students at a medium-sized urban community college, 2) examining how current and former ELLs claim to engage in activities that may explain retention or attrition, and 3) exploring how ELLs frame their own experience with retention and engagement. The purpose is to look for differences in ELL student retention within the ESL program and the college as a whole in order to develop strategies to address those differences, and to look for positive outcomes that can act as model ways to improve chances for retaining ESL students and potentially other student populations.

Research Questions

The nature of this research is mostly exploratory since there is so little ELL retention research to draw upon. My two-part overarching question asked "What are the retention patterns for ELLs at a community college, especially considering their demographic variables, and is there a relationship between retention and engagement for ELLs?" In order to build up to an answer, I explore some general trends in retention and engagement. First I look at ELL retention at a community college that needed more than one semester to yield enough data, and needed to begin early enough to allow part time

students to graduate, and thus I included fall terms from 2001-2004. Fall is chosen for consistency. Then I explore ELL engagement with the CCSR survey instrument which the same college began using in 2006 and continued in 2007. Although the survey data does not connect to the retention data in population, they still indicated patterns of engagement of ELLs who are advanced or who finished the ESL program. Then by comparing ELLs and non-ELLs in both sets of data (retention and engagement), we begin to see the connection I sought in my overarching question. Interviews with ELLs with various experiences such as completing the ESL program, graduating, transferring, or dropping out, further connected the two trends.

The first five questions can be examined quantitatively and therefore very specifically relate to the problem outlined above. I had stated that ELL retention is somewhat unknown in a community college environment. This gap in knowledge led to the first three questions:

1. What are the retention patterns of students who begin college by taking ESL courses, in terms of persistence, ESL program completion, graduation, and grade point average (GPA)?

2. How do persistence, program completion, graduation and GPAs vary among students who start in different levels and have different demographic characteristics?

3. Are there any differences in persistence, degree completion, and GPA between ELL and non-ELL students at a community college? If so, what are they?

To answer these questions I analyzed data that will be drawn from a college record database of first-time freshmen who start Fall 2001-2004 and include persistence,

demographic information (age, race/ethnicity/nationality, gender, SES, and full time part time status), GPA, and graduation. Then using class lists of ELLs during those semesters, I extracted a list of ELLs from the group and looked up individual transcripts to determine ESL program completion rates.

Then to look at ELL engagement that would account for potential differences in the retention patterns even though it is not the same group of ELLs as above, and to make comparisons between ELLs and non-ELLs, I asked the fourth and fifth questions:

4. What are the engagement practices of ELLs at the community college, as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

5. Are there differences in engagement practices between ELL and non-ELL students at the community college as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

To answer these questions, I analyzed previously collected CCSR data and looked for differences between ELL and non-ELL students in terms of their engagement practices which have been associated with positive student outcomes in the retention literature.

Lastly, I carried out the qualitative portion of this project. As seen above, qualitative approaches are necessary to gain complexity on phenomena. Broadly, I wanted to know the following:

6. What do ELLs perceive as causes for them to persist or drop out which can be linked to any patterns in retention and engagement? What are some obstacles to program or degree completion?

To answer this question, I interviewed present and former ELL students on their perceptions of their engagement, retention, challenges, and actions they took to overcome challenges. I sampled learners who completed the ESL program, graduated, or transferred.

Additionally, I interviewed students who stopped attending the college not having completed the ESL program or graduated, to see what factors led to their attrition.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study are that it will show general enrollment trends and engagement practices of ELLs, providing some explanation as to why some students persist in their enrollment until ESL program completion or graduation and others do not. However, a limitation of this study is that there is little data on students' goals for attending credit courses at the community college in the first place. The CCSR survey instrument and interview protocols ask for this information, but the retention data will not include students' original goals as this information was not elicited by EPCC. Another limitation of this study is that although it aims to show connections between engagement and persistence, it will not show a direct relationship between engagement and the learning process. It speaks to a theory of student engagement, the results of which can affect policy and curriculum planning that increases chances for engagement if that link is made; it will not show the observed characteristics of that engagement nor discuss how exactly certain interactions are conducive for learning. Interview data may also show other factors besides engagement that lead to overcoming challenges that may lead to further research in ELL retention. Another limitation is that the data on engagement are based on self reports, with some focus on ways of self-reporting in interviews. Connections to overall ELL student retention will help, but no observational data on what students actually do will be included.

Findings

Despite the limitations and delimitations of the research, some important trends were noticed that lead to implications for ESL programs, community colleges, and further research. The most striking finding was that ELLs overall do well as implied by their high averages in GPA and engagement scores, yet most do not persist long enough to complete the ESL program or to graduate. Upon further analysis, there were gaps in performance and engagement that may explain dropout among this population and must be addressed by ESL programs and community colleges. One explanation is that certain groups among ELLs did not do as well as others, accounting for some variance in the results. For example, Hispanic residents had lower first semester GPAs, and ELLs who began in lower levels of ESL were least likely to complete the ESL program. In addition, ELLs who graduated had higher GPAs than those who did not graduate. Related to this was the finding that some students seem to face challenges of being academically underprepared which affected enrollment in some cases. Perhaps of most concern is that nontraditionally aged students have lower first semester GPAs, do not persist for as many semesters, and are almost four times less likely to graduate than their counterparts. In interviews it seems that nontraditionally aged students were more likely to face external obstacles and that some find their first semester daunting as they begin English study and perceive they are not achieving well even when their GPAs are high.

But what about ELLs who have high GPAs and engagement scores but still do not complete the ESL program or graduate at the college, especially when most ELLs at this college have the goal to complete a college program? Student explanations from surveys and interviews were composed of three main obstacles to enrollment: lack of finances,

full time work, and family obligations. The fact that students attribute external factors to their departure from college does not exonerate colleges from their role in improving retention. There were other challenges noted by all students in interviews such as linguistic challenges and their status of being an ELL at the college, as well as a lack of procedural knowledge about college processes, all of which suggest a demand for greater awareness from faculty and staff of ELL concerns. In addition, it was found that although ELLs' overall benchmarks appear higher than their peers and the nation, individual items would be quite low, implying that high engagement scores are misleading. For example, in the active and collaborative learning benchmark, ELLs participated in significantly less class discussion than non-ELLs and perceptions about their oral proficiency and accent were expressed as the obstacle in interviews. They also felt the college assisted them in their understanding of others, but this understanding may not be reciprocal as they talked about non-ELLs choosing not to interact with them. ELLs also felt significantly more support from the college, and specifically were more satisfied with advising and received more orientation. However, in interviews, these services seemed to fall short when ELLs would be unaware of filing waivers for aid or credit, or when they had trouble seeking their advisors. Academic challenge was also at times a problem with the reading and writing demands in content courses and the added dimensions of curriculum and teaching styles. Lastly, student faculty interaction was perceived as unidirectional communication from faculty to students rather than a dialogue. These mixed findings of ELLs expressing their high engagement on surveys but showing a lack on specific survey items and in interviews lead one to ask, ELLs say they feel engaged, but are we engaging them enough?

But certainly part of their high engagement is connected to student success as described in interviews. The highest scoring benchmark is support for learners, which was significantly higher for ELLs than non-ELLs. It seemed ELLs felt overall supported by the college, and in interviews they characterized that support as receiving help from tutoring services. In interviews, students who successfully persisted, graduated, or transferred also attribute their success to their own extra efforts. It was found that high achieving students also seem to have fewer obstacles, whereas some were able to overcome the obstacles of finances, work, and family obligations. They also credit their own motivation and use of L2 for their success.

Implications of this study are that there is a demand for further investigation as not all ELLs have the same likelihood for success as non-ELLs and that interventions need to be explored. In addition, ELLs have unique experiences that could make them vulnerable to drop out such as obstacles that have to do with their linguistic abilities or their own perceptions of those abilities, as well as perceptions from faculty, staff, or other students about their oral proficiency. They may also be unaware of US college systems, as with first generation college students. Even when ELLs have educated parents, they may still be unaware of processes in the U.S. that would enable them to overcome certain obstacles. In addition, improved collaboration with peers could assist overcoming external barriers when peers share resources they have employed for success. Colleges can offer students ways to utilize these avenues as well as share strategies that successful students have used to overcome the external challenges they are facing.

Structure of the work

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of retention and ELL literature pertinent to the present study. It gives an overview of current retention studies highlighting key components of attrition and engagement in research. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework for the study by giving a background of the survey instrument and theorists that influenced its creation. Chapter 4 provides details about the methods used for gathering and analyzing each set of data. Chapter 5 presents the results of the analyses of the first set of data, namely the retention data. Chapter 6 presents the results of the second set, the CCSR survey, and begins making connections to the retention set. Chapter 7 presents the results for the final set of data from the interviews. It also discusses connections to the first two data results and to the literature that had been presented in chapter 2. Chapter 8 suggests implications for practice at the student, college, and national levels as well as implications for future research. At this time, we turn to the review of literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will show how there is a need to broaden the scope of ELL inquiry to ELL student retention in the context of a community college, as well as show how the issues in the retention literature have evolved in the past few decades with a particular focus on studies that have used engagement models. Attention will be on major conclusions and methodological issues, all of which will show how my study will make a contribution to the issues with a focus on a group that has not been involved in enough of the discussions.

ELL Studies that Focus on Retention Issues

As discussed in chapter 1 above, there has not been much focus on ELLs in community colleges despite the fact that it is a place more likely for some to enroll than a four-year college. An early extensive report at one institution showed strong implications for making for curriculum changes, others look at some specific successes, and another researcher looks at what students represent to faculty in the transition from high school and how that in turn affects students. Overall the studies show need for more focus on ELL retention in the context of community college.

The possibly first significant publication that looked into ELL retention was done by Belcher (1988). She conducted the report as a response to a large increase in ESL students at the community college and noted deficiencies in the ESL program that had subsequently overhauled their curriculum. She used transcript analysis to look at 884 first-time freshmen ELLs who stated they planned to pursue a degree and followed their success in terms of student goals. Before looking at persistence and graduation, she

measured their initial goal of learning English by looking at the percent of ELLs who finished the ESL program, did not finish but remained enrolled at the college, or maintained a GPA greater than 2.00 at the time of departure from the college, all of which she considered to be an indication of success. Then she looked at factors that pertained to working toward a college degree such as passing the college level English test and eventually graduating. She also looked at student demographics within the group and found that ESL students encompassed many categories, but overall the group had older learners than the rest of the college. She reported numbers and percentages for all of the data analysis. Her findings indicated that students who started college at the beginning level of ESL were much less likely to finish even the ESL program let alone graduate from the college than students who started at higher levels. Moreover, ESL enrollees were less likely to have graduated compared to nonESL enrollees at the college. But when using the measure of GPA rather than retention, ESL enrollees performed as well as nonESL enrollees.

Ignash (1995) also responded to an increase in ELLs in the student bodies of community colleges and wanted to know what community colleges were doing for them. He used survey-like phone interviews at six community colleges on ESL programs and triangulated responses with site documents and discussions with various sources at the colleges. He found that state-level definitions such as *ESL* versus *remedial* affect funding and that funding affects policy and curriculum. This means ESL is often classified as remedial since states tend to fund remedial courses more than modern language courses. He also noted that federal financial aid will only pay for students pursuing a degree which affects students' statements of their goals. Ignash (1995) states that a case should

be made if students wish only to complete ESL that financial aid should pay since it will still help learners gain equal footing in their communities. This is also a good reason to aim to improve persistence of the learner's goal even if it is just to complete an ESL program. He also recommends a way to add more questions for ELLs on college surveys to assist with evaluation measures. Additionally he makes a suggestion to alleviate the physical barrier of meeting off of the main campus which would not assist in promoting retention and persistence.

Another study showed the benefit of ELLs going through an ESL program. In a statistical study Song (2006a) compared students in ESL content and regular content courses (such as biology or other mainstream courses) and found students who took the ESL content course significantly outperformed their counterparts, as found through transcript analysis. The authors speculated the chance that other aspects of the content-linked program such as "learning communities, counseling, and tutoring, also played an influential role" (p. 434). She had noticed students from the program came back for services regularly but those not enrolled did not. This would imply a type of engagement may have been linked to their success.

Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, and Thomas-Spiegel (2005) tracked students who went through ESL or remedial courses from nine community colleges and two universities to see who would more successfully complete. They observed that students starting in the remedial courses had the most difficulty accomplishing their goals and that students who had indicated transfer as their goal performed best. ELLs who began in high levels of ESL also performed well, but those who began in lower levels did not.

Song (2006b) looked more specifically at a high rate of student failure in an advanced ESL reading/writing course at a community college which was linked to low English literacy on the one hand, and learner contributions such as lack of effort and interest on the other as discovered in interviews with the students who did not pass and with their teachers who had failed them (Song, 2006b). The author's implications are indeed a call for more engagement between students and teachers.

In a similar vein, Curry (2001) also investigated the mass attrition (75%) from a college ESL writing course at a community college. Using ethnographic approaches, such as class observations, interviews with students and the instructor, and site documents of course texts and student essays, she found that classroom discourses, such as framing homework by assuming everyone knew what a descriptive writing assignment was, favored students with the cultural capital of having had previous college experience in their homeland. However, she noted that some well-educated students dropped out as well. She also observed that students were more likely to remain in the course if had enough economic capital that they did not have to work, thus enabling them to complete the course requirements. Although she framed this study in terms of symbolic capital, it seems to point to engagement as well. To connect this with engagement, I would argue that students with higher education experience may be able to become engaged on their own whereas students without that experience and without the support of an engaging instructor or with work demands may not.

Harklau (2000) focused on a special population within ESL programs in community colleges, that of students who immigrated in secondary school. She conducted ethnographic case studies of four students using interviews with them, their

guidance counselors, and their high school and college instructors, observations of

classroom interactions, and written documents such as homework and textbooks. She

looked for emergent themes but more specifically tensions between teachers and students.

In a theoretical framework that views identity as a factor in language learning she found

that teacher representations of students could have negative consequences for these

students when teachers and curriculum attempt to socialize students. In high school they

were seen almost condescendingly as overachievers and in college as picking up all the

bad habits of American high school students. The high school label appeared to keep

students more engaged in their learning as it made for supportive relationships with their

teachers. This would imply that engagement depends on both the engager and the

engaged because of the reciprocity of social interactions. This perspective also adds an

important critical focus that comes from social constructions of students as not American

or as a cultural "other." For example, being asked to discuss their home country for long

term residents was a daunting task since it was much further removed from them than

from the more recent arrivals in the classes. This resulted in less engagement and more

boredom for the students finding it difficult to relate to their assignments.

Estrada, Dupoux, and Wolman (2005) conducted a study that also focuses on ELL

student transition into community college. They used two questionnaires to find that

students who felt that their success was contingent on external forces were better adjusted

socially in community college. The authors suggest psychosocial adjustment is a key

factor in retention as it helps students with social interaction. Again we see an allusion to

engagement. Keeping in mind what we learned from Harklau (2000) perhaps this is

suggesting that when students resist the way a curriculum or faculty represent them that has a deficit connotation, they are externalizing these powerful forces.

A study that does not address retention directly but focuses on an area of the active and collaborative learning benchmark is Leki (2001). Drawn from a larger research study, here she discusses the interactions between NSs and NNSs when involved with group work for college courses. From six case studies she found that NSs were sometimes resistant or controlling when working with NNSs in group work which interfered with NNSs' contributions to the intended outcome for the group.

Overall, the research above shows a need to look at ELLs as a group, and even at subgroups within them, since there are special factors relating to some of ELLs that give them their own issues. Some of these findings appear to be related to engagement as a factor in student achievement in college. The studies show a need to blend approaches as well since the statistical ones show how widespread phenomena are yet fall short of explaining, and the ethnographic studies hone in on specific explanations of few students and could gain power with more quantitative measures. The present study provides insights into the link between engagement *and* retention issues, giving an opportunity for students to speak.

Retention Studies that Focus on Engagement

The major issues in "retention" literature have mostly focused on academic gaps among students with particular demographics. The area of study started without directly stating theories on explanations for student retention or attrition. Then there were large endeavors to look at retention more comprehensively in theories of engagement. For reviews of this research, see Tinto (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). And while

Tinto (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have expanded their research syntheses to include retention of community colleges, they still frame success as transferring to four-year institutions despite the fact that is just one part of the role of the community college. As noted in the introduction, the majority of programs aim at career attainment. Astin's (1985) engagement theory has informed retention at four-year and more recently two-year institutions, but not with ELLs specifically. However, some of the ELL studies above seem to suggest that engagement issues may be related to ELL retention rates. I will use engagement theory but with the understanding that factors mentioned in the retention literature below can in fact be underlying influences to how much a student is or can be engaged.

A Focus on Ethnic Minority Students

Looking at community college retention data by de-aggregating demographic information has pointed to achievement gaps with specific student populations with an ethnic minority or low socioeconomic status. For reviews on some of these studies that are not on student engagement per se, see Lewis and Middleton (2003) for a review of research on African Americans, Lujan, Gallegos, and Harbour (2003) on Latino experience, and Lew, Chang, and Wang (2006) on Asian Pacific American students.

One study that seems relevant to engagement looks at the social adjustment of one group, low-income Black students who commuted to community college. Using ethnographic methods such as individual and focus group interviews with students, Alford (2000) notes low enrollment and success rates of these black students and explores social relationships in the lives of black students who commute to college,

finding that they generally had limited community affiliations and college associations. It would seem to me that this isolation inhibited their engagement in the college.

Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McLain (2007) looked at Latino student enrollment and graduation in community colleges and compared their success to the Latino representation in the student and faculty body of the colleges (i.e. percent in population vs. percent in college environment). They used large scale survey and transcript records of the same sample. They found a correlation between high representation of Latino faculty and Latino student success in terms of GPA and course completion (with a grade of "C" or better). They found no strong link between having taken ESL courses and success. The implications of the study were that faculty recruitment should match student proportions. Perhaps the finding could be related to having an impact on Latino student engagement, especially in terms of interacting with faculty.

Chang (2005) looked more closely at faculty-student interaction and race using a survey in the Los Angeles community college system. Like the CCSR survey instrument, the survey she used asked for self-reported behavior from students on their interactions with faculty, and additionally on their attitudes and perceptions on those interactions. She used descriptive statistics to look for trends, and then used a chi-square test to see if differences in interactions were statistically significant among racial groups. She found that African Americans interacted with faculty the most, and Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islanders the least. There was also an association made between perceiving racial differences and interacting less from Asian American/Pacific Islanders. The author notes that when interpreting this data, although it is very telling, it is not up to the students alone, and that faculty and administration have a responsibility in shaping

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student perceptions and initiating interactions. Chang (2005) also notes that data on characteristics of students would have assisted to see if interaction is helpful, and also notes that qualitative measures would have better revealed "how students of color perceive and negotiate their interactions with faculty" (p. 794).

Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez and Trevino (1997) looked at successful minority students (Latino, African American, Asian American, American Indian) at a state university. Participants were sampled by asking faculty to recommend students who fit the criteria of minority and successfully having completed at least one year at their college. In focus groups they asked what the students perceived were barriers they encountered and how they overcame those barriers with knowledge they gained and actions they took. The authors note that this approach differed from traditional research on retention that negatively looked at what unsuccessful students do that leads to dropping out. Results indicated that engaging in social support networks such as resource centers at the college assisted greatly in their success. Even though this model was used for four-year institutions it can be adapted to two-year since it deals with similar issues community college students face, especially since having support centers is characteristic of community colleges (Perin, 2004).

Remedial Education and Engagement

Another special population that has received attention in engagement retention studies at community colleges is students taking remedial education courses. While students in remedial courses have particular needs such as learner differences or disabilities, ELLs sometimes share those characteristics. But one thing all students who take remedial or ESL courses share is that they may take longer to complete their

academic programs due to the extra time needed for the extra coursework, which may affect prolonged learner engagement and retention. In addition, students who are placed into remedial courses may be facing the additional challenge of academic under preparedness.

A recent dissertation explored engagement and remediation using CCSR data and attempted to couple the survey with follow-up interviews much like the present study does for two of its phases. Noel (2006) used CCSR survey results and focus groups to examine differences between students who had remedial courses and those who did not. She used descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, standard error, and confidence intervals for the means, and then applied a one-way ANOVA to look for statistical significances on benchmarks and items within them. While she found significant differences in engagement practices between the two groups on the survey, results were not always supported in focus groups that asked the same questions at the CCSR. Unfortunately the focus groups questions did not much more than repeat questions on the survey, providing little depth to survey findings. Her overall finding was that remedial students were consistently more engaged, but without knowing whether their performance was different than non-remedial students at the college or without looking for details on divergent responses in focus groups, the relevance of these findings seemed limited. The present study will add to this line of inquiry by eliciting from students information similar to the survey but their characterization of their experience having to do with linguistic difficulties or other concerns having to do with their status as ELLs at the college.

Perin (2004) does not discuss engagement explicitly, but looks at learning assistance centers which students, particularly those in remedial education, can engage in to become more successful. The author looked broadly at 15 institutions as qualitative case studies where interviews were conducted. She found that all community colleges had some sort of learning assistance center, and some additionally had a specialized skills lab. All offered some kind of tutoring similar to that at EPCC outlined in the context of the study in chapter 1. "These facilities served as either supplement or alternative to remedial education in preparing students for the academic demands of postsecondary education" (p. 579). One school indicated their center was used most heavily by low-proficiency English speakers. Another institution reported more visits to these centers were associated with higher GPAs. Some schools felt the centers helped too much, or that there were not enough visits by students. An implication is that centers should be looked at more in depth for quality, especially in cases where if they serve high population of remedial or ELLs then staff should be trained to work with those special populations. Unfortunately the data reported here was quite vague since it was such a large scale and institutions retrospectively self reported what they had observed. I would still note that while the premise is that interaction may help engagement, not just any interaction will address every academic issue.

Using transcript analysis, Kolajo (2004) also looked at remedial students, and while the study was not explicitly situated in any particular retention theory, results show length of time which could affect retention which I would say speaks to the issue of prolonged engagement, especially for older students who need to go through remedial courses.

Obstacles to Engagement

Another approach to looking at engagement is to look for potential obstacles to student engagement. One study was done by Schmid and Abell (2003) on certain demographic risk factors that would impede engagement. They compared national data on four year colleges to their community college in terms of risk factors to show their differences, and then compared three cohorts within their college using three surveys. The cohorts included non-returning students, current students, and graduates. Study habits and involvement in college life were discussed in terms of study groups, speaking with faculty outside of class, and participating in school clubs. They used descriptive statistics and found that two-year college students have many more risk factors; non-returns have most risk especially with working full time, enrolling part time, and lack of financial independence. They suggest having early interventions when risks are known, such as providing additional financial aid and linking at-risk students to resources and peers on campus.

Another study that looks at something that could be considered an interference with engagement focuses on stressors that students face. Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) note that retention needs a different focus for community colleges since the students have a different profile than four-year colleges, such as students with marginal abilities in the same classes with students with academic skills who study there to save money. They did a study with a large scale survey with six colleges where 300 students had to rate challenges; data showed diversity in demographics and the authors stated that must mean ESL too. This shows that we still need to take Ignash's (1994) advice about putting ELL items on questionnaires. Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) also found that

achieving academic success was rated most difficult but noted that students' definitions of what that is might vary, so they call for research where participants define academic success themselves.

A different study saw less engagement despite students' willingness for interventions from staff and faculty. Tovar and Simon (2006) looked at students on academic probation (defined as less than 2.0 GPA) and progress probation (completing less than half of the coursework attempted). They noticed an association between ethnicity and gender in terms of success. They also wanted to see student motivation, coping, and receptivity to support services as measured on a survey. They also used a questionnaire on their backgrounds, study habits, transportation, perceptions of their probation, and plans to overcome academic difficulties. During a two-hour reorientation, they gave questionnaires, conducted small group counseling where counselors gave intervention strategies, all of which were observed. Results were descriptive and the researchers found more Latino students on probation than other groups, and found that those who were less likely to get help, were most likely to have academic and social difficulties, but had better attitude towards educators. They feel all probation students would be receptive to more intrusive advising, but did not look at effects of this in advising sessions. The results are intriguing as students were less engaged but more willing which shows that engagement is not a simple unidirectional phenomenon.

Crawford Sorey and Harris Duggan (2008) found that age is related to obstacles to retention where finances were a predictor on the withdrawal by nontraditionally aged students (age 25 and older) and low GPA was a predictor for withdrawal by traditionally aged students (18-24 years). However, lack of encouragement and support, lack of

academic integration, and expressed intent to leave were predictors for student

withdrawal from both age groups.

Overall, Retention literature shows that the achievement gaps which can lead to

attrition have been found with specific groups often labeled "at risk." Studies that focus

on race show the complexity in its connection to engagement as willing students are not

engaged, and lack of representation may be a hindrance to their involvement with faculty.

But there is also a positive approach to find strategies for overcoming the gaps for all

minority students. ELLs are mentioned but not as a diverse group on their own, with

extra language courses as practice in common with students in remedial education. Also

there are many mentions of social support networks and tutoring centers as contributing

to student persistence. Student engagement is often constricted by needing to work, or not

identifying with faculty who would be the points of contact. All of these issues and

methods will make a useful contribution to ELL focus and ELL focus will add another

dimension to this literature.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study is Astin's (1985) engagement theory. Although there is a blending of engagement and other retention theories underpinning the CCSR survey instrument, I choose Astin's since my study as a whole will test one particular proposition he offered. Below I will discuss another key engagement theory postulated by Tinto (1993) and show why Astin's is more appropriate for the present study by linking the framework to the CCSR survey instrument and retention inquiry of ELLs.

Tinto

The work of Vincent Tinto has been central in theorizing explanations of student attrition in terms of student engagement. Dedicated to retention issues, he has drawn on statistical information in retention reports from four-year institutions to find that students who are more involved on campus, in clubs, study groups, and other contexts involving students' interactions, had better chances of persisting and succeeding in college than students who were less involved (Tinto, 1993). He synthesized retention studies which he interprets with far-reaching implications that affect programs, individual colleges, and colleges as a whole, which are useful distinctions. However, he developed a theory of involvement that goes one step further by suggesting that students who are more assimilated in college culture, as indicated by higher levels of involvement, are more likely to succeed. I would argue that viewing involvement as one in the same as assimilating in college culture is a bit of a leap. Tinto (1993)'s theory is reminiscent of Schumann's acculturation theory which posits that one needs to feel part of the culture in

order to learn, which did not hold true for language learning (Norton, 2000). Rumbaut (1997) has surmised through a microanalysis of research that assimilation does not equal the greater good in US society by immigrants, so it should not be applicable in college culture either. If a student is more assimilated into college culture, that could mean increased academic interactions or succumbing to peer pressure to negative behaviors such as binge drinking or drug use. Access to assistance, getting involved in learning, being interested enough to be involved, which means addressing curriculum to make it engaging for more students, and developing talent as Astin would suggest all seem more appropriate for being factors in students' success in college. CCSSE's operationalization of engagement maintains the focus on interactions between students and peers, faculty, and administration that are academic and specifically linked to the kind of engagement associated with increased retention, graduation, and high GPAs (Marti, 2009).

Tinto's (1993) theory has been questioned by others as well. Maxwell and Shammas (2007) criticize the link of Tinto's theory to assimilation theory and its lack of attention to power differentials in "the social exclusion and competition experienced by some students at culturally diverse colleges" (p. 346). Tierney (1992) provides a strong criticism of an analogy in Tinto's model that achieving in college is like passing through one's rite of passage. Noting in anthropology that a rite of passage is not meant for going from one culture to another, and that dropping out is never an option, the metaphor falls short, and worse, regards students as the ones who have the acculturation "problem." Tierney's implication is to change college curriculum to be more engaging for diverse learners as opposed to attempting to acculturate everyone into dominant college culture. Tinto (1993) responds with a new edition of his theoretical point of view that aims at

taking more diversity into consideration, but still relies on an albeit softer view of assimilation as the key to college success.

In addition to the shortcomings Tierney (1992) points out, there are some practical uses that are also lacking in Tinto's theory if applied to the community college context. Marti (2009), in an article reporting on the CCSR survey instrument's psychometric strengths, noted,

> A recent review of the empirical evidence for Tinto's [1993] theory of student departure found that there are notable differences in the theory's applicability to the two- and four- year sectors (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Examining thirteen testable propositions in Tinto's theory, the authors report that there is robust empirical affirmation for only one of the propositions in the two-year sector, student entry characteristics, in contrast to support for two propositions in commuter institutions and support for five propositions in residential institutions (p. 4).

And yet Tinto is still influential in community college studies. The researcher, Linda Serra Hagedorn co-authored two studies, one criticizing Tinto (as cited in Tovar & Simon, 2006), the other relying on his assertions to address implications in a study (Maxwell et al., 2003). Even I quoted him in the introduction because of his dedication to finding solutions to get students more engaged. His observations are important as a starting place for using engagement to attribute to retention, but his theory as to why is not sufficient. Even in his discussion of two year colleges (Tinto, 1993), he talks about their characteristics as being exceptions to his theory since there is less chance for

students to integrate in the college community due to attending part time, commuting, and having other responsibilities.

Astin

Unlike Tinto, Astin (1985) does not make a leap into an assimilationist theory by elevating the role of student integration into the college culture. His terminology rings of social theories in SLA, especially Norton's (1995, 2000) identity theory where she asserts that one needs to assert his or her agency and invest time and energy into learning a language. Astin views motivation as describing psychological processes, but finds *involvement* a more useful term since it is more measurable in research, and since actions will lead to more success than simply wanting actions to occur. Yet he acknowledges that it is not as simple as students just doing what they need to do to succeed, and that there is a balance between what could make someone involved in college work or involved in something else. His example is of a student who works part time in a job that is related to their academic focus as opposed to working full time in an unrelated area. The first will increase involvement and the latter is likely to decrease it. So the category of "work" needs to be qualified to get an indication of whether it would obstruct student involvement in college. This shows the delicate balance between being involved and expending valuable resources such as the student's time. In addition, like investment, engagement also depends on access to other people. Even when students come face to face with other students, tutors, or faculty, it cannot be assumed that this interaction always yields overall engagement. Just like any interaction when learning a language, the interlocutor will not necessarily be of assistance.

Astin (1985) also views learning as "talent development" or talent theory, related to personal development which appears in one of the propositions below. Unlike other theories, like that of Tinto (1993) where all students are seen to go through certain stages in their development of becoming a college student, Astin's theory is more flexible, viewing that students are in college to learn "something" which at least minimally transforms their talent, but not necessarily their culture. Here is what he postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various "objects." The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry exam).

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in, say, academic work can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (does the student review and comprehend reading assignments, or does the student simply stare at the textbook and daydream?).

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (Astin, 1985, pp. 135-136).

The first proposition gives us a good working definition in order to operationalize the use of involvement, or engagement as it will be conceptualized in this study. The CCSR survey instrument which appears on CCSSE's website (CCSSE, 2003d) is a good example of how this works as it asks just what exactly do students do, or in other words what kind of energy students spend on actions inside and outside of class. The second gets at the dynamic nature of human activity, resembling identity and Norton's (2000) term *investment* where learners select their actions based on how they want to invest their energy at any given time. For example, the way students respond to the items on one day versus another may vary. Proposition 3 can also be seen as an assumption and shows that multi-method designs will yield different data all of which can show aspects of student engagement.

The fourth proposition is the most testable in this study as development which is measured by success in terms of persistence or completion of all members from a program is compared to the engagement of a statistical sample from that population. Astin (1985) stated that the last two propositions' purpose is to be tested, and they have been (Noel, 2006) but not with an ELL population. The fifth will be addressed through implications and a call for more research in the present study, but will not be tested here.

I will still take caution in drawing conclusions on why engagement may be a factor with the ELL population. It should not be assumed that it is up to the student to be engaged. There is reciprocity between the engager and the engaged. Literature above has

implied that students may not be engaged because of perceived racial differences (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007), or how students are perceived as being involved or not (Harklau, 2000). This is how it will inform my study and how my study will inform the theory.

CCSSE's Benchmarks

The complete survey is on CCSSE's website (CCSSE, 2003d). The benchmarks are related to Astin and others as they are related to specific types of student engagement. The survey provides overall benchmark scores, as well as responses to each item. The official CCSSE website illustrates the item composition of each benchmark as outlined below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Outline of CCSSE's Benchmarks

Active & Collaborative Learning	During the current school year, how often have you: Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions Made a class presentation Worked with other students on projects during class Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary) Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)
Student effort	During the current school year, how often have you: Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources Come to class without completing readings or assignments Used peer or other tutoring services Used skill labs Used a computer lab
	During the current school year: How many books did you read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment How many hours did you spend in a typical week preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, or other activities related to your program)

Table 3.1

Outline of CCSSE's Benchmarks (continued)

Academic Challenge	During the current school year, how often have you: Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
	How much does your coursework at this college emphasize: Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill
	During the current school year: How many assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings did you read How many papers or reports of any length did you write To what extent have your examinations challenged you to do your best work How much does this college emphasize encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying
Student Faculty Interaction	During the current school year, how often have you: Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework
Support for Learners	How much does this college emphasize: Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) Providing the support you need to thrive socially Providing the financial support you need to afford your education
	During the current school year, how often have you: Used academic advising/planning services Used career counseling services

Note: Adapted from CCSSE, (2003c)

The remainder of the questions on the survey solicits demographic information. One can

see above how each question is about student and college actions rather than on a

motivated feeling and how each question could relate to what Astin said about assisting or taking away from engagement. Astin's example of number of hours of work is also an item on the survey. Additionally, there is another item that speaks to the reciprocity of interactions, item 11 where they must rate the quality of their interactions with peers, instructors, and administrative personnel and offices.

The creators of the CCSR mention that researchers can couple this inquiry with retention data, and Astin (1997) warns not to go by retention rates alone, so these two methods will work well together. Plus there will be the additional benefits of interviews to gauge complexities of engagement issues as mentioned above. For example, the question on amount of time invested in homework could be viewed as showing engagement, but if there is too much homework that would take away from students' own resources of time, it could also be an extra challenge. These types of conflicts, tensions, or discrepancies will be looked for in the interview data. What the CCSR does not measure, however, is campus involvement as it relates specifically to ELLs. Although there is an item that indicates whether the participant has taken ESL coursework, that is the extent of gauging ELLs' experience, which is a limitation to the survey as interviews will illustrate. Now I will turn to the study below.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Research Approach and Design

Because the inquiry of looking at ELL retention and engagement in community college settings is still a largely unexplored area, it is beneficial to triangulate sources of data to gather different perspectives. That is why I utilized a mixed methods approach in this study since it can obtain a broad indication of student self-reported behaviors and the bonus of richer data (Dornyei, 2007) that may not come through on quantified survey and retention data alone (Astin, 1997). Follow-up ethnographic approaches such as focus group interviews are encouraged by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) organization as they "will help you better understand students' experiences, as well as uncover possible strategies to consider for improvement. They will provide qualitative information to enhance your CCSSE data" (CCSSE, 2003a, para. 1).

This chapter is broken down into sections that represent the three different phases of this study. Each section will describe participants, instruments, procedures, data analyses, and/or variables of the particular phase. The first phase will look at enrollment trends, the second will quantify results from CCSSE's survey instrument, The Community College Survey Report (CCSR), and the third will describe data collection and analysis of the interviews. As noted in the literature review in chapter 2, transcripts can show retention patterns, surveys can show how widespread certain behaviors are, and interviews can assist with explanations of differences in experiences and show how factors such as retention and engagement interplay in individual cases. I present the

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research questions below for reference. A full description of the questions can be found in chapter 1.

7. What are the retention patterns of students who begin college by taking ESL courses, in terms of persistence, ESL program completion, graduation, and grade point average (GPA)?

8.   How do persistence, program completion, graduation and GPAs vary among students who start in different levels and have different demographic characteristics?

9. Are there any differences in persistence, degree completion, and GPA between ELL and non-ELL students at a community college? If so, what are they?

10. What are the engagement practices of ELLs at the community college, as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

11. Are there differences in engagement practices between ELL and non-ELL students at the community college as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

12. What do ELLs perceive as causes for them to persist or drop out which can be linked to any patterns in retention and engagement? What are some obstacles to program or degree completion?

Methods for Retention Phase

This section of the study is largely exploratory since there is a paucity of research on actual ELL retention in community colleges. The method of transcript analysis has been used extensively, and seems to be the most direct and comprehensive way to investigate retention at an institution of higher education (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, &

McLain, 2006; Kolajo, 2004; Maxwell, et al., 2003). This phase will answer the first three research questions.

Participants

Participants were drawn from the database of student records at East Penn Community College (EPCC) and included 7129 first-time freshmen (FF) whose first enrollments were in the fall semesters of 2001-2004, 161 of whom were ELLs and 6968 non-ELLs. I used no minors (under age 18) or cases with missing ages in case they included minors as per IRB agreement. For the age category, I divided students into two variables, traditionally aged (18-24 years) and nontraditionally aged (25 years and older). The decision is based on the literature that makes the same division even for community colleges where students who are up to 24 years of age are viewed as being in the prime years of attending post secondary education (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008). It is also consistent with CCSSE's categories of age. With regard to race/ethnicity, only U.S. residents (with a green card or US citizenship) have such a category in EPCC's database of student records, the subcategories of which are shown in Table 4.1. Pell grant eligibility will be used to gauge student socioeconomic status (SES), bearing in mind that eligibility does not capture all students who would be considered as having low SES. Enrollment status is divided into full time (enrolled 12 or more credits in the first semester) or part time (enrolled 11 credits or fewer).

ELLs were identified by cross-checking the master file and a list compiled from fall 2001-2004 ESL course enrollments, the total of which added up to 161 FF who began college by taking at least one ESL course. I added two categories to be used in my analyses of ELLs: their level of ESL in their first semester and whether they completed

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the ESL Program with a grade of "C" or higher in the final course. For students who started with a mixed level, I counted them as the lower of all their levels since that low area would influence their time in college. Demographics of the ELL group are shown in Table 4.1, next to the non-ELLs from the data.

Table 4.1

Characteristics of ELLs (n = 161) and non-ELLs (n = 6968)

Characteristic	ELL	Non-ELL
Age		
Traditional	72 (45%)	5667 (81%)
Nontraditional	89 (55%)	1301 (19%)
Enrollment		
Part time	130 (81%)	2538 (36%)
Full time	31 (19%)	4430 (64%)
Not US resident	43 (27%)	25 (0.4%)
US resident	118 (73%)	6943 (99.6%)
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic	50 (31%)	575 (8%)
White	42 (26%)	5582 (80%)
Asian	16 (10%)	77 (1%)
Black	1 (1%)	407 (6%)
Unknown	9 (6%)	256 (4%)
Native	0	19 (0.3%)
Not Coded	0	27 (0.4%)
Sex		
Men	57 (35%)	3018 (43%)
Women	104 (65%)	3950 (57%)
Pell grant		
Eligible	34 (21%)	1622 (23%)
Not eligible	127 (79%)	5346 (77%)

As there is such a large difference in number between the groups of ELLs and non-ELLs, I drew a sample of non-ELLs from the cohort to be compared to the ELLs. Since bootstrapping samples would not be feasible with this data, as will be described in

the limitations section below, I used matching samples which has proven useful for making comparisons between groups with differences in sample sizes (Kamath, O'Fallon, Offord, Yawn, & Bowen, 2003). The data had many variables that needed to be narrowed down to make it manageable enough to match samples (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.2

Characteristics of matching samples

Characteristic	ELLs (*n* = 139)	Non-ELLs (*n* = 139)
Age		
Traditional	58 (42%)	58 (42%)
Nontraditional	81 (58%)	81 (58%)
Enrollment		
Part time	109 (78%)	109 (78%)
Full time	30 (22%)	30 (22%)
Not US resident	24 (17%)	24 (17%)
US resident	115 (83%)	115 (83%)
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic	50 (36%)	50 (36%)
White	42 (30%)	42 (30%)
Asian	13 (9%)	13 (9%)
Black	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
	9 (7%)	9 (7%)
Unknown		
Sex		
Men	48 (35%)	39 (28%)
Women	91 (66%)	100 (72%)
Pell grant		
Eligible	34 (25%)	29 (21%)
Not eligible	105 (76%)	110 (79%)

I matched on race/ethnicity, age, and enrollment status since those seemed to be the most disproportionate groups judging from their frequencies. In SPSS, I used crosstabs and randomly selected non-ELLs from the same indicators in ELL crosstabs. Due to a lack of students in certain categories, I had to reduce the number of ELLs and ended up with a final number of 139 students in each matched sample. The demographics for the matching samples are presented in Table 4.2.

Limitations

As noted above, EPCC provided me with the retention data in the form of three spreadsheet files that were outputs from the college's computerized student record system, which I converted to SPSS. The nature of the data presented some challenges due to the fact that they were separate outputs and not compiled in an immediately usable way.

First, because of the way the data on persistence had been compiled, persistence could only be measured by indicating the total number of fall semesters rather than all semesters that students enrolled subsequent to their first semester. In other words, the variable showed the number of fall semesters that students enrolled subsequent to the first one. Thus if a student had a category of "1" they were enrolled a total of two fall semesters, the first one and a subsequent one, but not necessarily the consecutive one. The data also included "stop-outs" (students who leave college but return at a later time) which meant that if a student enrolled in the fall of 2004, took a year off, and reenrolled in the fall of 2006, they would be counted as having enrolled one additional fall semester. This variable could not be used to count the number of all the semesters students attended, but could still be used to make comparisons between groups of students to give an

indication of persistence by allowing comparisons of enrollment patterns across groups of participants.

Procedure

Regardless of the limitations, I could perform analyses on and within ELLs as well as compared ELLs and non-ELLs. Specifically, I calculated frequencies for ELL graduation and program completion, calculated the means of their GPAs from the first and final falls they were enrolled, and compared results among ELLs by characteristics of age, ethnicity, and level of ESL in which they began. I also compared GPAs and number of falls enrolled between graduates and non-graduates. I then compared the matched sample of ELLs to non-ELLs for frequencies of graduation, means of GPAs, and means of the number of falls enrolled. To match samples of ELLs and non-ELLs, first I used SPSS crosstabs to cross reference the three demographic categories (race/ethnicity, enrollment status, and age) in ELLs. I then grouped non-ELLs by these categories and used SPSS to randomly select non-ELL participants. I also calculated the whole group non-ELL graduation rate, persistence, and GPAs. Details of these analyses are explained in the data analyses section below.

Variables

The dependent variables used to gauge retention include ESL program completion, graduation, first fall GPA, last fall GPA, and number of subsequent falls enrolled. Falls enrolled and program completion is explained above. GPA is on a scale from 0.00 to 4.00, where an "F" grade is 0.00 points, and "A" is 4.00. As noted in the introduction, graduation refers to completion of an associate's degree, certificate, or specialized diploma. Students complete a minimum of 60 credits for the degree, a minimum of 30

credits for the certificate, and a minimum of 6 credits for the specialized diploma. For the purposes of this study the term *graduation* will be used throughout to indicate the completion of associates degrees, certificates, or specialized diplomas.

Data analyses

As mentioned above, SPSS was used within and between ELL and non-ELL samples to calculate frequencies on program completion and graduation as well as means on GPAs and number of falls enrolled. To use inferential statistics, subsequent *t* tests were used on subgroups within ELLs and between matched samples of ELLs and non-ELLs for their means of GPAs and number of falls enrolled. However, more weight will be given to the results for GPAs in the final fall semester since it will be shown that ESL courses issue higher grades than other courses and ELLs would be taking mostly ESL courses in their first semester. Finally, linear and logistic regressions were used for ESL program completion within ELLs, and for graduation within ELLs as well as between ELLs and non-ELLs. Further explanation and rationale are explicated below.

When using *t* tests, I set the alpha level at $a < 0.05$ with a two-tailed decision since I was not certain of the outcomes, all of which is common for exploratory research in the social sciences (Brown, 2001). Also, since my inquiry is exploratory, I used the entire sample of ELLs, unequal variances in all, so when Levene's test indicated unequal variances, I used the significant results associated therein as well as the appropriate *t* and *df* when calculating effect sizes.

I used linear regression for GPAs and persistence since they are scale variables, and logistic regression for program completion and graduation since they are dichotomous variables (Wright, 1995). One limitation of this part of the study is that due

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to the low number of ELLs not all demographic variables could be included in all of the analyses, as a minimum sample size of 50 is recommended for logistic and 15 for linear. Therefore, decisions needed to be made to choose the most relevant predictors based on retention literature (Wright, 1995). I used age (traditional and nontraditional), ethnicity (Hispanic residents and all others) and level (high and low) for all of the regressions with the following rationale.

First, gender was not included in the analysis. While some studies have shown that Hispanic and Black males as having more risk factors that would influence dropping out of school or college (Alford, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, & Tai, 2001), quantitative inquiry has not always yielded conclusive interpretation. For example, Tovar and Simon (2006) note that differences for women and men seem to even themselves out; whereas women have outperformed men in verbal abilities, men have outperformed women in mathematical abilities. Likewise, Ewers (2007) found no differences for gender in her study on student engagement and persistence. Socioeconomic status (SES) has been discussed as a factor in the literature qualitatively (Alford, 2000) and quantitatively (Dowd & Melguizo, 2008), but has also been found irrelevant at times quantitatively (Ewers, 2007). In addition, Pell grant eligibility has yielded mixed results, at times enabling students to remain in school, at others not being enough to insure students with low SES will succeed due to the greater potential for less academic preparedness (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Nevertheless, due to the low number of Pell eligible students, SES had to be ruled out for the logistic regressions. Full time versus part time enrollment status has also been discussed as a risk factor in retention and engagement (Schmid & Abell, 2004), but again there were not enough full

time students in the data to warrant logistic regressions. There has been limited research conducted on students' residency status save for Harklau (2000) who observed differences in the effect that certain assignments had on long term residents as opposed to newcomers, and Chen (1999) who discussed stressors that international students face. Either way, the low number of residents was not enough to be included in the logistic regressions.

Race and ethnicity were essential to include since many articles address these in the retention literature. I considered looking at "minorities" as Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997) had done, but there would not be enough white students to use as a comparison group in the sample for the logistic regressions. The Hispanic Residents, however, is a large group and plenty of literature suggests there are factors that affect them negatively albeit not conclusively for ELLs (Conchas, 2001; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain 2007; Santos, 2005). I also included age as it was found to be a factor above all other factors in retention and engagement in Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan's (2008) study. Students' ESL level too would be a major factor based on findings in Belcher's (1988) descriptive study and on the assumption that time in school would affect completion. Collapsing them into two groups, a low level (1 and 2) and high level (3 and 4), yielded sufficient numbers in each group for all of the analyses.

In addition to looking to the literature to assist in choosing the most relevant variables to use in the linear regressions, I also ran exploratory *t* tests on first fall GPA, last fall GPA, and number of falls enrolled between each variable so that any with significant differences could help me narrow factors down or avoid omitting a potentially

significant variable. Licht (1995) finds this method preferable to simply using every variable in the linear regression. Similar methods have been used by Chang (2005) who conducted exploratory analyses in an aggregate sample to isolate variables associated with student-faculty interaction as a type of engagement; Crawford Sorey and Harris Duggan (2008) who used only the variables that correlated with persistence at the 0.30 level; and Tovar and Simon (2006) who conducted a MANOVA first and then an ANOVA on the significant findings.

After merging the four levels into the two groups, high (levels 3 and 4) and low (levels 1 and 2), I found differences were not significant for first fall GPA, second fall GPA, or numbers of falls enrolled. There were, however, significant findings for age: students aged 25 and older had significantly lower first GPA, t (154.56) = 2.84, $p < 0.05$, lower final fall GPA, t (155.87) = 2.08, $p < 0.05$, and fewer falls enrolled, t (147.54) = 2.51, $p < 0.05$. Nonresidents had significantly higher first fall GPAs only, t (114.94) = -2.62, $p < 0.05$. For Race there were no significant findings from group to group with the exception of Hispanic residents compared to everyone else with the first GPA being significantly lower for Hispanic residents, . There were no significant differences between part time and full time students, Pell eligible or ineligible, or male and female students.

This is how I came to ultimately use age (traditional and nontraditional), ethnicity (Hispanic residents and all others) and level (high and low) for the logistic regressions on program completion and graduation since these factors were relevant based on the literature as noted above and had at least 50 cases in each category as required for logistic regression. In the linear regressions used to analyze first fall GPA, final fall GPA, and

number of fall semesters completed, I used the same categories (age, ethnicity, and level) for the purpose of consistency. Even though the preliminary analyses showed that levels were not significantly different for the GPAs or falls enrolled, and the ethnicities were not significantly different for the final fall GPA or falls enrolled, I did find significant results for the linear regressions, which are discussed in the results. There were also no other variables that were significant in preliminary analyses save for residency in the first fall GPA. However, even though residency was significant for first fall GPA, this categorization will not be included since I used Hispanic residents as a category to compare to all others, which was also found to be significant and since I used this distinction for the logistic regression.

Methods for CCSR Survey Phase

To answer questions 4 and 5, ELL responses in CCSR data were analyzed and then compared to non-ELL responses, the results of which appear in Chapter 6. Questions on the survey are linked to specific areas of engagement as outlined in Chapter 3. Surveys have been used extensively to gain insight into student behaviors that can be linked to retention issues, even though they are self-reported (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2006; Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005; Perin, 2004; Schmid & Abell, 2003; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Note that this is a different sample than the retention sample, the data of which answers different research questions; however, as mentioned in the introduction, looking at alternate sources of data is a way to find some general trends in retention and engagement that can be linked in the interview phase. In other words, after finding out the magnitude of how a certain population of ELLs do in college (part 1), and then finding out how a random sample of ELLs are generally engaged in the college (part 2,

presently), I used previous research and follow-up interviews to make connections and answer my two-part overarching question, "What are the retention patterns for ELLs at a community college, especially considering their demographic variables, and is there a relationship between retention and engagement for ELLs?"

Participants

CCSSE uses a stratified random sampling methodology that selects courses where participants meet on campus (CCSSE, 2003b). Noncredit courses, online courses, low levels of ESL courses, and courses reserved for high school students are not used for survey distribution. For these particular samples, no advanced ESL courses were used. CCSSE sent a liaison to the college to assist in data collection and survey administration. After obtaining permission from EPCC and Temple's IRB, the CCSSE organization sent me the data from the 2006 ($N = 919$) and 2007 ($N = 784$) surveys compiled in SPSS files. The total enrollment for the college was approximately 7000 in those years, and has been classified as "urban" although it has a predominantly White population. Even though participants were randomly selected, there was a disproportionate ratio of full-time to part-time students in both years. Although the file came with a weighting variable to account for this, I did not use this feature since I would not be analyzing the data for the purposes of looking at trends for the whole college, but would be looking at subsamples within the data. However, I will still note the disparity in enrollment status when discussing results of the ELLs.

From the participants in the file, I selected first-time freshmen by using item 1 on the survey: "Did you begin college at this college or elsewhere?" (CCSSE, 2003d) to which students could respond that they started here at EPCC or elsewhere. I omitted

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missing cases for that item. I also omitted cases where students responded that they had

an associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctoral, or professional degree in case any of the

participants had misunderstood the first question. I accepted technical certificates since

they could indicate students with a technical equivalent to a high school diploma. I also

omitted cases with missing ages in case they included minors as per IRB agreement.

Even though CCSSE does not distribute surveys in courses that are designated for high

school enrollment, and they delete minors in the data sets, I took this extra precaution to

assure there would not be minors in the data sets. In addition, I omitted cases where

students indicated that they had taken this survey in another class in the same semester.

I identified ELLs by using the survey question "Which of the following have you

done, are you doing, or do you plan to do while attending this college?" where one item

indicated "English as a second language course" to which students could respond 1) I

have not done, nor plan to do, 2) I plan to do, or 3) I have done (CCSSE, 2003d). I used

only the "I have done" responses for ELLs for two reasons. One is for the implications

and focus in this study. A delimitation here is to look at students who begin college at

EPCC in academic ESL. The other reason is due to the small number of "plan to do"

responses ($n = 4$ for 2006 and 2007 combined). After data reductions mentioned above,

there were not enough students who chose "I plan to do" to make comparisons to students

who had been in the program, nor to be worth it to combine them with students who had

taken ESL. I also cross referenced the question about whether English was their native or

first language with the "I have done" group and omitted "yes" responses to insure fewer

chances for participants having misunderstood the question; it is possible that non-ELLs

could have misinterpreted that item especially if they did not read the whole question. I

ended up with 11 ELLs from 2006, and 34 from 2007. Although these are smaller

numbers of ELLs than I had hoped for, they are still random and large enough for some

statistical tests (Brown, 2001; see also Moosavi 2007).

I combined the years to make one larger group of participants for looking at

overall trends of ELLs and to use as a comparison to a sample of non-ELLs from the data

sets. Before combining ELLs from the two years, I ran t tests between them on the

benchmark scores where no significant differences were found. I also ran chi-square tests

between the two groups on their demographic characteristics, all of which differed by

administration year as one can see in Table 4.3. Note that race and residency overlap here

unlike in the retention data where international students were not coded for race. Also,

while there are questions about parents' education on the survey, I will not use generation

status here due to a large amount of missing numbers in participant responses, in addition

to the fact that results could not be used to compare to retention data which did not

include generation status.

Table 4.3

Chi-Square results for ELL characteristics between 2006 and 2007

Characteristic	Chi-square	df	n	P
Age (traditional/non)	5.730	1	45	0.017*
Enrollment (full-time/part-time)	5.000	1	45	0.025*
Residency (US resident/non)	6.119	1	43	0.0138*
Race (seven categories)	16.330	1	45	0.000*
Sex (male/female)	6.211	1	45	0.013*
Grants (major/minor/not source)	11.213	1	44	0.001*

Note. *Significant differences at $p < 0.05$

The fact that the two groups differed in all characteristics further served as a rationale for combining them in order for the sample to include variables from a range of ELLs within the college. I conferred with a CCSSE consultant who endorsed this technique. The final sample for the combined years for ELLs remained $n = 45$.

The ELLs who took this survey were enrolled in content courses given that CCSSE did not administer the survey in any ESL courses at EPCC. Most likely these students finished ESL or would have at least been in levels 3 or 4 of ESL since they may enroll for regular classes at the same time in the higher levels. When asked how many credits students earned before the semester in which they took this survey, most students selected 1-14 credits (45%) or 15-29 credits (33%), indicating most are still fairly early in their pursuit of a degree which takes about 60 credits to complete, but closer if their goal is for a certificate or specialized diploma.

Table 4.4 shows the demographics for the ELL group. When comparing this group to the ELL population from the four-fall semester cohort in the retention data, one can see there is a difference in the ELL population in terms of the ratio between full time and part time students where the retention data showed 19% full time and 81% part time students compared to 55% full time and 44% part time students here. There is also a disparity between retention and survey demographics in the ratio of traditionally and nontraditionally aged students with 45% to 55% in retention data respectively versus 60% to 40% here. Age may be associated with full time/part time status here given that in the cohorts 96% of nontraditionally aged students were also part time students. Unlike the retention data, the data in Table 4.4 separates the international and racial designations as individual categories. Note there were some missing numbers in items on grant eligibility,

residency, and race/ethnicity. However, I will be mimicking the retention categorization

for the matched sample for practicality purposes as will be illustrated when comparing

ELLs and non-ELLs below.

Table 4.4

Characteristics of ELLs (n = 45)

ELL Characteristic	n (%)
Age	
Traditional	27 (60%)
Nontraditional	18 (40%)
Enrollment	
Full time	25 (55%)
Part time	20 (44%)
Nonresidents	16 (36%)
Residents	27 (60%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	15 (33%)
Hispanic	12 (27%)
White	10 (22%)
Other	3 (7%)
Black	1 (2%)
Sex	
Men	19 (42%)
Women	26 (58%)
Grants	
Eligible	18 (40%)
Ineligible	26 (58%)

      Table 4.5 shows the demographics of the non-ELL group after data reductions

took place as mentioned in the participant section above. Note there were some missing

numbers for sex, enrollment status, grant eligibility, and residency. I compared these to

the ELL frequencies of characteristics (Table 4.4) and decided to draw a matching sample

from the non-ELLs based on age, enrollment status, and race. I used the same categories

of race as the retention data and grouped internationals together, and residents by race for

consistency and ease since it is not feasible to match on more than three characteristics.

For example, Kamath, O'Fallon, Offord, Yawn, and Bowen (2003) matched on age, sex, and type of doctor's appointment in their survey study on interethnic doctor/patient encounters. I had originally used only race without international student status but did not end up with very many international students in the matching samples. Since they comprise a fairly large population, I included them as a group in the ELL sample even if their race was not identified.

Table 4.5

Characteristics of Non-ELLs (n = 1011)

Characteristic	*n* (%)
Age	
Traditional	842 (83%)
Nontraditional	169 (17%)
Enrollment	
Full time	772 (76%)
Part time	237 (23%)
Residency	
Nonresidents	29 (3%)
Residents	972 (96%)
Race/Ethnicity (residents)	
Native	8 (1%)
Asian	19 (2%)
Black	61 (6%)
Hispanic	89 (9%)
Other	59 (6%)
White	760 (75%)
Sex	
Men	444 (44%)
Women	566 (56%)
Grants	
Eligible	396 (40%)
Ineligible	587 (58%)

The matching samples left me with 34 participants for each group. Table 4.6 shows the demographics of the two matching samples. They did not come out as perfectly as the retention samples due to some missing numbers. Kamath, O'Fallon,

Offord, Yawn, and Bowen (2003) encountered this issue as well but included the

unmatched pairs in their sample in order to use as much data as possible. On the plus side,

as an unexpected outcome after matching the samples, two other variables, sex and grant

eligibility, resulted in fairly comparable proportions as well.

Table 4.6

Characteristics in matching samples

Characteristics	ELL	Non-ELL
Age		
Traditional	22 (65%)	22 (65%)
Nontraditional	12 (35%)	12 (35%)
Enrollment		
Full time	24 (71%)	24 (71%)
Part time	10 (29%)	10 (29%)
Residency		
Nonresidents	17 (50%)	17 (50%)
Unknown	2 (6%)	0
Residents	15 (44%)	17 (50%)
Hispanic	8 (24%)	8 (24%)
Asian	4 (12%)	4 (12%)
Black	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
White	2 (6%)	2 (6%)
Other	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Sex		
Men	15 (44%)	14 (41%)
Women	19 (56%)	20 (59%)
Grants		
Eligible	14 (41%)	14 (41%)
Ineligible	19 (56%)	18 (53%)
Unknown	1(3%)	2 (6%)

Instrument: About the CCSR survey

As noted above, the CCSR survey instrument was administered at EPCC in 2006

and 2007. The survey took about 25 minutes to complete, except in remedial courses

where they may have taken more time. One can refer to CCSSE's (2003d) website to

view the complete survey that was used for both years. Although there were supplemental

questions that were included with the 2006 and 2007 surveys, they will not be addressed here due to low numbers after data cleaning and since the questions were different each year. There are 100 items, and certain questions fall under one of five benchmark categories: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners (further explication can be found in chapter 3).

CCSSE's survey has been used nationwide in community colleges and has been demonstrated to be a valid and reliable instrument (Marti, 2009). McClenney and Marti (2006) analyzed studies from three institutions that used CCSSE survey and retention data and observed that many positive student outcomes, such as higher GPA and longer persistence, were related to higher student engagement. The survey has been tested for validity and reliability for the community college population as a whole from year to year, and on the subpopulations of males and females, as well as part time and full time students (Marti, 2009), but not for ELL populations until now. I also tested the internal consistency of the survey using the Cronbach alpha in SPSS for the engagement benchmark subsections of the survey with this specific population of ELLs (Brown, 2001). As one can see in Table 4.7, the Chronbach's alpha scores do not deviate greatly from Marti's findings. The lowest one is for student effort, which is also low in Marti's findings, but Marti found that test-retest reliability was good so I too will not discount this benchmark as unreliable. However, academic challenge and Support for learners were the most reliable and results will be interpreted taking this into consideration in Chapter 6.

Table 4.7

Reliability of benchmark related items for ELL responses

Benchmark	Items	Alpha (ELLs)	Alpha (Marti)	Test-retest r (Marti)
Active and collaborative learning	7	0.63	0.66	0.73
Student effort	8	0.45	0.56	0.74
Academic challenge	10	0.69	0.80	0.77
Student-faculty interaction	6	0.63	0.67	0.73
Support for learners	7	0.79	0.76	0.73

Data analyses

Analysis began with descriptive statistics of results such as percentages, frequencies, and means of select items. Students had to respond on a Likert-scale, and all scales related to benchmarks on the survey force respondents to choose high or low answers rather than allowing a neutral option. Specifically, I used SPSS to calculate the frequencies of responses to each survey item, often collapsing responses for highs and lows on the scales, and cross referencing certain items to see how they co-occur.

Then *t* tests were used between groups, using the same criteria as in the retention section above. One test was used within the group of ELLs (n = 45) for traditional and nontraditional ages since age will prove to be a significant factor in the retention results. More *t* tests were used for results between the matching samples of ELLs and non-ELLs, like that noted in the methods section for retention above. There has been some caution about using multiple t tests that one may commit type I error, or seeing significances that may not actually be true. For example Brown (2001) would suggest using the Bonferroni adjustment (Brown, 2001) where one would divide the set alpha (0.05) by the total

number of tests (136), making the adjusted alpha 0.0004. However, Everitt (2001) warns that using this adjustment for a large number of tests would make the alpha so low that one could make type II errors where one accepts the null hypothesis when it should in fact be rejected. Therefore, I decided to use a more conservative alpha of $p < = 0.001$ which would not be so conservative that it would make me blind to actual significances.

Methods for Interview Phase

The purpose of conducting interviews was to answer my sixth research question and speak to results found in retention and survey data. I investigated what assisted some ELLs in persisting to ESL program completion or graduation as well as what other ELLs attribute to their departure from college. I will show student construction of what they have perceived as challenges in their learning trajectories at the college and what they have done to overcome those challenges. Some questions were also derived from retention results and from responses to the survey. The sections that follow will explain the participants, interview instrument, and data analyses used for this phase of the study. The procedures used are interwoven throughout each section where applicable, as suggested by Dornyei (2007).

Participants

In the fall of 2008, I began selecting interviewees by soliciting volunteers from four categories: (a) students who completed the ESL Program in the past year; (b) students who began in ESL courses and graduated from the college with a degree or certificate within the past five years or longer if they had been in the retention data sample; (c) students who stopped attending the college short of completing the ESL program; and (d) students who dropped out of college before attaining a degree. My

sampling procedures modeled stratified random sampling. Specifically, the goal was to develop an initial list of ELLs who fit the criteria above from the four groups, and send out twenty (20) invitations to a random sample from each group, aiming to have an equal number of interviews, approximately ten (10), from each group. When responses came in, I issued more invitations to populations that were not fully represented. To each contact I sent invitation letters to come on specific dates, and followed up with phone calls and emails (see Appendix E).

Specifically, I started selecting participants who fit the category of recent program completer by contacting all students who completed ESL IV in the fall of 2008, and then spring of 2008, and who were also enrolled the following semester. For the remaining three categories, I began developing a list from the retention sample. When there were more than 20 in a given category, I contacted a random sample by flipping a coin to start with first or second on the list and selecting every other name on the list. When local addresses were not available or students could not come in for an interview, I contacted the rest of the cohorts from each category. Only four from the cohort participated in interviews: two who dropped out of college, Diana and Ruth, and two who graduated, Takuji and Margarita.

After the cohort sample did not yield any more participants, I used other files from which to draw. For graduates, I started with recent graduates, contacting all those who graduated in 2008, then 2007, and finally 2006. For students who dropped out before or after attending the ESL program, I also started with most recent semesters and moved backwards. The category that was the most difficult to fill with enough participants was

on those who dropped out of the ESL program which will be discussed more in the

section on limitations for the interview phase.

Table 4.8

Interview Participants and Characteristics

Participants & categories	Sex	Age, US arrival	Trad. or Nontrad.	Age in interview	Resident (Y/N)	Country of origin	Grade average
Drop ESL							
Mary	F	15	T	22	Y	Dom. Rep.	A-
Sophia	F	50	N	58	Y	Ukraine	B-
Harjinder	F	30	N	34	Y	India	A
Drop after ESL							
Clarissa	F	50	N	58	Y	Brazil	B-
Donna	F	18	T	26	Y	Haiti	C-
Ruth	F	16	T	24	Y	Guatemala	A-
Judith	F	28	N	43	Y	Colombia	B
Nicole	F	17	T	22	Y	Dom.Rep.	C
Diana	F	32	N	44	Y	Dom. Rep.	B
Skip ESL							
Genoveve	F	18	T	19	N	Austria	A
Tommy	M	24	Y	24	N	S. Korea	B+
Lat Transfer							
Hai	M	19	T	19	N	Vietnam	F
Trans, no grad							
Ahmed	M	20	T	24	N	Yemen	B+
Abdullah	M	25	N	29	N	Yemen	B
Complete ESL							
Ilhan	F	41	N	46	Y	Turkey	A-
Christie	F	15*	T	20	N	S. Korea	C+
Adriana	F	23	N	42	Y	Colombia	B+
Mike	M	15	T	20	Y	China	B
Fauzia	F	15	N	31	Y	Afghan.	B
Luz	F	26	N	27	N	Peru	B
Graduated							
Margarita	F	17	T	23	Y	Colombia	B
Aylin	F	31	N	49	Y	Turkey	A-
Ana	F	19	T	23	N	Japan	A
Jasmyn	F	25	N	45	Y	Egypt	A-
Thanh	M	14	T	30	Y	Vietnam	C+
Kyoko	F	20	T/N	39	N/Y	Japan	B+
Grad/trans							
Takuji	M	19	T	27	N	Japan	C
Hope	F	17	T	21	N	Thailand	A-

Note: *Christie attended first two years in Canada.

Ultimately, I interviewed a total of twenty-eight (N = 28) ELLs and former ELLs

who did not fit precisely into my original four categories. The eight categories that

describe them best are as follows: drop out before completing ESL (n = 3), drop out after

completing ESL (n = 6), do not complete (skip) ESL but remain enrolled (n = 2), lateral

transfer (transfer to another community college before finishing ESL) (n = 1), transfer to

a four-year institution without graduating from EPCC (n = 2), finish ESL and remain

enrolled (n = 6), graduate from EPCC (n = 6), graduate from EPCC and then transfer to

four-year institution (n = 2). The relevance of these categories to issues in retention will

be explained in the analyses section below. All interviews took place between December

16, 2008 and March 5, 2009. When students arrived, I asked each volunteer to fill out an

informed consent form (Appendices F and G) and a biographical form adapted from

CCSSE's website (Appendix A and B), to insure that I would get various perspectives.

Demographics of the participants are shown in Table 4.8. When writing up the results,

students' pseudonym, country of origin, and age during the interview are given.

I discovered during one interview that although Clarissa was a first time freshmen

in EPCC's database for student records, she was in fact not which I discovered during the

interview that she had attended college in her country during the interview. This raises an

issue about the retention data in chapter 5, that there may be others who omit putting that

they went to college on EPCC's application. I included her data since she represents the

potentially small proportion of students in FF retention data who are in fact not FF.

At this time I would like to comment on some ethical issues regarding my role in

this data collection with the participants. My role is more than just a researcher at this

college. Each of the students I contacted started in the ESL Program where I have been

their advisor. While I may not be the current advisor for many of them at the time of the

interview, I acknowledge my power in this advisor/advisee relationship as a potential

factor in the interviews. Many students see me as a confidant, someone with whom they

can share any of their feelings, while others may see me as someone who had some control over the direction they took in their studies which may inhibit how freely they contribute. It is also possible that out of respect students might not want to complain, or they might not want to reveal how much they struggled on their academic journey. On the other hand, these inhibiting factors may be outweighed by the fact that I have established a rapport with students that may yield more discussion than if they were interviewed by an unfamiliar person. In any case, I took great care to make clear in writing (on the invitation letter and the consent form) and in discussion (in person, on the phone, and in email correspondence) that students were under no obligation to be interviewed by me, that they could withdraw from the interview at any time before, during, or after it, and that their decision would not affect our future interactions.

Limitations

In addition to my role with the participants as having been a potential limitation which I strove to overcome, there is also a limitation regarding the sample itself. As noted above, it was very difficult to find participants who had truly dropped out of the ESL program. Some reasons included students relocating or being occupied with work or health issues. There were only three who dropped out of college before completing the ESL program, so data are lacking in this area. Conversely, some interviewees would appear as students who dropped out in the retention data and will at least be able to speak to what happens to students when they leave ESL which will raise implications about collecting retention data as we will see in the end. Ultimately there were enough data to yield answers to my research questions, while yielding implications to address finding students who had dropped out earlier, perhaps in the form of an exit interview.

Instrument

I created two interview protocols, one for students who left the ESL program or the college, and one for those who completed the program or graduated. The protocols are found in Appendix C and D. I piloted two earlier versions of the protocols to see if they were flexible enough, yielded enough of the data I was looking for that could address the issues raised in chapters 5 and 6 on retention and the survey analyses, respectively, and if there were any extraneous questions I could omit. Even though there were two different protocols, I made the questions correspond to each other. For example, for the protocol for students who completed ESL or graduated, I asked if the student was planning to go on to get a degree or certificate and if he or she was not, I included questions from the other protocol about why they would not go on. Likewise, for the protocol for students who dropped out, when asking a student who did not graduate, I included questions from the other protocol about their completion of the ESL Program. This made the protocols parallel and assisted me in not viewing learners as representing simply one category.

As one can see I used statistical information from the retention data as a stimulus (Dornyei, 2007), at the beginning for students who completed and a little later for those who dropped out. The questions were derived from the literature in chapter 2 and from the retention and engagement data I had analyzed. For example, I asked about their initial goals since that was unknown on retention data and CCSSE could not capture it for those only in ESL since it was given in content courses. I also asked about their experience with remediation since many had indicated taking remedial courses in the survey. Asking about challenges was derived from Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997), who

had interviewed students who passed courses with high attrition rates. But additional questions asked more about how students were able to be successful so as not to represent them only as struggling. It was also important to capture not only their interactions but their impressions of how individuals at the college interacted with them to get at the reciprocity of those interactions as Harklau (2000) and Chang (2005) indicated which was discussed in the literature review in chapter 2. The last thirteen questions on each protocol were identical and asked about engagement as derived from the survey. I included a question asking directly about language to see if any aspect of being a language learner could be a determining factor between matched groups from ELL and non-ELL comparisons in the retention and survey data. I tape recorded and transcribed each interview. Following the advice of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), I represented student speech in standard written form in order to make their experiences accessible to readers and since the conventions of linguistic analyses would not be relevant for this exploratory study.

Interview Analysis

I used thematic analysis on the transcripts of the interviews. I began with *pre-coding* to get an overall feel for the data while taking memos before getting lost in the details during the coding process (Dornyei, 2007). I then conducted *initial coding* where I began labeling thematic units that were relevant to my questions. For example, Ahmed responds to my question about resources that would help students overcome the language challenge in the beginning level of ESL by saying, "I had some ESL teachers who used to tell me not to use the [bilingual] dictionary." I labeled this segment as "perceiving lack of support from teacher; L1 resource perceived as helpful." I also coded outliers or

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metalinguistic talk that was not related to my inquiry. For example, when Adriana asks "Can you repeat the question?" I labeled the segment as metalinguistic and did not include it in my code retrieval. I continued taking data notes, recording relationships and contextual information that gave meaning to codes. I coded until I reached "saturation" where no new information was found.

Next, I compiled the codes into a word processing document in various categories, often relating to the research questions, and color coded the codes for the eight retention groups. I then conducted *second level coding*, assigning broader categories such as those of engagement, some of which were predetermined from CCSSE (active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners), and reasons for leaving (lack of finances, work, and family obligations). I also noted levels of intensity of a code with "+/-," especially for academic challenge where difficulty from a lot of writing had one "+ academic challenge with writing" but not being able to write a final paper that led to course withdrawal as "++ academic challenge with writing." I also conducted searches for category items within the codes to insure I did not omit work from another category so I did not miss another relationship. For example, I had originally had a category for "advice" and "overcoming language" but found when sub-categorizing that they related to benchmark categories. I also reexamined my memos to make sure I did not omit broad meanings and interpretations I had initially made.

During the write up phase, sections were organized around dominant themes and explored by comparing findings from the eight categories of retention. Regarding the two categories that represent dropout, "drop out before completing ESL" and "drop out after

completing ESL," there would be direct program and college implications while exploring their struggles in college and their causes to leave college. Then while the categories of "do not complete ESL program but remain enrolled," "lateral transfer," and "transfer to a four-year institution without graduating from EPCC" mark continued student success in remaining enrolled, there would be some implications for student choices to leave ESL or EPCC before completing the program or degree. Then "completed ESL and remained enrolled," "graduated," and "graduated and transferred to a four-year institution" would represent three levels of success for students, yielding implications for fostering success for other students. On occasion I looked at participants within a category and divided by the nine (n = 9) who dropped out compared to the nineteen (n = 19) who persisted or graduated to get a sense whether a certain theme seemed to affect dropout. Some findings can speak to retention data *as* data showing the complexity that what is represented in quantitative measures is not always the case. For example, some students who appeared to have dropped out in the data have actually transferred. At times I infused my experience as a professional assistant at the college with them, not to exploit my insider's position but to explain or confirm with my perspective on what they had shared with me to assist in the interpretation. I conclude the analyses by connecting findings to the retention data, CCSR data, and the greater literature.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION FOR RETENTION DATA

In this chapter, I will present the results from my analyses of the retention data to answer my first three research questions:

1. What are the retention patterns of students who begin college by taking ESL courses, in terms of persistence, ESL program completion, graduation, and grade point average (GPA)?

2. How do persistence, program completion, graduation and GPAs vary among students who start in different levels and have different demographic characteristics?

3. Are there any differences in persistence, degree completion, and GPA between ELL and non-ELL students at a community college? If so, what are they?

The incongruity that was found between ELL high academic performance and low completion rates was first detected when analyzing student transcripts. As noted in the introduction to this study in chapter 1, when ELLs are enrolled they tend to perform academically well in terms of GPAs, with the exceptions of nontraditionally aged students and Hispanic residents in the first semester. Yet their graduation rates are significantly lower than the college as a whole and lower than national averages. We find in other parts of the study that while ELLs tend to be quite engaged in seeking support from the college, they attribute their dropping out to three main obstacles of lack of finances, work, and family obligations. However, there are implicit obstacles of linguistic challenges, ELL status at the college, and not knowing how to navigate the US college system that compound the main obstacles. Therefore, ELLs may be engaged enough to

do well in their courses, but some not enough to overcome challenges and complete their academic goals due to the implicit obstacles.

For the results that follow, as mentioned in the methods section, I used descriptive and inferential statistics to see how ELLS, demographic groups within ELLs, and ELLs compared to non-ELLs earn GPAs, persist, graduate, and complete ESL (ELLS only for the latter). Specifically, 37% of ELLs complete the ESL program, 13% graduate, and 30% persist for about one additional fall semester. On the other hand, GPA averages are above the required 2.00 to graduate and are significantly higher than a matching sample of non-ELLs. Among ELLs, age seems to be the most inhibiting factor of all of the variables, as nontraditionally aged students had lower first semester GPAs, persist for fewer semesters, and are almost four times less likely to graduate than their counterparts. In addition, ELLs who begin in lower levels of the ESL program are five times less likely to complete it, and Hispanic residents have significantly lower first semester GPAs. ELLs who graduate also persisted for more semesters and had higher GPAs than those who do not, implying that perseverance and academic performance are certainly at play for successfully graduating. What follows is the detailed presentation of the results and discussions about them.

Results for ELLs

Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the whole group of ELLs were used to answer the first research question, as shown in Table 5.1.

As one can see in Table 5.1, GPAs are fairly high but completion and persistence rates are quite low. GPA means are well above 2.00 which is the minimum required for

graduation. However, there is also a standard deviation of at least one point indicating a high degree of variance. Looking at ELL GPA means, it appears the final fall GPA is only slightly lower than the first fall GPA, yet a paired t test showed the two GPAs were significantly different, $t(160) = 2.61$, $p = 0.01$. Therefore, I looked at grade distributions of ESL courses compared to the college as a whole and found that higher grades are issued in ESL courses (3.16 average equal to about a B+) than the college as a whole (2.73 average equal to about a B-). Note these averages are for all students and not just first-time freshmen (FF). Comparing first fall GPAs between groups of ELLs will prove useful for seeking achievement gaps. However, when comparing ELLs to nonELLs, this disparity in grade distribution will be noted when interpreting the GPA results. I also found for final fall GPA that a majority of ELLs (86%) earned at least a 2.00 and that almost half (49%) had 3.00 and higher.

Table 5.1
Descriptive statistics for ELLs as a group

ELLs	Completed ESL	Graduated	1st Fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Last fall GPA *M*	*SD*	*M* Falls enrolled	*SD*
161	60 (37%)	21 (13%)	2.86	1.14	2.75	1.03	1.13	1.25

Program completion rate is 37% and graduation 13% (Table 5.1). In addition, a cross tabulation of graduates and program completers revealed that there were an additional 10 students who started in ESL, did not finish the ESL program, but still graduated, indicating that they tested out of ESL and went on to take other college courses and graduate. With this finding taken into consideration, there were then 69

(43%) students who started in ESL and successfully either passed the program *or* simply went on with their studies and graduated. Additionally, with regard to the graduation rate, there are 18 students who were currently enrolled at the time of analysis (fall 2008) and still have the potential to graduate.

Also in Table 5.1, the mean for the number of falls enrolled is 1.13 (1.25) which implies that ELLs enroll an average of just over one subsequent fall semester. Note that the standard deviation for the number of falls enrolled is actually higher than the mean, which shows there is a high degree of variance in ELL enrollment. For an alternative representation of persistence, see how it is broken down in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

ELL Persistence, stop-out, and dropout rates

Enrolled	One Fall	Two falls	Three Falls	Four Falls	Five Falls	Fall 2008
Fall 2001, *n* = 54	19 (35%)	9 (17%)	5 (9%)	3 (6%)	0	6 (11%)
Fall 2002, *n* = 33	13 (40%)	5 (15%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	3 (9%)
Fall 2003, *n* = 38	7 (18%)	2 (5%)	6 (16%)	2 (5%)	--	8 (21%)
Fall 2004, *n* = 36	9 (25%)	5 (14%)	6 (17%)	--	--	5 (14%)

Note. Dashes represent unknown data

Although Table 5.2 does not indicate stopped enrollments due to graduation, we can make a comparison to graduation rates in Table 5.3. For example, even though only 6% of fall 2001 students enroll four subsequent falls, 11% are still enrolled and 22% have graduated by fall of 2008. That means 36 (67%) are not accounted for. One can also get a sense of stop-outs from Table 5.2; for example, of the fall 2001 group, no student attended five falls, but in 2008 there are 6 students enrolled which means those six did not enroll in at least three different fall semesters. Regardless of stop-out rates, however, I found that 40% enrolled for only one fall. It is uncertain if any of those students enrolled for any spring semesters.

Table 5.3

ELL cumulative graduation rates from first fall to last fall

	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Fall 2008
Fall 2001, $n = 54$	3 (6%)	9 (17%)	10 (19%)	12 (22%)	12 (22%)	12 (22%)
Fall 2002, $n = 33$	--	1 (3%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	4 (12%)
Fall 2003, $n = 38$	--	--	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)
Fall 2004, $n = 36$	--	--	--	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	3 (8%)

Note. Dashes represent no numbers.

Comparing Graduates and Nongraduates

I compared graduates and nongraduates to determine whether there were differences in first and final fall GPAs and number of falls enrolled between them. As one can see in Table 5.4, students who graduate on the whole have higher GPAs than those who do not graduate. Graduates are also enrolled for more subsequent fall semesters. Standard deviations indicate a high degree of variance for each variable, especially for nongraduates.

Table 5.4

Comparison of GPA and enrollment between ELL Graduates and Nongraduates

	First fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Last fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Number of falls *M*	*SD*
Graduated ($n = 21$)	3.43*	.59	3.12*	.59	2.38*	.92
Did not graduate ($n = 140$)	2.77	1.18	2.69	1.07	0.94	1.19

Note. *Significantly higher at $p < 0.05$

More specifically, after using independent *t* tests, graduates have significantly higher first fall GPAs $t (47.61) = 4.04$, $p < 0.001$, with a large effect size, $d = 1.2$, higher final fall GPAs, $t (43.28) = 3.04$, $p = 0.004$, with a large effect size, $d = 0.9$, and higher number of subsequent fall semesters enrolled, $t (30.92) = 6.41$, $p < 0.001$, with a large effect size, $d = 2.3$.

Discussion of ELL Findings

The previous section of results answered my first research question by showing ELLs' overall GPAs, number of falls enrolled, ESL program completion rate, and graduation rate. In some cases they outperformed ELLs in Belcher's (1988) report, while in other cases they underperformed when compared to national averages of all community college students, as summarized below.

First, with regard to persistence, the mean for subsequent falls enrolled of 1.13 (1.25) would not give much time for ELLs to complete the ESL program and graduate. However, there is no previous research on ELLs in this area for a comparison. The seemingly high number of stop-outs is a community college phenomenon (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) since students are free to enter, leave, and reenter in most programs with the exception of programs with competitive admission such as nursing as noted in the context of the study in chapter 1. There is surprisingly little research that captures this occurrence as well. But trends of persistence have been recorded showing that 16% of community college students depart from college in their first year (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008). I had found 40% who enrolled for only one fall, one of whom actually returned in the fall of 2008. Although this appears to be a very high number, it may be skewed since spring enrollments were not included in the data.

The ELL graduation rate of 13% is significantly lower than EPCC's rate of 23%, X^2 (1) = 9.1, p = 0.011, as well as below the national average of graduation in all community colleges of 25% (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008). However, graduation rates of ELLs are higher compared to Belcher's (1988) report on ELLs at a community college where only 7% graduated. ELL program completion of 37% is also

higher than that found in Belcher (1988) where only 16% finished the ESL program. Despite the fact that ELLs at EPCC completed the program and graduated higher than Belcher's group, where it was noted that the program was in need of revamping its curriculum, the numbers at EPCC are low enough to warrant further investigation of the causes for leaving the college.

I also found that graduates' GPAs were significantly higher than nongraduates, suggesting that at least some students left college while not performing as well as those who persisted through to graduation. The finding that graduates' number of falls enrolled were significantly higher than nongraduates may not be surprising initially. However, without this information, some may wonder whether students have a certain amount of time that they can invest in completing a college degree but that taking additional ESL courses prolong that amount making them run out of time. The finding here suggests, on the contrary, that students who dropped out left college much earlier than graduates, perhaps by transferring, accomplishing a shorter term goal such as finishing ESL, investing their time elsewhere, or giving up. However, as we will see in later chapters, the goal of most of the ELLs who took the survey and were interviewed was at the very least to graduate from EPCC.

It is also compelling that while ESL courses yield higher grade averages than the college as a whole, graduates earn higher final GPAs somewhat unexpectedly since they most likely took more content courses than nongraduates, again indicating that higher academic performance is concomitant with graduation. The large standard deviations of the nongraduates show the large variation in their GPAs and suggest that not all ELLs who left did so because they were not doing well. It is possible most of these students

left for the same reasons as the ELLs in the interviews and survey which showed three main reasons for ELLs to leave: lack of finances, full time employment, and family obligations; other difficulties may be related to linguistic challenges or lack of knowledge about the college system.

As for overall GPA performance, ELLs had higher GPAs in their first semester than the final fall semester they were enrolled. The difference in grade distribution averages between ESL courses and all courses may account for the difference in first fall GPA and last fall GPA although reasons for this disparity are unknown. One of the participants in Leki's (2007) study, Ben, earned lower grades with each semester he persisted due to the academic challenges he faced. Despite the lower final fall GPA, many ELLs' final fall GPAs are high enough to achieve certain outcomes. For example, a large majority (76%) had GPAs above a 2.00 (equivalent to a "C" letter grade) which is the minimum required for graduation, where Belcher (1988) had found only 56% of ELLs (which was incidentally not far below the non-ELLs at 59%) above a 2.00. In addition, almost half (49%) of the ELLs in this study had a 3.00 (equivalent to a "B" letter grade) which is often required for transfer to four-year institutions. Still, the standard deviation for GPA is equivalent to at least one whole letter grade which shows that GPAs vary considerably among ELLs. These GPA findings diverge from survey results where all ELLs had high GPA's, but parallels findings in interviews where students dropped out due to outside factors both while some were doing well and others not as well when facing those obstacles. When academic achievement is explored further on survey and in interviews, it seems at times too hard as reported on survey, and linguistic challenges is often a factor in difficulty as reported in interviews.

Although some findings here show ELLs' retention patterns to be better than those found in Belcher (1988), numbers are low enough to warrant further exploration. In the next section, comparisons within the ELL group are made, some of which will explain the variances in GPA and enrollment means.

Results among ELL Groups by Characteristic

This section reports on the descriptive and inferential statistics used to answer my second research question, beginning with results from descriptive statistics, followed by inferential statistics, and concluding with a discussion of within-group comparisons among ELLs.

Descriptive Comparisons

Descriptive statistics on GPA, persistence, program completion, and graduation by level of entry into the ESL program are shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Descriptive statistics by level when entering ESL program

Beginning Level	n (%)	Completed ESL	Grad.	1st fall GPA M	SD	Last fall GPA M	SD	M Falls enrolled	SD
1	38 (24%)	7 (18%)	3 (8%)	2.68	1.08	2.52	0.97	1.16	1.31
2	69 (43%)	18 (26%)	6 (9%)	2.81	1.22	2.73	1.11	1.04	1.27
3	43 (27%)	25 (58%)	9 (21%)	3.03	1.03	2.96	0.91	1.16	1.17
4	11 (7%)	10 (91%)	3 (27%)	3.05	1.24	2.86	1.11	1.45	1.37

Note: Percents in first column are out of all ELLs; Percents in second and third columns are out of that particular demographic category

ELLs who began in the two lower levels have lower frequencies in completing the ESL program and graduating, and lower means for enrolling in subsequent fall semesters than ELLs who began in higher levels. Also, as with the findings on the whole group, GPA

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went down from the first fall to the final fall enrollment for every level. Again, the standard deviations for all of the levels suggest a high degree of variance, which will be addressed by inferential statistics shortly.

Descriptive statistics on GPA, persistence, program completion, and graduation by demographic characteristics are shown in Table 5.6. As one can see, women exceeded men in completing the ESL program and in their first and last fall GPAs, but then graduated at a slightly lower rate even though they enrolled for a slightly higher average of fall semesters. Traditionally aged students did better overall (in terms of program completion, graduation, first and final GPA, and falls enrolled) than nontraditionally students, as did students who are full time over part time, Pell grant eligible over ineligible, and nonresidents over residents (except for program completion where nonresidents and residents had the same rate). Some of these figures may not be surprising considering previous literature where part time students (Tinto, 1993), nontraditionally aged students (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008), and students who begin in lower levels of ESL (Belcher, 1988) would be at a disadvantage. However, one might think Pell eligible students would not do as well due to having low SES. As noted in the methods section, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) asserted that eligibility is not always a precise predictor of college success since on the one hand it may aid in retention by granting access to college while on the other eligible students may be less academically prepared. In this case, the eligibility at EPCC seems ultimately to aid access by giving financial stability, which coincides with the results in survey and in interviews where not qualifying was one of the three major obstacles to enrollment.

Table 5.6.

Descriptive statistics of ELLs by their characteristics

Variable	*n* (%)	Completed ESL	Graduated	1st Fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Last fall GPA *M*	*SD*	*M* Falls enrolled	*SD*
Age 18-24	72 (45%)	36 (50%)	16 (22%)	3.12	0.87	2.93	0.81	1.40	1.27
Age 25+	89 (55%)	24 (27%)	5 (6%)	2.64	1.28	2.60	1.16	0.91	1.19
Full time	31 (19%)	17 (55%)	9 (29%)	3.01	1.08	2.91	0.94	1.48	1.18
Part time	130 (81%)	43 (33%)	12 (9%)	2.82	1.15	2.71	1.05	1.05	1.26
Non-resident	43 (27%)	16 (37%)	12 (28%)	3.17	0.80	2.99	0.82	1.19	1.16
Resident	118 (73%)	44 (37%)	9 (8%)	2.74	1.22	2.66	1.08	1.11	1.29
Men	57 (35%)	17 (29%)	9 (16%)	2.60	1.21	2.61	1.10	1.11	1.24
Women	104 (64%)	43 (41%)	12 (12%)	2.97	1.09	2.82	0.98	1.14	1.27
Pell	34 (21%)	16 (47%)	7 (20%)	2.95	1.12	2.78	0.95	1.50	1.30
No Pell	127 (79%)	44 (35%)	14 (11%)	2.83	1.15	2.74	1.05	1.03	1.23

Note: Percents in first column are out of all ELLs; Percents in second and third columns are out of that particular demographic category

Descriptive statistics on GPA, persistence, program completion, and graduation by race/ethnicity are shown in Table 5.7. Asian, White, and Hispanic students represent the largest groups showing Asian students with highest GPAs, enrolling the most falls but graduating the least. It is not certain why this is true. The Asian students in interviews performed well and dropped out for the same reasons as the rest of the group, so Asians in this data may simply be encountering more of the external factors, but little was learned about this finding in the present study. Hispanic students' GPAs were lower than White and Asian students but they completed the ESL program the most, and White students enrolled in the fewest falls, completed the ESL program the least, but graduated the most.

Table 5.7

Demographics by categories of race, residents only (N = 118)

Race	n (%)	Cmplt. ESL	Graduated	1st Fall GPA M	SD	Last fall GPA M	SD	M Falls enrolled	SD
Hispanic	50 (31%)	21 (42%)	4 (8%)	2.50	1.23	2.55	1.02	1.18	1.34
White	42 (26%)	14 (33%)	4 (10%)	2.91	1.18	2.64	1.12	1.05	1.10
Asian	16 (10%)	6 (38%)	1 (6%)	3.11	1.10	2.98	1.05	1.56	1.71
Black	1 (1%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	3.70	--	3.70	--	0.00	--
Unknown	9 (6%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2.56	1.50	2.67	1.35	0.33	0.50

Note. Dashes used when information is not applicable.

Significant Findings

As noted in the methods section in chapter 4, I collapsed the first two levels into a low level and the last two into a high level, compared Hispanic residents to all others, and used the traditional and nontraditional age distinction to prepare for tests of significance. Refer to Table 5.8 for a review of the descriptive statistics of these six categories after they were collapsed for the regressions.

Table 5.8

Descriptive Statistics on subgroups by age, ethnicity, and ESL level

Group	n (%)	Cmplt. ESL	Grad	1st Fall GPA M	SD	Last fall GPA M	SD	M Falls enrolled	SD
Age 25+	89 (55%)	24 (27%)	5 (6%)	2.64	1.28	2.60	1.16	0.91	1.19
Age 18-24	72 (45%)	36 (50%)	16(22%)	3.12	0.87	2.93	0.81	1.40	1.27
Group	n (%)	Cmplt. ESL	Grad	1st Fall GPA M	SD	Last fall GPA M	SD	M Falls enrolled	SD
HI Res.	50 (31%)	21 (42%)	4 (8%)	2.50	1.23	2.55	1.02	1.18	1.34
Others	111(69%)	39 (35%)	17(15%)	3.02	1.06	2.84	1.02	1.11	1.22
Levels 1-2	107 (66%)	25 (23%)	9 (8%)	2.77	1.17	2.65	1.06	1.08	1.28
Levels 3-4	54 (34%)	35 (65%)	12 (22%)	3.04	1.06	2.94	0.94	1.22	1.21

GPAs and enrollment.

Linear regressions were used to compare the first and final fall GPAs and number of falls enrolled among ELLs by age, ethnicity, and level. Based on descriptive findings (see Table 5.8), preliminary analyses, and previous literature, I hypothesized that Hispanic US residents, nontraditionally-aged students, and students who start in lower levels of ESL would have significantly lower GPAs and number falls enrolled than their counterparts.

The first linear regression was used for first fall GPA. The variables of ethnicity, age, and level accounted for only 8% of the variance in GPA, implying that there are unknown variables that account for the variance. The results can be seen in Table 5.9. Only age and ethnicity were significant ($p < 0.03$ and $p < 0.01$ respectively), but ethnicity (B = -0.47) had more of an effect than age (B = -0.39). In other words, when controlling for age and ESL level of entry, Hispanic residents would score 0.5 or half a grade point lower than their counterparts (i.e. non-Hispanic residents, traditionally aged students, and students who began in higher level of ESL). No significant findings were found in the second linear regression on the final fall GPA.

The third linear regression, also represented in Table 5.9, was performed on number of falls enrolled, again on the same categories. Taking level and ethnicity into consideration, nontraditionally aged students enroll significantly less in the college fall semesters by about 0.50 of a subsequent fall, or an additional semester or half of a year less than their counterparts who average 1.40 subsequent falls enrolled. However, these findings account for only 4% of the variance in number of falls enrolled.

Table 5.9

Linear regression results on GPAs and enrollment by three characteristics

Dependent variable	R^2	Independent variable	B	SE B	*B*
First fall GPA	0.08	Age (nontrad. = 1, trad. = 0)	-0.39*	0.18	-0.17
		Ethnicity (HR = 1, others = 0)	-0.47*	0.19	-0.19
		Level (low = 1, high = 0)	-0.14	0.19	-0.59
Final fall GPA	0.05	Age	-0.24	0.17	-0.12
		Ethnicity	-0.25	0.17	-0.11
		Level	-0.21	0.18	-0.10
Falls enrolled	0.04	Age	-0.51*	0.21	-0.20
		Ethnicity	0.14	0.21	0.05
		Level	0.01	0.22	0.01

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Program completion and graduation.

Next, I used logistic regressions for program completion and graduation. I continued to use age (traditional and non-traditional), race (Hispanic US residents compared to everyone else) and level (high and low), this time to see which variables are factors in program completion and graduation.

For program completion, based on previous literature as referred to in the methods chapter (chapter 4), I hypothesized that students who start college at lower levels of ESL, non-traditionally aged students, and Hispanic students would be less likely to complete the ESL program, with the null hypothesis being that students with the six characteristics would have equal odds in completing the ESL Program. The dependent variable of "program non-completion" was coded as a "0" for students who completed (*n* = 60) and "1" for students who did not complete (*n* = 101). The goodness of fit (-2LL) was 181.852 and the Nagelkerke R square was 0.237. The likelihood ratio statistic had a

probability less than 0.001 which indicated that at least one of the population coefficients

differed from zero, and thus the null hypothesis was rejected. Looking at Table 5.10, it

appears that students who begin in the two lower levels are 5 times less likely to complete

the ESL Program as students who begin in the two higher levels. It might be expected

that a student who begins in level 4 has a greater chance than one who started in level I,

but that lower levels are 5 times less likely to finish seems to be an outstanding difference.

Table 5.10

Logistic regression results for ESL program non-completion

Variable	B	SE	p	exp (B)
Age (nontrad. = 1, trad. = 0)	0.695	0.373	0.062	2.003
Ethnicity (HR = 1, others = 0)	-0.490	0.394	0.214	0.613
Level (low = 1, high = 0)	1.657	0.379	0.000*	5.244

Note. *Significant at $p < 0.05$

I conducted a second logistic regression for graduation. I hypothesized that ELL

students who start college at low levels of ESL, non-traditionally aged ELL students, and

Hispanic students would be less likely to graduate than their counterparts, with the null

hypothesis being that students with these characteristics have equal odds in graduating.

The dependent variable "non-graduation" was coded as a "0" for students who graduated

($n = 21$) and "1" for students who did not graduate ($n = 140$). The goodness of fit (-2LL)

was 111.015 and the Nagelkerke R square was 0.151. The likelihood ratio statistic had a

probability less than 0.003 indicating that at least one of the population coefficients

differs from zero, and thus the null hypothesis was rejected. Looking at Table 5.11, it

appears that students who are nontraditionally aged are 3.7 times less likely to graduate

than traditionally aged students, even when taking student beginning ESL level into

account. This could be interpreted to mean that nontraditionally aged ELLs tend to make it out of the program but not to graduate. In interviews, both groups encounter difficulties related to learning language when in the ESL program but that it would become easier over time. Older learners, however, would still have to overcome the other factors of full time employment and family obligations which they seemed to encounter more than traditionally aged ELLs in the interviews.

Table 5.11

Logistic regression results for non-graduation

Variable	B	SE	*p*	exp (B)
Age (nontrad. = 1, trad. = 0)	1.319	0.558	0.018*	3.739
Ethnicity (HR = 1, others = 0)	0.654	0.608	0.281	1.924
Level (low = 1, high = 0)	0.833	0.502	0.097	2.3

Note. *Significant at $p < 0.05$

Discussion of ELLs by Characteristic

Although Hispanic residents start out with lower GPAs it does not seem to be enough to make them drop out significantly more than other ELLs. And while Hispanic students do not have as good odds in the literature, the Hispanic ELLs in this study seemed to get through college as well as other ELLs. Students who begin ESL at higher levels do not significantly outperform lower levels in terms of GPA, but the lower levels certainly do not complete the program as easily as those who start in higher levels. But of even more concern is nontraditionally aged students who have lower GPAs, the fewest falls enrolled, and the lowest rates of graduation. In the survey, this group had significantly less interaction with faculty and staff, and in interviews some students found ESL courses more difficult than their content courses attributing it to learning language at an older age.

Results Between ELLs and Non-ELLs

In order to answer my third research question, I compared the GPAs, persistence, and graduation between ELL and non-ELL samples from the fall 2001-2004 cohorts which matched in race/ethnicity, age, and enrollment status.

First I used descriptive statistics on the matched samples comparing the frequencies of graduations and the means of the first fall GPA, last fall GPA, and number of fall semesters enrolled (see Table 5.12). The first and final GPAs for ELLs are higher than for non-ELLs, and ELLs enroll for more fall semesters than non-ELLs. However, first fall GPAs are expected to be higher since ESL courses have higher grade distributions.

The graduation rates seem similar to each other but ELLs' rate is slightly lower. I compared these findings to the whole group of non-ELLs ($n = 6968$). First I found that their first fall GPA mean was 2.15 (1.31) and final fall GPA mean was 2.15 (1.27), both of which are slightly lower than the matched sample of non-ELLs. I also found that their graduation rate was 23% of all non-ELLs graduated by Fall 2008 which seems quite a bit higher than for both matched samples. Finally I found that their average number of falls enrolled was 1.10 (1.17) which is higher than both matching groups.

Table 5.12

Results for matching ELLs and non-ELLs

Matching groups	Grad	First Fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Final Fall GPA *M*	*SD*	Falls enrolled	*SD*
ELL (*n* =139)	16 (12%)	2.82*	1.16	2.72*	1.04	1.13	1.25
Non-ELL (*n* = 139)	20 (14%)	2.26	1.45	2.32	1.37	0.86	1.24

Note. *significantly higher at $p < 0.05$

To begin inferential statistics, I conducted *t* tests to see whether there were differences between matched ELLs and non-ELLs in the first fall GPAs, last fall GPAs,

and number of falls enrolled. ELLs had significantly higher GPAs in the first fall semester, t (263.02) = 3.56, $p < 0.001$, but with a medium effect size ($d = 0.4$), and significantly higher GPAs in the last fall semester, t (256.87) = 2.76, $p = 0.006$, also with a medium effect size ($d = 0.3$). Variances were not equal between these two groups. The number of falls enrolled was not found to be significantly different between ELLs and non-ELLs. Although one would expect that GPA's would be significantly higher for ELLs in the first semester given that ESL courses have higher grade distributions, the fact that they maintain significantly higher GPAs until the end of their enrollment is an interesting finding.

To compare graduation between the groups, I conducted a logistic regression hypothesizing that ELLs would be less likely to graduate than non-ELLs, since their rate was lower in the descriptive statistics, with a null hypothesis that they would have equal chances of graduating. I coded graduating as "0" and not graduating as "1." The goodness of fit (-2LL) was 213.787 and the Nagelkerke R square was 0.003. The likelihood ratio was 0.474 indicating that the null hypothesis is not rejected. Even though they graduated less often than the non-ELLs in the descriptive statistics, ELLs do not have significantly less of a chance to graduate as one can see in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13

Results for those less likely to graduate, ELLs compared to non-ELLs

Variable	B	SE	p	exp (B)
Language learning status (ELL = 1, non-ELL = 0)	0.256	0.359	0.476	1.292

Discussion of ELL and Non-ELL Comparisons

Overall, ELLs have slightly but significantly higher GPAs, similar average subsequent fall enrollments, and similar graduation rates as the matched sample of non-ELLs. Both matched samples (ELL and non-ELL) are below the national average for graduation rate (25%) and below EPCC's rate for the whole college (23%). Given the findings that both samples match in age, have more nontraditionally aged students in them, and that age was the biggest factor among ELLs, it is possible that age is a factor here as well. However, since the matched ELL and non-ELL samples are controlled for age, the differences between these samples may be related to linguistic challenges or to having been in ESL program. These results could also indicate that students with high risk demographics, also matched in both samples, performed better in the ELL population.

The difference in GPA shows that ELLs earn higher first and final fall GPAs than non-ELLs. Again, it was noted that ESL courses distribute higher grades than the college as a whole, but grade distribution is not necessarily the definitive reason for the difference in GPA here. Differences could also be attributable to other confounding factors not available for analysis in the data such as whether there are generation 1.5 students in either group or whether students have taken remedial education, all of which could be addressed with future research.

General Discussion

In this chapter, we have seen how ELLs perform well but do not complete ESL or academic programs at a high rate. Even though GPAs were generally high enough for graduation and higher than a matching sample of non-ELLs, completion and graduation rates are quite low. Findings were not as dire as those found in Belcher's (1988) study,

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but are below rates for this college and rates of community colleges across the nation. It is particularly concerning when we see that the vast majority ELLs in random samples of surveys and interviews express that they want to at the very least graduate from EPCC with an associate's degree.

One explanation from these data is that there was a high degree of variance in initial findings that are represented among groups within the ELLs. First, graduates had higher GPAs than nongraduates, suggesting that academic preparedness is a factor in not completing. On surveys and in interviews, this was expressed as a reason to leave but by only by a minority of the students who left, 22% on the survey and just two cases in the interviews. Two other groups among the ELLs who also seem to present risk in completing programs are nontraditionally aged ELLs and students who begin college in the lower levels of ESL. ELLs who began in lower levels were five times less likely to complete the ESL program. This finding is consistent with findings by Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, and Thomas-Spiegel (2005). Nontraditionally aged ELLs were of most concern as they had significantly lower first semester GPAs, had significantly fewer falls semesters enrolled, and were almost four times less likely to graduate even when level was taken into account. Crawford Sorey and Harris Duggan (2008) viewed lower persistence and low graduation rates as likely consequences of these learners having to face financial obstacles more than traditionally aged students. The lower GPAs raise an additional concern which may be related to learning a new language as nontraditionally aged ELLs in the interviews talk about the difficulty of learning and perfecting English at an older age. Another group, Hispanic residents, had significantly lower GPAs but showed no significant differences for final fall GPA, persistence, or graduation indicating that this

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group was more successful than Hispanic students in other literature (Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, & Tai, 2001).

However, these differences among the three demographic groups, students who are nontraditionally aged, begin college in lower levels of ESL, and Hispanic residents, does not account for all of the variance found. Interviews and surveys will show most students reporting that the outside factors of lack of finances, full time employment, and family obligations lead to their leaving college. In addition, implicit factors of linguistic difficulties, status of being an ELL, and lack of procedural knowledge about the college processes were deduced as having an impact on engagement and enrollment. In addition, other groups who have high risk may exist but not be represented in these data, such as generation 1.5 students or first generation college students.

It should also be noted that when certain factors are controlled for, ELLs do as well as and sometimes better than the sample of nonELLs matching in age, enrollment status, and race/ethnicity. Specifically, ELLs had significantly higher first and final fall GPAs, but no significant differences in persistence or graduation were found. Nevertheless, both of these matching samples were lower than the college and nation. One explanation could be that the matching samples share high risk factors of being composed of nontraditionally aged learners, part time students, and Hispanic residents. To explain why ELLs performed better, surveys showed ELLs as feeling significantly more support from the college than nonELLs. To explain their dropout, in interviews that support fell short when ELLs were not made aware of U.S. college procedural knowledge that would have assisted some in remaining enrolled. More information would be needed about the greater population of these non-ELLs to explain their high dropout rate.

The survey and interviews, although on different samples of ELLs, will offer more in-depth explanation into why so many ELLs drop out while they are performing well. We turn to the survey results and discussion now.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION FOR SURVEY DATA

In this chapter, I will present the results from my data analyses of CCSSE's survey, "The Community College Student Report" (CCSR) to answer my fourth and fifth research questions:

4. What are the engagement practices of ELLs at the community college, as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

5. Are there differences in engagement practices between ELL and non-ELL students at the community college as indicated on the CCSR survey instrument?

In the present chapter, findings reinforce, add to, and present new questions regarding the findings in the retention data. To parallel the findings in retention data, students report high GPAs while at the same time expressing that they would not be returning in the next academic year. Unlike the retention data, we will see the goals of students where most want to graduate with an associate's degree. We will also see reasons for their departure which we did not know from the retention data since the college does not have a systematic tracking system. The biggest risk factor in leaving college appears to be lack of finances, where most ELLs report not receiving Pell grant. This will shed some light on the retention finding that students without Pell do not perform as well as Pell eligible students. The survey also adds information about ELL engagement which is overall high, like GPAs, and perhaps explains the high GPAs. But it is also mixed among items and will draw causes for concern aside from the risk factors. We also compare ELLs and nonELLs who seem to share risk factors, possibly giving an explanation for why they both graduate at low rate; on the flip side, ELLs are more

engaged in support and tutoring possibly explaining higher GPAs that nonELLs in retention data.

As noted in the methods section in chapter 4, I use descriptive statistics on ELL responses that are related to retention such as GPA, future goals, causes to leave college, and obstacles to engagement or enrollment, and end with a *t* test within ELLs on age to relate to the retention findings on age. I continue using descriptive statistics to present ELL responses to specific benchmark-related items. I then perform *t* tests on benchmarks and specific items between samples of ELLs and non-ELLs that matched by certain demographic characteristics. The ratio of full time to part time students differed from that in the retention data, representing more full time students than are enrolled at the college. Since full time students tend to be more engaged (Astin, 1984; Marti, 2009), results may be skewed given this disparity. Now we turn to the complete results and discussion for the survey data.

<div align="center">**Results for ELL Retention-Related Items**</div>

GPA

As one can see in Table 6.1, all of the ELL survey participants who answered the item on their grade averages (*n* = 44) claimed to have an average grade above a C-. In other words, all reported having a GPA of 2.00 or higher. In addition, 27 (61%) of the students indicated that they had a B average GPA or higher, equivalent to 3.00 or higher.

To see if there was a connection between grades and enrollment patterns, I cross-referenced the items on grades and students' intent to return to the college within the next twelve months. I found that grades were distributed fairly evenly between the two groups,

with six (6) returns and six (6) non-returns below 3.0, and ten (10) returns and eleven

(11) non-returns above 3.0.

Table 6.1

ELL Grade Averages Reported

Grade average	Number of ELLs
A	3
A- to B+	12
B	12
B- to C+	9
C	6
C- or lower	0
Have no GPA yet	1
Pass/fail classes only	1
Total	44

Goals vs. Plans

When asked about their goals for attending this college, 43 (96%) students said

they have a goal to obtain an associate's degree at the college, yet only 17 (38%) had

plans to return within 12 months. When participants were asked to rate five issues as

being very likely, likely, somewhat likely, or not likely to cause them to withdraw from

the college, transfer to four-year college (56%) and lack of finances (51%) were the

biggest reasons for not returning, which were chosen more frequently as likely or very

likely than caring for dependants (36%), working full time (33%), or being academically

unprepared (22%).   Since lack of finances was the highest risk factor of the group, I

looked at whether those students were receiving financial aid and about half of them

(52%) were not. Interestingly, these factors mirror the causes for withdrawal found in

interviews.

Obstacles and Risk Factors

In addition to looking at what students perceive as causes for them to stop attending college, I looked at how they responded to the other obstacles to persistence. Certain risk factors that had separate items on the survey include working for pay, providing care for dependants, commuting to and from class, lack of out-of-college support, and being academically under-prepared.

There were 27 (60%) respondents who work while they take courses at the college. A cross-tabulation on students' employment and enrollment revealed 7 (16%) students reporting that they work more than 30 hours but they enrolled part time, and 8 (18%) students reported that they work between 11 and 30 hours while being enrolled full time. Astin (1985) had asserted that working part time on campus could actually enhance engagement but that more hours off campus would interfere with engagement. If we assume then that working more than 10 hours per week is considered higher risk, these results suggest that about 33% of ELLs show signs of risky work behavior. Unfortunately the category for enrollment does not show how many courses students are taking, so part time could mean being enrolled for one, two, or three courses in a semester.

There were 30 (67%) students who are caring for dependants. Specifically, 5 (14%) students spend more than 30 hours caring for dependents while enrolled part time, while 4 (11%) care for dependants 11-30 hours while enrolled full time, each of these indicating high risk to persistence. Regarding support, however, 89% of the students found family "quite a bit" or "extremely" supportive of them attending this college, and 78% found friends supportive of them attending this college.

Then, 38 students (84%) in this group commute to the college while only 7 students (16%) live on campus. One student claimed to commute to the college over 30 hours a week and be enrolled full time, in addition to three students who commute 11-30 hours per week while being enrolled full time. An additional risk factor is when students are academically unprepared where only 22% of students indicated that this would cause them to drop a class or the college.

Many of these findings also resemble what was found in interviews where most students worked and were distracted by family members yet often reported feeling supported by their jobs and family as well.

Discussion of Retention-related Results

Before exploring ELL student engagement, I looked at results that would directly address issues raised in chapter 5 on the retention data. Students who took the survey reported higher GPAs than those found in the retention data. All indicated a 2.00 or higher, which can be considered one aspect of success as it is the minimum to graduate at EPCC. Additionally, 14 reported a 3.00 or higher GPA which is high enough to transfer to many institutions. In the retention data, although 61% had a 3.00 or higher which is the same percentage as that reported in the survey, there were 15% of the students who had below a 2.00. Aside from the 22% who noted they would not return due to academic underpreparedness, the survey results could not speak to a connection between academic progress and retention since those leaving did not claim to do better or worse than those staying.

There was a caveat in the data set in chapter 5 about whether students wanted a degree or managed to attain their goal of completing the ESL program, since that

information was not available in the college database. In the survey, all but two students

want a degree but less than half are continuing. It is likely that some respondents may not

be returning if they are graduating, but the survey does not ask about this as a cause for

leaving. What is elicited as the biggest cause for leaving is lack of finances. When

comparing to retention data, it was found that students who were receiving financial aid

in the form of a Pell grant were not negatively affected in any outcome (program

completion, graduation, GPAs, or number of falls persisted). Not qualifying for aid could

be a factor for some of the survey participants indicating the lack of finances since half of

those respondents do not receive financial aid. Other explanations could be that students

may have underestimated the cost of college, or students simply wished to invest their

money in other ways, rather than not having enough money. It is likely that students

qualifying for the Pell may have more of a chance to attend college than those with low

SES who do not qualify, even though other factors associated with low SES could be

obstacles such as academic unpreparedness. There may also be some student who would

qualify but face struggles in applying due to lacking the procedural knowledge as implied

by findings in the interviews. Unfortunately neither this survey nor the retention data

have well defined indicators of SES such as knowing household income which has

proven to characterize SES more precisely (Dowd & Melguizo, 2008).

Work did not seem to be much of an obstacle for this group as only 16% work full

time and 33% said they would not return to school to work full time. Almost half of them

(46%) work part time but part time work may not be as risky as observed in interviews

where most graduates had worked part time. The dominating obstacle for this group is

commuting (84%), a finding not atypical for community colleges but risky nonetheless as

Alford (2000) considers any commuting to be an obstacle for students to become engaged on campus. On the contrary, commuting was not discussed as a major obstacle in interviews. The retention-related results suggest that while enrolled, the majority of ELLs perform well academically and that external factors influence dropout. However, as we will see in the engagement results, mixed findings will complicate this view as it will appear ELLs are not as engaged as they could be and are even less engaged than non-ELLs in specific areas.

Results for ELL Benchmarks

Overall, the ELL benchmark scores are above the national means. This is easily visible in the data since the benchmark scores, comprised of an average from survey items in each benchmark, are standardized so that the mean is 50 and the standard deviation 25 for all participating students nationwide ("CCSSE" website"). Out of all the benchmarks, ELLs score highest in "support for learners" and the lowest in "active and collaborative learning" as shown in Table 6.2 where they are ordered from highest to lowest score. Note that results for "support for learners" and "academic challenge" had better reliability alpha scores than the other benchmarks for this sample of ELLs and will be interpreted given this fact in the discussion.

Table 6.2
ELL Benchmark Scores, n = 45

Benchmark	Mean score	SD
Support for learners	65.0	26.7
Student effort	63.2	19.1
Academic challenge	60.2	19.7
Student-faculty interaction	55.7	23.9
Active and collaborative learning	54.4	25.0

Details on all the benchmark items are discussed below to see more specifically how

ELLs and the college engage in activities associated with college persistence. They are

organized starting with highest and lowest benchmarks (support for learners and active

and collaborative learning, respectively) and ending with the remaining three. When

viewing responses to individual items, we see that even though overall scores are higher

than the nation, there are indications of some deficiencies in certain areas.

Support for Learners

Table 6.3 shows the item-by-item breakdown of the benchmark "support for

learners" where ELLs scored the highest of all their benchmarks.

Table 6.3

Benchmark 5: Support for Learners (7 items) (n = 45)

How much does this college emphasize:	Very little/some	Quite a bit/very much	
Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college	8 (18%)	37 (82%)	
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	15 (33%)	30 (67%)	
Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	28 (62%)	17 (38%)	
Providing the support you need to thrive socially	20 (44%)	25 (56%)	
Providing the financial support you need to afford your education	16 (36%)	28 (62%)	

During the current school year, how often have you:	Rarely/ never	sometimes	often
Used academic advising/planning services	7 (16%)	29 (64%)	6 (13%)
Used career counseling services	16 (36%)	17 (38%)	6 (13%)

It appears that a vast majority of ELLs view the college as providing a great deal of the support that they need to help them succeed at the college. On the contrary, they do not seem to view the college as helpful for nonacademic responsibilities. A slim majority views the college as one that encourages contact among students of different backgrounds, provides the financial support they need to afford to be enrolled, and provides the support they need to thrive socially. Most students report using academic advising, and more than half using career counseling.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Table 6.4 shows the breakdown of the benchmark in which ELLs scored lowest, active and collaborative learning, into the individual responses.

Table 6.4

Benchmark 1: Active and Collaborative Learning (7 items) (n = 45)

During the current school year, how often have you:	Never/sometimes	Often/very often
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	25 (56%)	20 (44%)
Made a class presentation	25 (56%)	20 (44%)
Worked with other students on projects during class	23 (51%)	22 (49%)
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	34 (77%)	10 (23%)
Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	41 (91%)	4 (9%)
Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course	39 (87%)	5 (11%)
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	24 (55%)	20 (44%)

Note. Percentages do not add up due to missing numbers in some cases

For items with even-numbered Likert scales, responses are divided into two categories to get a sense of whether students were more or less engaged in the particular category. The activity with the lowest score seems to be teaching or tutoring other students, followed by participating in a community based project as part of a regular course, and then by working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments. The activity students stated they engaged in the most is work with other students on a class project, yet the majorities all remain in the "never/sometimes" category.

Student Effort

A noteworthy item in this benchmark (Table 6.5) is that most students report coming to class with their readings or assignments completed. A slim majority report drafting papers and integrating ideas or information from various sources. Only a quarter of the students report rarely or never using peer or tutoring services, computer labs, or skill labs. Enrollment status did not appear to be the divisive factor in number of hours preparing for class. For instance, the mean of responses show part time students studying slightly more hours, $M = 2.15$ (1.35), than full time students, $M = 2.12$ (1.09), where 2 indicates 1-5 hours and 3 indicates 6-10 hours a week.

Table 6.5

Benchmark 2: Student Effort (8 items) (n = 45)

During the current school year, how often have you:	Never/sometimes	Often/very often
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	20 (44%)	25 (56%)
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	14 (31%)	29 (64%)
Come to class without completing readings or assignments	39 (87%)	5 (11%)

Table 6.5

Benchmark 2: Student Effort (8 items) (n = 45) (continued)

During the current school year, how often have you:	Rarely/never		Sometimes	Often	
Used peer or other tutoring services	10 (22%)		17 (38%)	13 (29%)	
Used skill labs	9 (20%)		20 (44%)	9 (20%)	
Used a computer lab	5 (11%)		20 (44%)	17 (38%)	

How many books did you read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	None	1-4	5-10	11-20	20+
	12 (27%)	18 (40%)	9 (20%)	3 (7%)	3(7%)
During the current school year (hours):	None	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	30+
How many hours did you spend in a typical week preparing for class	1 (2%)	14 (31%)	17 (38%)	7 (16%)	3(7%)	3(7%)

Academic Challenge

As for academic challenge, Table 6.6, while a slim majority feels they worked harder than they thought they could (53%), quite a few students feel exams are challenging to extremely challenging (71%). Additionally, the last item shows most students indicating they spend what they would consider significant amounts of time studying. As for the type of challenges the college emphasizes, more students report analyzing, synthesizing, and using new knowledge to perform a skill than they have making judgments about new knowledge or applying knowledge in real life situations.

Table 6.6

Benchmark 3: Academic Challenge (10 items)

During the current school year, how often have you:	Never/sometimes	Often/very often
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	21 (47%)	24 (53%)

Table 6.6

Benchmark 3: Academic Challenge (10 items) (continued)

How much does your coursework at this college emphasize:	Very little/ some	Quite a bit/ very much
Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	7 (16%)	37 (82%)
Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways	1 2 (27%)	31 (69%)
Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	23 (51%)	20 (44%)
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	23 (51%)	22 (49%)
Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill	13 (29%)	32 (71%)

During the current school year:	none	1 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 20	20+
How many assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings did you read	2 (4%)	10 (22%)	13 (29%)	13 (29%)	7 (16%)
How many papers or reports of any length did you write	2 (4%)	10 (22%)	14 (31%)	10 (22%)	9 (20%)

Extremely easy (1) to extremely challenging (7)	1-3	4	5-7
To what extent have your examinations challenged you to do your best work	1 (2%)	7 (16%)	32 (71%)

How much does this college emphasize:	Very little/some	Quite a bit/very much
Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying	6 (13%)	38 (84%)

Student-faculty Interaction

Lastly, in benchmark 4 on student-faculty interaction (Table 6.7) it seems that a high proportion of students do not engage in dialogue with their instructors. The only activity in this category that students experience at a high frequency is receiving prompt feedback from instructors.

Age Group Comparison of Benchmarks

I compared traditionally aged students (18-24 years) and nontraditionally aged

students (25 years and older) since age was the primary factor that affected persistence

and success in the retention data. After running *t* tests between these two groups, the only

benchmark that was significantly different was "student faculty interaction" where

traditionally aged students were significantly more engaged, t (41.81) = 2.35, p = 0.02,

with a fairly large effect size, d = 0.7. Of the items within this benchmark, how often a

student discussed grades or assignments with an instructor, was the only significant

difference where traditional students exceeded nontraditional, t (41.10) = 3.03 (p = 0.005),

with a large effect size (d = 1.0).

Table 6.7

Benchmark 4: Student Faculty Interaction (6)

During the current school year, how often have you:	Never/sometimes	Often/very often
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	28 (62%)	17 (38%)
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	29 (64%)	15 (33%)
Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor	29 (64%)	16 (36%)
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class	32 (71%)	12 (27%)
Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance	17 (38%)	28 (62%)
Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	38 (84%)	5 (11%)

Discussion of ELL Engagement Results

How do ELL engagement results help in answering my fourth research question

and begin to explain ELL retention? Overall, ELLs seem engaged, even more so than the

national averages of engagement. This may explain higher GPAs in the retention data, but it does not explain lower graduation rates than the nation. Support for learners and academic challenge were the most reliable benchmarks and results therein should be viewed with more consideration than the others.

Participants indicated that they felt overall supported by the college (82%). This support may be in the form of tutoring services since they did not seek support from peers or faculty as much. About three quarters claimed to use these services and could have been perceived as college support even though this item was part of the student effort benchmark. It is also interesting that 62% view the college as providing the financial support they need to afford to be enrolled considering 56% would drop due to finances. Perhaps the hypothetical nature of asking what *would* cause them to withdraw *would* be lack of finances if for example their aid was cut. But we find in interviews that lack of finances and not qualifying for financial aid has a direct impact on enrollment.

Lack of academic preparedness could be another obstacle to persistence, especially given the retention finding that low GPAs and low persistence seemed to co-occur as seen in chapter 5. Yet coursework with a lack of challenge may lead to boredom and be less engaging, which is the rationale for academic challenge to be an engagement benchmark (Marti, 2009). Even though academic unpreparedness was not a frequent reason for not returning to school on this survey (22%), challenges that are too high could be a compounding factor in dropout or persistence as reported in interviews. The questions and answers in the benchmark do not necessarily address this threshold. Students indicated on the survey that most found exams extremely challenging and spent significant amounts of time preparing for their courses. While this shows they are

engaged in their course work, there is still the concern that students cannot afford the time they need to put into the courses. We find cases of too much academic challenge in the interviews with linguistic obstacles to writing assignments, passing tests, or learning new vocabulary. These findings are consistent with those Leki (2007) found in case studies of ELL literacy practices where students would report feeling overwhelmed and under prepared to accomplish the reading and writing required in their majors.

ELLs scored lowest in active and collaborative learning and student faculty interaction, although the reliability of the results for these benchmarks was low. Receiving prompt feedback was the only item in the student faculty interaction benchmark in which a majority reportedly engaged, which is a positive appraisal of the faculty but the least interactive of all the items, possibly implying a top down relationship with authority. In addition to not seeking support from faculty, they do not participate in class or interact much at all with faculty. Nontraditionally aged students in particular interact significantly less than traditionally aged. We see very similar results in interviews where ELLs would feel much more comfortable talking to tutors for assistance and maintained a distance with faculty.

We also saw student effort as the second highest scoring benchmark where most students spend up to ten hours per week preparing for class, full time and part time students alike. However, the reliability of this benchmark was low. Nevertheless, in interviews, ELLs depict their student effort as quite high, claiming that because their work is in a second language they feel they have to work harder than they would in their first language or harder than a native speaker would. Graduates and transfer students attributed much of their success to seeking tutoring and investing their effort, but students

who dropped out at times felt overwhelmed by the amount of effort required to persist in college, again similar to reports found in Leki (2007).

Results Comparing ELLs and Non-ELLs

Just as the ELLs did, the whole group of non-ELLs also scored above the national means for all of the benchmarks as shown in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8

Non-ELL Benchmark Scores (n = 1011)

Benchmark	Mean score	SD
Support for learners	52.3	23.0
Student effort	51.8	22.8
Academic challenge	52.8	22.9
Student-faculty interaction	53.5	25.3
Active and collaborative learning	54.0	24.4

But when comparing matched samples, the non-ELL matched sample scored above the national means for all benchmarks except for support for learners, as shown in Table 6.9. Then, comparing the scores of the matched groups, also shown in Table 6.9, ELLs appear higher in all of the benchmarks except for active and collaborative learning. However, ELLs score significantly higher than non-ELLs in just one benchmark score for "support for learners," $t = -2.69$ (64.50), $p = 0.009$, with a fairly large effect size ($d = -0.7$).

Table 6.9

Benchmark Scores between Matching Samples

Benchmark	Non-ELLs ($n = 35$)	ELLs ($n = 35$)
Support for learners	48.2	66.7*
Student effort	61.4	63.4
Academic challenge	57.3	60.7
Student-faculty interaction	56.6	60.3
Active and collaborative learning	61.7	57.4

Note. *Significantly higher at $p < 0.05$

Given that benchmark scores are cumulatively based on only a certain number of items, I conducted *t* tests on every item in the survey to explore specific differences in responses from ELL and non-ELL responses. As there were more than 100 items, I used an alpha of $p < = 0.001$, conservative enough to avoid type I error but not so conservative as to commit type II risk error (Brown, 2001; Everitt, 2001).

Table 6.10

Significant Items for ELLs Compared to Non-ELLs

ELLs:	t (df)	d
Have taken developmental/remedial reading course*	-7.58 (48.26)	-2.2
Have taken developmental/remedial writing course*	-7.18 (51.31)	-2.0
Have taken developmental/remedial math course*	-4.84 (57.99)	-1.3
Have participated in college orientation program or course*	-3.71 (62.47)	-0.9
Have frequently used peer or other tutoring*	-4.10 (58.72)	-1.1
Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions (*less*)**	3.64 (60.69)	0.9
Are satisfied with academic advising/planning**	-3.58 (50.52)	-1.0
Indicated that their experience at this college contributed to: understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds**		
	-3.37 (55.77)	-0.9
developing a personal code of ethics**	-3.51 (60.71)	-0.9

Note: *significant at $p < 0.001$; **significant at $p = 0.001$

As one can see in Table 6.10, three significant items were on taking remedial courses where ELLs showed having taken developmental/remedial reading, writing and math courses significantly more than non-ELLs, all with large effect sizes. ELLs participated in a college orientation program or course significantly more than non-ELLs with a large effect size. ELLs also had a higher frequency of using peer or other tutoring with a large effect size. Conversely, ELLs "asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions" significantly less than non-ELLs with a large effect size. This item is

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part of the first benchmark, "active and collaborative learning" where ELLs scored lowest and where only 44% of ELLs claimed they often or very often did this activity. Another item was that ELLs expressed "satisfaction of academic advising/planning" significantly more than non-ELLs with a large effect size.

ELLs also responded that they felt their experience at the college contributed to their "understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds" significantly more than for non-ELLs with a large effect size. Although this item is not specifically associated with a benchmark, it seems related to "encouraging contact with students of different backgrounds" in the "support for learners" benchmark. Finally, ELLs felt that their experience at the college also contributed to "developing a personal code of ethics" significantly more, also with a large effect size, which is related to CCSSE's model of best fit (Marti, 2009) and was not the focus in the present study.

Discussion of ELL and Non-ELL Comparison Results

In the two matched samples, the support for learners benchmark score was significantly higher for ELLs, even though there were no significant differences among specific items within that benchmark. ELLs did, however, indicate using peer or other tutoring more than non-ELLs, which participants may have associated with the overall feeling of college support, as considered in the ELL engagement results discussion. Other specific significant items that relate to feeling support from the college were that ELLs tended to participate in orientations, feel satisfied with advising services, and feel their experience added to their understanding of others and their own code of ethics more than their non-ELL counterparts. That ELLs generally perceive the college as supportive may not be sufficient for persistence. We saw here and in retention data that ELLs will leave

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the college, and here and in interviews, for financial, work, or family reasons. We also find in interviews that although ELLs feel support with advising services, there are counter examples as well as cases where advising could have assisted more with the use of waivers to accept an alternative course for graduation, reapplication for financial aid, or transfer advice. Then, the fact that ELLs asked questions and contributed to class discussions less than non-ELLs seemed most attributable to student perceptions about their oral proficiency or concerns about their accents as we will see in interviews.

The significant result that ELLs took every type of remediation (reading, writing, and math) more than non-ELLs made it imperative to add a question in the interviews about students' experiences with these types of courses to get a sense of why in their view ELLs take them and whether the students perceive them as helpful. We will see that remedial math classes were viewed as helpful as a refresher for students, especially nontraditionally aged, who had taken math long ago or for students who had not developed math skills in their educational backgrounds. Remedial reading and writing were sometimes viewed as useful but at other times too difficult for ELLs.

Also noteworthy is what did *not* come up in the comparison of all items. In the retention data, ELLs had significantly higher GPAs, but they were not significantly different here as reported on the survey. ELLs also did not have significantly more or fewer risk factors than nonELLs. This finding gives some interpretation to a question in the retention data asking why both matched samples graduate less than the EPCC and the nation. If the risk factors of finances, work, and family responsibilities are the same for both groups here, and these are that factors that ELLs attribute to leaving college, then it is quite likely these factors affect nonELL retention as well. Again, this group of ELLs

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omits students who did not take any courses beyond ESL. It also bears repeating that only support for learners and academic challenge were reliable benchmarks for ELLs. In addition, each of these results must be considered noting the disparity between full time and part time status for both groups compared to the actual population at EPCC as noted in chapter 4. This means overall engagement of the general population of ELLs may in fact be less than what was found here.

General Discussion

What do these results illuminate about ELL retention? First we need to remain mindful of the nature of this population before making claims. The strength of the results lies in the random albeit small sample, but the experiences of the participants therein are narrower than in the retention data as this group of ELLs have enrolled in at least one content course (where the survey took place) and do not include ELLs who did not go beyond the ESL program. In addition, there were more full time than part time respondents and therefore they do not represent the same ratio in the population at EPCC. In addition, academic challenge and support for learners are the only two benchmarks with high enough reliability for ELLs. Given these limitations, however, we could see trends that spoke directly to retention results and reflect ELL engagement practices at the college.

In the preceding chapter, we had found that ELLs generally have high GPAs but low program completion and graduation rates. Here we find that ELLs report high GPAs and overall high engagement, but that most will not return due to obstacles of lack of finances, full time work, and family responsibilities that will be consistent with interview results. The biggest reason to leave was transfer to a four-year institution, reported by just

over half of the ELLs. It can be inferred that many of the students unaccounted for in retention data also left because of transfer, although probably not as many as here since the survey respondents include more full time students and ELLs who were already in more advanced levels. Lack of finances was the biggest obstacle to enrollment, a finding that is predominant in the interviews as well. Plus, a little more than half of the ELLs do not receive financial aid where lack of aid presents a big obstacle in the interviews. Together, these findings will explain the retention finding that Pell eligible students are more successful in all areas.

Results also showed that ELLs report taking significantly more remedial courses than non-ELLs which could be viewed as another obstacle. Because of this finding, I added a question about remedial courses on the interview protocols to see how it may have affected retention. The survey also asks whether students would leave due to feeling academically unprepared where 22% said they would, despite their report that they all have "C" and above grade averages. This suggests that even when GPAs are high, too much academic challenge could still inhibit enrollment. However, the survey does not ask about linguistic challenges or how they feel perceived by the college as ELLs as obstacles.

Even though the score was higher than the national average in the active and collaborative learning benchmark, upon closer examination all responses indicated that students were *never* or *sometimes* rather than *often* or *very often* categories. And even though this benchmark score seemed higher for ELLs than non-ELLs, ELLs still engaged in significantly less class discussion than non-ELLs.

ELLs also scored low in the student faculty interaction benchmark and nontraditionally aged learners were significantly less engaged, especially when

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discussing grades or assignments with faculty. This item was in fact the only significantly different item for nontraditionally aged learners and does not offer much of an explanation for this group's low performance in the retention data. It will not be until interviews that we find this group's struggle with linguistic challenges and external obstacles that we get more of an explanation for retention findings.

The category where ELLs scored highest and significantly higher than non-ELLs was in the support for learners benchmark which also seemed high in interviews. Specifically, ELLs used tutoring services more, attended more college orientation activities, claimed to be satisfied with academic advising, and felt they had the opportunity to understand people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds with assistance from the college. Students seem to feel generally supported by the college, but I would still ask whether it is enough support to assist ELLs in achieving their academic goals? They indicated satisfaction with advising, yet there were cases in interview data where advising support did not seem sufficient.

To conclude, the survey presented student reports that were similar to retention data where students reported high GPAs most would not be returning. Results gave us answers that the retention data could not such as their goals, which was that nearly all wanted an associate's degree and that lack of finances was the biggest impediment to students' return. As for the engagement data, mixed findings gave us little explanation of retention findings. However, the interviews will add to these data to suggest that excessive academic challenge, lack of student faculty interaction, and active and collaborative learning tend to stem from linguistic challenges and may indirectly affect

retention, and that engaging in tutoring and student effort would be attributed to student

success in persisting and graduating. We turn to the interviews now.

CHATER 7

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION FOR THE INTERVIEW DATA

The analyses of interviews in this chapter address my final research question:

6. What do ELLs perceive as causes for them to persist or drop out which can be

linked to any patterns in retention and engagement? What are some obstacles to

program or degree completion?

In the twenty-eight (28) interviews I conducted for this chapter, I found that ELLs who

succeed in completing the ESL program, transferring to a four-year institution, or

graduating at EPCC, attribute this success mostly to engaging in their own extra effort

that is motivated by their goals and in seeking the support of tutors, family members, and

friends. Some of the predominant reasons students give for not crossing these thresholds

include lack of finances, full time work, and family obligations, as found in survey results

from the preceding chapter as well. Language appears to be a silent factor, not claimed by

students as the key factor but certainly one that affects certain areas of engagement,

especially active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, and academic

challenge. There were two ways students talked about language as a challenge. One can

be described as the linguistic challenges they faced when completing their course work,

having to do with reading and writing (Kanno & Varghese, in press). The other was how

peers, faculty, and even ELLs themselves perceived their oral proficiency as somehow

deficient, raising questions about how ELL identity is constructed at the college. Another

implicit factor that was observed was students' lack of awareness in procedural

knowledge that could have assisted some to overcome certain obstacles, such as applying

for waivers. Conversely, student engagement in the benchmarks of support for learners

and student effort seem to account for most of the success that students achieve in
persisting to graduate or transfer, although it was at times represented in different ways
than the survey aims to capture this experience. This chapter presents students' accounts
of the causes for leaving, biggest challenges they faced, and their engagement, while
students with varying trajectories and successes are discussed within each category.

Table 7.1

Interview Participants with Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Sex	Age, US arrival	Trad. or Nontrad.	Age in interview	Resident (Y/N)	Country of origin	Grade average
Drop ESL							
Mary	F	15	T	22	Y	Dom. Rep.	A-
Sophia	F	50	N	58	Y	Ukraine	B-
Harjinder	F	30	N	34	Y	India	A
Drop after ESL							
Clarissa	F	50	N	58	Y	Brazil	B-
Donna	F	18	T	26	Y	Haiti	C-
Ruth	F	16	T	24	Y	Guatemala	A-
Judith	F	28	N	43	Y	Colombia	B
Nicole	F	17	T	22	Y	Dom.Rep.	C
Diana	F	32	N	44	Y	Dom. Rep.	B
Skip ESL							
Genoveve	F	18	T	19	N	Austria	A
Tommy	M	24	Y	24	N	S. Korea	B+
Lat Transfer							
Hai	M	19	T	19	N	Vietnam	F
Trans, no grad							
Ahmed	M	20	T	24	N	Yemen	B+
Abdullah	M	25	N	29	N	Yemen	B
Complete ESL							
Ilhan	F	41	N	46	Y	Turkey	A-
Christie	F	15*	T	20	N	S. Korea	C+
Adriana	F	23	N	42	Y	Colombia	B+
Mike	M	15	T	20	Y	China	B
Fauzia	F	15	N	31	Y	Afghan.	B
Luz	F	26	N	27	N	Peru	B
Graduated							
Margarita	F	17	T	23	Y	Colombia	B
Aylin	F	31	N	49	Y	Turkey	A-
Ana	F	19	T	23	N	Japan	A
Jasmyn	F	25	N	45	Y	Egypt	A-
Thanh	M	14	T	30	Y	Vietnam	C+
Kyoko	F	20	T/N	39	N/Y	Japan	B+
Grad/trans							
Takuji	M	19	T	27	N	Japan	C
Hope	F	17	T	21	N	Thailand	A-

Note: *Christie attended first two years in Canada.

It should be noted that at the time of the interviews, all students expressed an interest taking other college courses beyond ESL, pursuing a degree or diploma, or transferring, similar to ELLs' expressed goals on the survey. Three had originally wanted to take only ESL courses but changed their minds to continue at the college when they completed the ESL program. The groupings that will be used to discuss the results are as follows: students who drop out before completing ESL (3), drop out after completing ESL (6), skip ESL but remain enrolled (2), transfer to another community college before finishing ESL (1), finish ESL and remain enrolled (6), transfer before graduating (2), graduate (6), and graduate then transfer to a four-year institution (2). Table 7.1 shows pseudonyms and characteristics of the participants. Their traditional or nontraditional age category is based on their age when they commenced studies at EPCC. When students are introduced in this chapter, their pseudonyms will be followed by their country of origin and age during the interview.

<div align="center">**Causes for Leaving**</div>

This section highlights the main reasons that were given by students who dropped out or stopped out of college. I will also discuss reasons students gave for leaving the ESL program early or leaving the community college before graduating even though they are still persisting in higher education as it too has implications for colleges. In addition, I explore reasons graduates gave for not transferring to four-year institutions.

Table 7.2 shows lack of finances, work, and family obligations as the only types of causes to leave college as they were in the survey data. Waiting for acceptance in EPCC's nursing program was an exception to these categories. Diana (Dominican Republic, 24) notes, "I complete all the classes that they are required for the program so

I'm waiting. I'm pretty sure I'm gonna be in the program by August." Unfortunately, the following August she was still not enrolled. Kyoko (Japan, 39), a graduate from EPCC twenty years ago who now wanted to get into the nursing program, and subsequently was admitted, had been facing the same prospect. This potential cause to leave college presents a problem unique to community colleges that allow open enrollment of general courses while students wait for restricted programs. A four-year institution would not likely allow long term enrollment without being matriculated.

Table 7.2

Categories of reasons for stop-out or dropout of college

Finances	Cancellation of financial aid due to lack of academic progress
	Ineligibility for financial aid
	Lack of finances
Family/work	Pregnancy
	Engagement to be married
	Lack of time to study due to work and family obligations
	Taking care of sick father
	Too many hours of work
	Feeling too "weak" to overcome work and family obstacles
	Travel to home country
Other	Waiting to be accepted in competitive program at the college

In addition, there were reasons for early transfer but remaining in college. Hai (Vietnam, 19) made a "lateral transfer" to a community college in another state before completing the ESL program at EPCC in order to be closer to family members. It is uncertain whether to consider this a successful move as Bahr (2009) has illuminated that students making lateral transfers tend to fall outside of the scope of college tracking systems and retention research. Two others transferred to a university before graduating, one claiming that EPCC does not have his exact major and the other that he heard not all of his courses would transfer. Even though their transfer is certainly a positive move, the transition could have been better facilitated had they graduated from EPCC first as there

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is an articulation agreement with the state university that could have benefitted them. Their premature departure may have been due to lack of advisor support or influenced by their desire to leave the small, overcrowded satellite campus they were attending and complained about in their final semesters.

There were two students who left the ESL program but remained enrolled at EPCC, one claiming to push herself more academically, the other in a hurry to graduate, transfer, and go on to graduate school. Genoveve (Austria, 19) discussed her goals by stating, "I'm here to learn English and to find out what I'm going to study in Austria." For her, improving English does not mean completing the ESL program but to take English I, the college composition course. Tommy (South Korea, 24) decided to test out of ESL IV because of his feeling pressure to finish his degrees before he fears it is too late: "I don't have many times. I'm already twenty-four years old. I'm old."

Additionally, although it is not always the case that community college graduation leads to transfer to a four-year institution, a little more than half of the participants both in the interviews and on the CCSR survey indicated that they wanted to transfer. Therefore, I asked graduates whether or not they had transferred or were planning to transfer to see what could be preventing further enrollment and pursuit of four-year degrees. Five out of the eight had not transferred, two of whom had different goals. Aylin (Turkey, 49) felt that completing the nursing program enabled her to secure employment and that at her age there was no point in continuing with college, and Kyoko was planning her second associate's degree, this time in nursing. The other three expressed a desire to transfer but were waiting due to external obstacles or feelings of trepidation about the change. For instance, Jasmyn (Egypt, 45) worries about the distance to the

nearest state school, the time she would sacrifice in addition to her job, and the care she had mentioned for an elderly parent: "I'm still debating on that fifty-fifty. If I can finish it here at EPCC, I would have no doubts. I would register tomorrow. But the problem is I have to travel for [*Univ. A*] or [*Univ. B*] after my work. I see it is kind of hard for me right now." Another graduate, Thanh (Vietnam, 30) expressed reluctance to transfer until he received his associate's degree which he had not applied for yet. He attempted to apply for graduation a previous semester and reported that he was required to take a class he had not realized he needed. Then while taking the class, he recounts what he perceived as why he did not apply to transfer:

> You don't know while you're taking a class you gonna pass it or not, so you don't really sure that you apply other schools and stuff. So I just wait and let's see after that class and hopefully I did pass it. And I want start fresh. I don't wanna go in the middle of a semester. I wanna go like the start of the fall and finish two years or something, so that why I'm taking a semester off this semester.

In addition to his general apprehension about transferring, he also does not seem to realize that he could apply for a four-year institution before his graduation is assured.

We have just seen reasons that students attribute to discontinuing college enrollment or deciding to leave the ESL program or EPCC to be enrolled elsewhere. The most prominent reasons that students attribute to leaving relate to three main obstacles of finances, work, and family as will be illustrated in the following section. However, there also appears to be another pattern of students' lack of knowledge of the college system that could be addressed with advising, as with Thanh above. While the three main

obstacles will be explored in the next section as they relate to all of the participants, this underlying problem will be a recurring theme implicit in students' accounts.

Finances, Work, and Family: Reasons to Leave or Challenges to Overcome

Lack of finances, work, and family responsibilities were expressed as obstacles not only for students who dropped out but for those who persisted, graduated, or transferred to four-year institutions as well. Although these were certainly not the only obstacles, as we will see when discussing engagement below, they were discussed as the biggest reasons to leave college by students who dropped out, especially when students experienced more than one of these obstacles at a time and when lack of knowledge about the college system interfered. We will also see how other students managed to overcome these factors, and how the factors played less of a dominating role in the lives of students who continued going to college.

Finances

For five of the nine students who no longer attend college, lack of finances were given as a direct cause to drop out, with students either not being eligible for financial aid or simply not having the finances to continue. Even four students who are persisting or who had graduated note that financial aid does not cover everything. In contrast, three graduates feel their success at least partially depended on the fact that money was not an obstacle either because of qualifying for aid or having other financial means.

First, the lack of financial aid was noted as a direct factor for two to drop out either by not qualifying or having it cancelled due to poor academic performance. But another concern is that neither student seemed to be aware of procedures to reapply. Mary (Dominican Republic, 22) was not approved for financial aid, stating it as the sole

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reason for her not to return, reiterating it with every one of my follow-up questions. But when she stated, "I need money. I don't live my parents. I live by myself," I realized that the fact that she is a traditionally aged student who does not live with her parents might have complicated her application. Pell requires that students are considered dependents of their parents until the age of 24 unless they follow a procedure to become independent, a procedure she did not seem to be aware of. Like Mary, Donna (Haiti, 26) attributes her not being able to return to the college completely to having her financial aid cancelled due to her low grades and course completion rate, while appearing as though she too did not know about the process for an appeal. When asked what the college could do to help her return, she states, "It would be better if they found a better way with the financial aid because it's not like I wanna drop. Some people don't wanna drop their classes but some things come up. That time I don't have no choice." The "things" that "come up" refer to having to care for her ill father which may have served as an acceptable excuse for not making academic progress by Pell's standards.

Three students who dropped out of the college after completing the ESL program, Judith (Colombia, 43) Ruth (Guatemala, 24), and Clarissa (Brazil, 58), talked about the lack of finances, not qualifying for financial aid, and having to work full time would make it difficult to take classes at the same time. For Ruth this obstacle is compounded with caring for her newborn. These findings reflect the strain that lack of economic capital has on enrollment that has been observed in other studies (Curry, 2001; Schmid & Abell, 2003).

Students who are persisting or who graduated have also faced financial struggles but managed to overcome them. One graduate, Thanh, faced a potential cause to leave

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when his eligibility for aid expired. The policy states that financial aid will cover 90 attempted credits for a 60 credit program. Thanh had taken 29 credits of ESL and remedial English and math, which did not allow any room for repeating courses, yet he ended up having to do so. He decided to attend college part time, remain living with his parents, and work part time to pay for his tuition.

One persisting student (Adriana, Colombia, 42) noted that even with financial aid there is a financial struggle. "This year I received financial aid but that is not cover all, so I start to take it out from my pocket, so I start to see difficult." A graduate, Margarita (Colombia, 23), noted that when financial aid did not cover all her expenses, she got by as a resident since her tuition is less expensive than for international students and added, "my mom could help me out."

Margarita's concern for international students raises another aspect of the impact of finances on college enrollment regarding how students perceive the higher rate for international students as they are not subsidized by the state and must pay three times the tuition rate as state residents. Another graduate, Ana (Japan, 23), makes a complaint about higher tuition rates for international students, as well as having to show they have enough savings in their account, and assumes that causes other international students to drop out if their parents can not afford it. One persisting international student, Genoveve, also made this claim. There were no international students who dropped out in this group, or any who talked about tuition as an obstacle for themselves. However, international students who drop out for any reason would be required to leave the country and are therefore unavailable for interviews.

Conversely, half of the graduates attribute their success partly to not having to worry about money, like Margarita above who mentioned that when there was not enough aid her mother could contribute or Thanh who could live with his parents. Jasmyn was grateful for having access to financial aid, "which was a very good support for me too. I wouldn't be able to do it without financial aid and work study."

Overall, we see that lack of finances is perceived as having a decisive impact on college enrollment. Qualifying for financial aid is certainly considered helpful to persistence, which may explain how Pell eligible students in chapter 5 seemed to outperform other students. However, sometimes the aid is perceived as not enough and lack of eligibility as problematic. Unfortunately, some students have not been made aware of the steps to take to become eligible. In addition, some even make a direct plea for the college to seek ways to provide them with the funds they need to attend college. Students with alternative resources, such as having family members to support them, seemed more likely to overcome financial difficulties. Graduates and persisters seemed to have more access to these resources. We started to get a glimpse of how other factors of work and family came into play in conjunction with finances. We turn to the obstacle of work now.

Work

Employment seemed to be a cause to leave but more as a compounding factor rather than the direct factor that lack of finances was. Even for the one student who attributed her departure entirely to work, she would talk about the added responsibility of caring for her daughter. There was a strong trend that suggests full time work impacts enrollment as all six students who had dropped out after completing ESL worked full

time and noted difficulties managing their jobs and classes, whereas none of the graduates worked full time. Work seemed to be a problem for students persisting at college as well, but it also seemed to be a source of support and resources, especially for the graduates for which part time work did not markedly interfere.

Sophia (Ukraine, 58) was the one student who claimed to leave because of work as she had been working 60 hours a week while taking a course at EPCC. She expressed a longing to return to the ESL program but noted in the interview that she feels unable to do so because she needs to support her daughter who has recently come to the United States. She states that like other immigrants, she worked for low wages and shared her money with her daughter in the Ukraine:

> I work for me in America, I pay for everything in here and I must paid everything in Ukraine, so this is reason I work sometimes sixty hours each week, and this is very difficult you know when you're tired when you sleep not enough, come to college, you must understand you must have attention and have success. If I come to college in my class and I sleeping, it's not reason to come to college and study.

Here she observes that academic ESL requires more than just her presence and does not feel she can muster enough strength to be an active student, as I found in other accounts of students who worked full time. Her testimony also reflects an observation that Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have documented about the status of new immigrants who tend to work for low wages at first and are likely to have jobs that are not professional and, I would interpret, less likely to relate to a student's major.

Full time work also affected *all* six students who dropped out of college after completing the ESL program as well. These former students talked about work as helpful

at times by allowing a flexible work schedule or opportunities to study while working, but that ultimately the jobs presented a strain on their studies, especially when students had dependents as well. Clarissa was able to acquire a job with a work schedule conducive to studying, unlike Judith who had to work swing shifts, but in a history course she still could not complete the final paper because her work made her too busy: "I was doing good but up to the end I had to write ten pages for my last work and I could not finish and I stopped come to the school. I dropped because I want always do my best and I could not do." She talks about wanting to do her best as though simply to pass would not have been sufficient, similar to Sophia above. Even when work was at its optimal support by being related to one's major and offering a flexible schedule, the full time hours would interfere with studies as it did for Diana.

Students who persisted at the college were not impervious to the strains of work but with much less impact. Of the six students who finished ESL and were still enrolled, four did not work, two of whom, Luz (Peru, 27) and Fauzia (Afghanistan, 31), had the option to quit when it interfered with their studies. Another persisting student, Mike (China, 20), has part time work which won't be an obstacle until he has to take over the family business in the following semester when his father retires. He views the work now as merely helping out and schedules his classes so that he can get all his homework completed on campus.

Adriana, who recently completed the ESL program and persists at the college, struggled the most to overcome the multiple factors of family and a full time job. She managed to overcome the challenge of work and family in a constant negotiation and by sacrificing time with her children:

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They never see me that I was study so when they start to see me they start to take my own time, so they start "hey mommy hey mommy." They thinking I forget about my children but I say "no, I need my time. I need to study." So I start to fight with- not fight but to talk with they and to say, "I do everything for you, now I need my time." So that is hard for me too (*tearing up a little*).

Likewise, Kyoko who is persisting and hoping to be admitted into the nursing program, struggles with work, dependants, and school and deals with the struggle by sacrificing sleep: "I work full time and I have a kid so I really don't have time, but this is what I wanna do so I don't get all that much sleep anymore." Yet when asked if her job was ever helpful to her studies, she notes, "I'm working in ICU right now doing a secretarial job. Watching nurses taking care of sick patients inspired me to become a nurse."

Graduates seemed least adversely affected by work, especially since two did not work at all while studying and the rest worked only part time. The ones who worked talked about it as being somewhat of an obstacle but a manageable one, especially when offered a flexible work schedule, and some even mentioned their jobs as helpful for gaining access to English, for applying knowledge in a job related to their majors, or as a stress reliever.

Overall, work was perceived as a key factor in inhibiting students' valuable resources of time and energy to engage on campus or fulfill their assignments despite some support they would receive from their jobs such as flexible scheduling and having a chance to study on the job. These helpful aspects of employment seemed to assist those who worked part time, but full time work simply took too many hours away from students' time at college. The distinct trend is that students who persisted or graduated

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did not work, worked only part time, or quit their jobs. The two exceptions of students who persisted and worked full time made difficult sacrifices. These findings are in line with one of Schmid and Abell's (2003) findings that students who did not remain in college tended to work full time more. Next we will turn to factors that come from family as obstacles to enrollment.

Family

Dealing with family obligations also presented obstacles for students. For some they were indicated as a direct cause to leave, but like work, and often even more than work, family was also a source of support that helped students persist, graduate, or transfer. Of the nine students who dropped out of college, family obligations played a direct role in two students' dropout and a compounding role in another three. In addition, some students who were persisting or had graduated also discussed family as an inhibiting factor. But many also discussed family as an integral part of the support that helps them continue at the college. In fact, five of the eight graduates attributed some of their success to family support.

While three students who dropped out talked about family as an interceding factor, two students indicated that dropping out was due directly to family obligations, one because of her pregnancy and another because her children were dependent on her. Yet both mentioned that they planned to return. The way Harjinder (India, 34) resists viewing her children as keeping her from re-enrolling seems to reinforce the "stop out" rather than "drop out" category in community college students:

> C: You mentioned that the difficulty coming back is your family. Is that the
>
> biggest reason?

Harjinder: No, no.

C: But…

Harjinder: No not biggest reason.

C: Oh what's the biggest-

Harjinder: I think I take the next semester. I got to do (*laughs*).

Her apparent urgency to return prevents her from viewing herself as someone who simply dropped out of college.

Program completers and persisters also face family pressures. One program completer, Mike, mentioned above as having to work is doing so under family obligation, will have to quit school to take over the family business. Another we saw from the work section, Adriana, talked about negotiating with family members for more time to study. However, even though she feels her children take her time as she is persisting at the college, she also notes that she receives support from them to study and not to be so dependent on them, which may be different from the students who dropped out, none of whom mentioned that kind of support:

Sometimes I had a lot of trouble when I had to go some places to buy something and talk with the doctors and everything so all the time I was bother my daughter or my son because they say "no mommy, we don't have time mommy." All the time they say "mommy it's time to learn English, its time you talk by yourself you're doing your own things." So they make me feel bad and the same time I feel strong to do.

She seems to balance the encouragement and the demand from her children when they feel her studying is taking too much time away from them. "They get jealous but they learn."

Ilhan (Turkey, 46) also has children who depend on her at home. However, she does not have the additional factor of employment to interfere with her studies. Also, her oldest child was a student at the college before she was and assisted her with the process and sometimes assists her with homework. Even though she is technically a first generation college student, she has the support of someone in her family who can orient her to college processes.

Quite a few students also mentioned support that they received from their families. Parental support in terms of pushing students to continue came up for more successful students (one transfer, one persister, and three graduates). Even a few students who dropped out mention financial assistance and help with homework or household chores from family members. One graduate also mentioned not having children to worry about as contributing to her persistence.

Overall, family constraints and support seem to cross all groups but successful students seemed to receive more support than strain whereas students who dropped out felt more pressure from their obligations especially when facing the additional factor of working full time. One persisting student who struggles with work and family seems to utilize her children's support for her to learn more English by demanding more time for herself when she is studying. When we consider that in the CCSR data 89% of students feel supported by their families, perhaps this large amount of support can be tapped into by students to outweigh the obstacle for the 67% who care for dependants and the 36%

who would drop out to care for dependants. We conclude this section on biggest

challenges by discussing the interplay of these factors on students as they remain in

school or not.

Concluding Remarks on the Dominating Factors

Lack of finances, work, and family obstacles were expressed as the biggest causes

to leave especially when they were experienced in conjunction with each other. There

were cases where students drop out and point to financial constraints as not possible to

overcome, which at times were tied in to having to work full time and thus not having the

time to enroll. The ones who were able to overcome and continue their enrollment or

graduate had other resources such as support from their families. Family could be

distracting factors or sources of support. Lack of finances has been discussed at length in

retention literature as cause for withdrawal (Curry, 2001; Pascarella &Terenzini, 2005;

Schmid & Abell, 2003; Tinto, 1993). In addition, Astin (1985) had noted that any activity

that takes the valuable resource of time away from a student will impede student

engagement. However, some students reported negotiating these factors to persist.

Another important finding is that some students seemed unaware of the options available

to them at the college to assist their return, such as filing waivers to attempt to qualify for

financial aid, even though they expressed dissatisfaction with the rejection of aid. More

evidence on where the college could have done more to inform and assist students with

college procedures appears in the results that were related to engagement which follows.

<center>**Engagement**</center>

We had seen in chapter 6 that on the survey, ELL benchmark scores were higher

than non-ELLs, significantly so in support for learners, as well as higher than national

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averages. In interviews, while support for learners and student effort were influential for student success, low engagement in specific items therein and in the other benchmarks seemed to interfere with student success, in addition to the lack of reciprocity of engagement between the college and students. Linguistic challenges and perceptions regarding ELLs language as somehow deficient was found to be a major hindrance in all of the benchmarks as experienced by all groups. For some students who dropped out, excessive academic challenge, lacking the time to invest in student effort, and lack of engagement with or from advising staff seemed to have an effect on enrollment.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Active and collaborative learning is characterized by the active involvement students have with others regarding their learning. Items that were of particular focus in the interviews include class participation, making presentations, and working with others on school work, all of which was at times obstructed by linguistic challenges and self and other perceptions of their oral proficiency for all groups.

Class participation was portrayed by students as a struggle but recognized as an expected part of their courses. Out of the six students who did not like to participate, three were graduates. Concerns about their oral proficiency and how they perceive their interlocuters view of them were direct factors for some, but confidence about academic preparedness also played a role. It appeared easier to overcome reluctance to participate when students felt they had important content to contribute.

Some students resisted participation like a graduate, Ana, who stated, "I hated that kind of stuff," or another graduate, Thanh, who would not participate unless it was for extra credit. Another student, Donna, who dropped out, seemed to lack confidence. She

stated, "well when it's boring I'm not gonna say anything and sometimes I feel like some people more help than me. I just stay quiet. Let them talk." One can see she also seems to be criticizing the instructor for not being engaging when she claims class time is boring.

Three other students who particularly constrained from participating in class discussions, one who persisted at EPCC, one who dropped out, and one who transferred, associated it with their pronunciation. Ahmed (Yemen, 24) talks about his awareness of the dilemma as he tries to encourage himself to participate.

> When we participate and the professor say, "Sorry what you said?" then "It's ok repeat it. Say what you said again." Because this is happening with the other student, native speakers English. Sometimes they participate and the professor say, "I don't got that," and then they say it again, so they don't feel like why the professor ask them say that again. They say it again normally. They don't feel bad. They don't say oh it's because it's my accent. But I do feel bad. Even if not the problem from me, it's the problem from him. Not even from him but it's the problem he couldn't hear it. So I analyze it to myself. I said that is because I have different accent. So even it hasn't to be the truth it's my accent. It hasn't to be the case, but that's what I feel. That's how I interpret it myself. I said it's my accent so they don't understand, but yeah I encourage myself. Always I try.

He seems to feel that he must overcome his sensitivity about his accent as he feels participation is an integral part of being a student, even when he notices that the instructor may be the one with the "problem" of not listening. And yet he also recalled a time when he felt comfortable and knowledgeable in the classroom:

I was really participated in that class because it's international relations so I had something to participate. I'm from the Middle East, so now everybody is paying attention to me and the problems that is going on there, so all of the students including the professors were eager to hear from me.

Perhaps the nature of the course and the instructor being more welcoming of a variety of perspectives and ways of speaking contribute to his willingness to participate.

Another aspect of active and collaborative learning is making class presentations. Eleven students mentioned making presentations in ESL or content classes. Most responses were fairly neutral, but some were on one of two poles as strongly liking them or strongly disliking them. These attitudes toward presentations varied across groups. A few students who had resisted participation in class preferred making presentations in class. For example Donna exclaimed, "I used to love speech. I do good in speech. I wish all my classes were like that." Here she is referring to a class devoted to making oral presentations. But when students did not like to present, it was mostly due to their feelings about their verbal abilities, indicating feelings of embarrassment. For example, Diana states, "I feel so embarrassed in front of Americans when I have to stand and speak in front of everybody, but I have to do it anyway." By differentiating herself from what she calls "Americans," she shows that her feelings are tied in to her identity as being perceived as *different* with a deficient spoken language. It appears that when students are obligated to make presentations, they somehow force themselves to overcome this obstacle.

Another component of the active and collaborative learning benchmark is students working with others on elements of their courses. All graduates mention having the

support of their friends, and out of the rest of all interviewees only six, half of whom had dropped out, state that they do not collaborate with friends,. This means a third of the students who dropped out did not seek help of friends whereas only a fifth of the more successful students did not seek their help. This pattern could suggest that not seeking help from friends is related to dropout. Reasons for not seeking support of friends included not needing their friends' help, having different topics for their assignments, viewing it as less professional help than from a tutor, being a distraction to school work, or not having friends at the college now. Part time students were the ones who mentioned having had some friends who had moved on over the years.

For students who do interact with friends in academic matters, the types of interactions markedly differ from those with faculty or from tutors as we will see below. Nine mentioned studying together for homework, tests, or going over concepts. Others mentioned talking to peers to get ideas or see their work as examples, to help their friends, or to receive personal and moral support while studying. The only trend related to retention is that graduates tended to be the ones to mention assisting their friends.

Aside from working with friends, students discussed their experience working with their classmates. Five students, only one of whom had dropped out, talked about having a difficult time interacting with "Americans" as they would be too busy or would blatantly ignore NNSs. For example, Diana describes her experience in this regard:

> Some students don't want to help you because the American people, as soon they hear your accent, they just [throw away] your English. The only way that they can be with you, if they notice that you are smarter, *maybe*.

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These findings remind us of Leki's (2001) report which focused on interactions between native and nonnative speakers of English where NSs resisted interacting with NNSs.

Conversely, one graduate, Jasmyn, did not let NS perceptions of her affect her the way she thought it might affect younger students who need to be socially accepted: "I never cared if they accepted or not. I always felt I'm better than them. I know two language. That's it, that's all I felt like I have two languages. If I'm not like them, but still I get better grade than them." This was a rare example of a student resisting the identity NSs impose by viewing her bilingual and nontraditionally aged status as a resource rather than a deficit (Ruiz, 1984).

Student Faculty Interaction

When students talked about their interactions with faculty, it was often quite positive but characterized as unidirectional communication from instructor to students rather than the dialog that is an integral part of the benchmark, just as it had on the survey. This finding crossed all groups. Specifically, students talked about instructors explaining or answering questions about assignments when discussing their interactions with instructors. Ahmed provides an account that was typical of students' interactions with faculty:

> She assigned us the homework, and I don't know what it was so I had after class
>
> to ask her to make sure it was. She marked it on the book and she said that what
>
> you had to do. So I took the homework, I went to the tutor, and the tutor helped
>
> me out (*almost chuckling*). That's what the question was for the faculty.

The same student also provided the only counterexample of an instructor actually sitting down with him to review a paper as a tutor would. We will see more on tutor interactions

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in the support for learners section below. Other ways students discussed interaction with

faculty included faculty giving hints, examples, advice, and encouragement.

There were also twelve cases where the interactions with faculty were viewed

negatively as either no help or not enough help. Ana talked about a time when she

criticized the professor's part in their interaction: "Some professors really got like

communication stuff but some professors just doesn't listen, so like I ask something and

like wrong answer comes out, like uh I didn't ask that. They don't listen to students'

complete sentence." The striking finding was that all students characterized their

interactions with faculty as unidirectional where faculty provided pertinent information

rather than discussed, talked with, or worked on assignments with them.

Academic Challenge

For this benchmark, we will see how academic challenge may be necessary to

engage students but that it is also a compounding factor for some students who dropped

out especially if they are academically underprepared. Linguistic factors was a dominant

factor here as well especially when students discussed struggles with reading and writing.

ESL.

At times ESL courses were perceived as appropriately challenging, but at others

they were considered too easy or too difficult. One way ESL was perceived as difficult

was when students first encountered the language in the beginning course, Level I,

especially when one was prohibited by the instructor to use a bilingual dictionary. Ahmed,

describes learning the language itself at first was his biggest challenge that he had to

overcome, having made him consider dropping out:

I was really stressed [and] bored because I couldn't communicate with people and even when I tried they didn't understand me so sometimes I wished that I didn't come to this country to study at all. I felt like I'm useless and worthless because I couldn't communicate 'cause language is a tool but you communicate with people express your feelings so if you cannot do that then you're like dead.

The other factor that students seemed to attribute to the difficulty of ESL was that they were learning a new language at their age. The difficulty for nontraditionally aged learners of English to struggle more may contribute to explaining their significantly lower GPAs in the first semester enrolled. However, only two of these students had a lower GPA in their first and were never below a 3.00. One graduate, Jasmyn, noted that "The ESL was challenge more than the degree," implying that once students can overcome the initial challenge with learning English as a new language, college will become easier.

Conversely, some students attributed their ease in ESL to their experience using the language. Mike felt that having ESL previously in high school was helpful, as did Fauzia for having been in the US for seventeen years. Three others talked about how English for them has gotten easier over the years as they have improved.

Another finding that has program implications is that there was one course, ESL Writing III (W3), that seemed to be a potential cause to withdraw. W3 is a high-intermediate writing course with an intensive grammar component which focuses on perfect tenses, modal auxiliaries, and clause structures. Three students talked about W3 as their hardest course where one almost dropped out as I recall at the time. The students complained that although they wanted to learn the grammar, there was too much information to be covered in a fifteen week semester, and there were some instructional

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approaches by various teachers that did not seem conducive for learning the material. Christie (South Korea, 20) said that in her section of W3, many students dropped out and she herself almost dropped the course. When comparing to ESL IV she exclaimed, "it's too much work. I mean ESL four was definitely much more work but at least I got covered." The words "I got covered" denotes that the challenge in ESL IV can be distinguished from W3 since she felt that she was learning instead of being turned off by the approach in W3 to give a lot of material without enough explanation where students may have had to memorize rather than apply their knowledge.

In contrast, level IV was discussed in mixed terms, patterned around certain instructors. This course is the most advanced level in the program and focuses on academic reading and writing with a purpose to prepare students for college English and other content courses. Four recent program completers felt it was an engaging challenge without the criticism attached to W3 when Christina talked about competition in the class which she felt helped her as she states, "because I feel like I gotta study, I have to make it." However, others with different instructors noted and even criticized a lack of challenge in ESL IV for not preparing students well enough for content courses.

Remedial courses.

Eight out of the twenty-eight participants had taken remedial courses in math, reading, or writing. Overall the math courses were found by all who took them to be either useful or easy in an unproblematic way as they tended to be a review for nontraditionally aged learners or a way to fill gaps in math skills. However, of the six who took remedial reading or writing, students faced some struggles which may have been contributing factors in two students' dropout.

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The two students who took remedial reading and writing and subsequently dropped out both talk in terms of not belonging either there or in ESL due to difficulty levels and identity perceptions. Both Donna and Nicole (Domincan Republic, 22) had arrived to the US in their latter years of high school and seemed to lack awareness of their own capabilities and options. Donna recalls the difficulty of a remedial course: "When I start the classes, they put me in critical reading and I felt like I wasn't supposed to be there because there was a lot I need to learn, so somebody told me to come to ESL, so I dropped it so I could come to the ESL classes." One can see how she speaks as though none of the decision was up to her. Bunch and Panayotova (2009) argue that colleges need to make policies clearer to students since their placement can adversely affect them, and that colleges should guide them in these decisions. Later when Donna came to ESL, she felt it was too easy: "I remember I used to come to class, [ESL] reading. I used to feel so bad and I felt like I'm not supposed to be here." She uses the same words to describe both courses making her feel she is not supposed to be there, as if she did not belong in either place. She also talked about having to overcome the challenge from her sisters, who were younger and had had more years of high school in the U.S., labeling her as "dumb" for being in ESL.

Nicole had conflicting feelings about ESL and remedial courses as well. When I asked her directly whether language was a challenge she stated, "no 'cause when I came here I already know English. I just don't like to talk a lot." And yet when discussing her challenges in Critical Reading and whether others had the same challenges, she responded, "I mean it depends how you know English. For me it was difficult because the vocabulary. I didn't know the words." Another striking element of Nicole's account is

when she states, "I got two years already so if I keep going, I know that I can finish school." But in her two years, she had not earned any credits that could be applied to a degree. Like Donna, Nicole does not seem to feel like she fits in academically at the school and exhibits a similar lack of awareness of herself in relation to the college. The high dropout risk for students needing to take remedial courses has been documented by Kolajo (2004) in terms of the time they consume. Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, and Thomas-Spiegel (2005) have noted that students in developmental tracks continue at a disadvantage: "Though some do progress to college-applicable coursework, they perform noticeably less well once there" (p. 10). Holton (2009) has discussed designing a course especially to meet the needs of generation 1.5 students. But little empirical research has been done on students' struggle between ESL and remedial courses.

However, some studies show that students taking remedial courses are actually more engaged (Noel, 2006). Four students were able to overcome some of the same struggles when having to take ESL *and* remedial courses. Some simply felt ESL was basic and that remedial was more helpful in preparing students for college courses. Christie talked more about her internal conflict when her remedial instructors referred her to ESL as she had thought her English was not a *problem*. She had been an international exchange student at various North American high schools without ever attending an ESL program. Her conflict was compounded when her strong verbal abilities aroused suspicion from peers and instructors in the ESL program. She describes this time when she started ESL as her biggest challenge:

> It was hard 'cause some people in my class were from same country and they are
> like "oh" you know "you are good at speaking English so you're probably good at

everything" [*mockingly*]. And then when they get better grade, they come to me

and then they're like "oh," you know what I mean? And then they like "oh maybe

she's not good at English." It just like really disappoint me. Plus I feel like

sometimes according to teacher they may think like "oh she acts like she knows

everything" but it's not. I mean I know some thing, like sometimes I get kind of

bored 'cause like I know what it is, not whole stuff but some stuff I already know.

Like findings in Harklau (2000) she was bored in classes where the curriculum did not

seem to suit her, making her instructors perceive her negatively. Additionally, she talks of

peers almost mocking her lack of grammatical ability despite her advanced speaking

capability. But once she overcame these struggles by working with a tutor and being

inspired to compete with her classmates, she talks about ESL IV as helpful in improving

her academic writing.

Overall it appears that the situations surrounding the taking of remedial math or

reading/writing skills differed. Math was perceived as helpful for skills or review. For

some the threshold between ESL and remedial reading or writing, however, played into

the identities as ELLs, possibly being a contributing factor to leaving.

Content courses.

When asked whether their courses were academically challenging, students would

often depict their experience as difficult, mostly due to linguistic challenges. Diana

asserts, "if I would have a chance to take the class in Spanish, I never gonna have any

trouble. I'm been doing so good in English, and I think I will do a wonderful in my

language." Yet only two out of the six students who dropped out after ESL talk about

academic challenges in content courses. Interestingly, only one, Aylin who graduated,

actually addressed a CCSSE category of having to apply judgment and not just memorizing in the nursing program, which she found to be a struggle: "It wasn't like solid information that you can look at it, and there wasn't only one answer, so many answers. It took the critical thinking."

The most common challenge was writing for which five students, only one of whom had dropped out, commented upon. For example, Fauzia felt the demanding writing requirements made her early childhood education courses difficult, attributing it a "hundred percent" to having to do it in a second language. She represents it as enough of a challenge to make consider quitting.

Another challenge for six students, again only one of whom had dropped out, included specialized terminology in courses such as science and economics. In addition, three graduates talked about the extra time it takes for them to read content from their course work in their L2 as a difficulty, again reflective of other accounts of ELLs doing undergraduate work (Leki, 2007).

Taking tests presented another challenge for three students, two of whom had dropped out. Two attributed the difficulty to the fact that tests were timed. But for Donna the biggest academic challenge was passing exams in her biology class, which she did not attribute to having to do it in a second language, yet she was not sure what caused the difficulty. "I do everything but I still have problem passing the test. The test was so hard. I read the book and read the book and I take the test and it was really tough."

Another category that I included as part of academic challenge but that is not part of the CCSSE benchmark was teachers' teaching style, which no students who had dropped out complained about.

For me it depends on teacher's teaching style if I like it or not. Biology I hated

because biology two professor just speak speak speak. He never use blackboard

so I'm like what is that word? And when he write down the vocabulary, his

spelling wrong so when I type in dictionary it didn't come up.

It seems the professor is not aware of the accommodations content instructors can make

to alleviate the problem of making lectures difficult for ELLs to follow, such as speaking

at a slower pace and utilizing the board. Not only style but perceptions of students as

NNSs can contribute to academic challenge. Aylin talks about her challenge with

instructors in the practical training for her nursing courses:

Especially in clinical if you are a foreigner, it puts you into more pressure because

you have to prove yourself, you are not just a foreigner, you don't know anything

about it, but you are as good as the other students, you are equal to them, you

share the same knowledge.

In contrast, the lack of academic challenge in content courses was certainly not

discussed as a problem the way engagement theory suggests. Eight students, most of

whom had not dropped out, even seemed to appreciate courses that were less challenging,

which tended to be ones that focus less on reading and writing like math and music. One

student, Abdullah (Yemen, 29) even preferred easier courses stating that they "give me

more time to focus on the more challenging courses."

Four students who transferred to four-year institutions made comparisons to their

academic challenge at EPCC. Ahmed, Takuji (Japan, 27), and Hope (Thailand, 21) found

the courses at their universities more difficult, which they attribute mostly to the fact that

they are at a third-year level. Ahmed felt his university professors rushed through

material which differed from the community college where he felt "they try to make sure that you understand everything they're saying. They're not rushing." Abdullah has not experienced a difference between his new university and EPCC, attributing it to the fact that "it depends like how the teacher is nice or bad or something."

Too much challenge was discussed by students as an impediment to success, which has also been noted by Tinto (1993) in terms of a threshold between an engaging challenge and an overwhelming one. Thus I compared GPAs among the groups of interviewees to see how academic success and retention are related. As one had seen in Table 7.1, seven out of the nine students who left college had received "A" and "B" grades, implying they left for reasons other than excessive academic challenge. Donna and Cynthia were the ones who struggled with both external factors and finding the middle ground in academic challenge between ESL and remedial courses. These proportions liken to CCSR results where a majority of students claim to leave due to external factors, but that there is a handful (22%) whose struggle with academic work would influence their departure from college.

Looking at students who persisted at the college, transferred to other institutions, and graduated, the trend indicates that students with marginal "C" grades were the students who also took remedial courses but were able to overcome academic challenge and under preparedness: Christie, Thanh, Takuji, and Kyoko. The lowest grade average was for Hai who made a lateral transfer to be closer to his family. He had talked about not doing homework, not seeking help, and generally not investing effort into his studies, perhaps knowing that he would be starting over at the next college, but again alluding to the lack of data that exist on students making lateral transfers (Bahr, 2009).

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Overall in this benchmark it seems students appreciate a challenge if they can succeed at it and learn from it, but do not seem to mind lack of challenge except in ESL courses where a stigma may be attached or where they feel they need better preparation for college-level work. We can see through the various courses where students experienced challenges, seldom did they resemble items from the benchmark such as higher order thinking skills of analyzing, synthesizing, or applying new concepts. Instead, they often presented challenges due to linguistic demands of writing, test-taking, and learning new vocabulary. In addition, there were cases where the quality of the instruction had an effect on engaging students in content and ESL courses which the CCSR survey omits. We now turn to two benchmarks that illustrate some ways that enabled persisting students to continue.

Support for Learners

From the themes in the support for learners benchmark, many items have been mentioned previously. For example, students made quite clear their satisfaction or disappointment regarding qualifying for financial aid earlier in this chapter. As for encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds and providing the support they need to thrive socially, findings in the active and collaborative learning benchmark illustrated gaps in this area, despite the fact that students rated the college as overall supportive on survey findings. There were no mentions of the college helping students cope with nonacademic responsibilities or with career counseling services. General feelings that they get support from the college, tutors, and other staff came out in their responses although the support of tutors will be explored in the student effort benchmark which is where CCSSE placed that item.

One student who had dropped out talked about the college as being like a family where "everybody was always very helpful" (Clarissa). Two others, who were graduates, talked about college staff as their supportive friends. Jasmyn elaborates, "They help me to keep going. Every time I feel so frustrated I wanna quit, I just call them or I come here [*ESL department*] and keep help me and let me see the whole picture."

Some students mentioned me in my role in the ESL department, only two of whom had dropped out. Two international students, one who was persisting and one who graduated, noted the support of the international student office. Abdullah states, "they help us like how to prepare for our papers get visa and how to live comfortable on the college," a service which Kyoko noted was not available twenty years ago when she first arrived as an international student when she was dropped off at the dormitory without directions about how to obtain food or enroll in classes. Ana also noted that the secretary to one of the advisors is helpful when the advisor is busy. These findings may give some explanation on the CCSSE finding the ELLs had more orientation than non-ELLs.

One student who dropped out and one who graduated extolled appreciation for their academic advisors. Margarita called her major advisor a nice guy and helpful for finishing her degree. Diana used advising services from two bilingual counselors who not only helped with course choices but "stood behind me, you know, let me know what I have to do when I'm not clear on something." This support may have assisted her retention until she had to wait to become accepted into the nursing program.

However, there were also some negative comments about staff and advisors, as well as a lack in advisement that I noticed during interviews. Some students mention simply not seeking an advisor. For example, Kyoko does not utilize support from staff

except to get a signature on a course registration form. And Tommy, although he is persisting, talked about his advisor being too busy to see him. In addition, earlier we saw that Donna did not fill out an appeal to request that her financial aid be reinstated. Likewise Mary may have been rejected for aid since she was young and assumed to be claimed by her parents as a dependant, but she seemed not to know why she did not qualify or, perhaps, that there is a procedure for becoming independent under the age of 24. These processes could have had a direct impact on the two who had dropped out. In addition Thanh could have filled out a graduation waiver for a math class that was not recommended in his major to graduate sooner. And there were some students who came from US high schools who did not seem to be aware of the options of taking ESL or remedial courses.

Students expressed a general feeling of support from the college which was manifested more in their comments about tutors, which actually falls in the student effort category explored below. This finding reinforces the notion that the distinction between student effort and support for learners on the survey is ambiguous as ELLs scored highest in the benchmark of support but not on the items within, yet scored low in student effort but significantly higher for receiving tutoring. In addition, despite their feelings of support, the college lacks proactively engaging ELLs where they could be made aware of what is negotiable in this system, another area that was not elicited on the survey.

Student Effort

The student effort benchmark items that were addressed in the interviews included seeking tutoring, preparing for class or completing assignments, and using skill or computer labs. However, other items that seem related to the benchmark but are not

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CCSSE items also came out in the interviews such as motivation or investment towards their goals and students' attempt to use English over their L1.

Lab resources were mentioned by only two participants. Genoveve, who was persisting at the college, felt the fifteen hours of required computerized language lab time was useful, stating that she learned a lot. Another student, Clarissa who dropped out, appreciated the lab software as well but added that she wished the vocabulary practice matched that in her text more precisely. Others mention coming to the lab only for tutoring assistance.

The predominant form of student effort found in the interviews was seeking support from tutors. There were three ESL tutors who worked over the course of time that many interviewees had been enrolled at EPCC, Geena, Antonio, and Nicholas, in addition to numerous content tutors in the learning center. As briefly noted in the introduction, tutors are hired and trained by the college. While there are some full time coordinators of tutoring services, tutors tend to be part time, hold at least a bachelor degree, and are generally not instructors at the college. There are also some peer tutors whose qualification is to have completed the course they tutor with a high grade. Students may receive one hour of free one-on-one tutoring per week that may be on a walk-in basis or by appointment.

Twenty-three out of the twenty-eight participants mention using tutoring services. Of the five who did not, only one had dropped out. One persists with her own extra effort, two state that they do not need help, and one seeks help from friends. In addition, two of these five recall negative experiences with tutors. Sophia recounted the only time she sought tutoring where they did not seem to agree about the content of her assignment that

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was about her country: "I made topic about Ukraine but we have difference vision about it. I grow up in the Ukraine and I know this is my vision but my tutor he understand little difference about this." Aside from these students, there was one other complaint by a student who would seek tutoring but felt that at times their perceptions about her accent interfered with her trying to procure assistance: "I looking for help in the [science] lab and sometime people can no understand what you say. I was working so hard make somebody understand me."

However, the trend was that an overwhelming majority of students from every group would seek tutoring and praise it. Students would generally visit the ESL tutors for ESL course homework in addition to grammar and writing from their content courses, while they would go to the learning center for assistance on specific course content. One graduate, Ana, noted that Geena would even help for course content other than ESL: "She can do everything like science and she never give up like chemistry class and chemistry paper she's like oh what is this? And she doesn't change whole sentence so doesn't sound like American English but grammar is perfect." Unlike the descriptions of the interactions with their teachers, those of the tutors were that they gave more step-by-step direction, as we saw when students compared tutors to student faculty interaction above, as well as in the following:

> Some professor provide you that like after class or meet him like before class at his office and stuff, and like something you don't understand during the lecture you ask him after class. But tutors is the best. You could go there twice a week any subject, anything you don't really understand come there. You prepare, you show to them that you try and they gonna help you out, give you clear answer.

Three students, one of whom had dropped out, attributed overcoming their linguistic challenges to working with a tutor. Four others suggested that students should see a tutor in order to succeed at the college, all of whom were graduates or persisters. In addition, two said they would not have persisted and graduated without the assistance of tutors. It appears then that tutoring assists retention, but it is not enough for everyone. However, even though tutoring may not prevent drop out, it may have a positive effect on students while in classes as seven of the nine who dropped out did so while they had "A" or "B" grade averages. The two who had "C" averages and low completion rates, Donna and Nicole, also mentioned tutoring but whatever support they received must not have been sufficient to overcome their academic abilities and lack of awareness of their capabilities.

Preparing for class and completing assignments was another dominant theme that students attributed to completing the ESL program, persisting, graduating, or transferring. Some talked about putting more effort into courses than they would if studying in their L1 or than NSs would, again a common phenomenon when studying in a second language (Leki, 2007). Takuji states, "I take maybe five times longer to read English compared to my language." A couple mentioned the extra effort they had to invest to change what could be considered fossilization in speech. Adriana notes, "You need more time to start to teach your mind to change a lot of things because when we start to learn English we always talk in the present time. In this class you have to start to use the three verbs in different forms, so that's need times." Students would also advise other ELLs to invest in student effort, most of whom were graduates. Suggestions in this category included following the teacher, doing homework, trying hard, reading, talking, practicing,

doing whatever one can to make it, being dedicated, studying, taking it seriously, focusing, not thinking you know everything, and simply continuing.

Another area that students discussed as an important way to succeed was not to use their first language. While this is not a category in the student effort or any other benchmark, it seemed related to student effort since it is an action they would do on their own much like reading out of class assignments which is an item in the student effort benchmark. Seven stated that ELLs should not use their L1 in order to succeed at college, four of whom had dropped out. However in other accounts, some students made mention of the usefulness of bilingual resources as helpful to their success, such as transfer students Abdullah and Ahmed who had found it so difficult in the beginning with no English knowledge to have a bilingual tutor and having wished to be able to use a bilingual dictionary. The suggestions possibly reflected dominant discourse of society's expectation of how to learn a language, evident when one student who dropped out stated, "and I just think people needs to learn because we are in America like everybody says you know? 'You are in America you speak English' so I guess then that's what we need to do." This stance did not indicate a dropout pattern as it crossed all groups, implying that use of L1 or L2 does not seem to actually affect retention.

A final item that was not in this benchmark but seemed relevant was having motivation toward a goal as helpful to completing that goal. Many successful students talk about achieving their goals with their own effort because of their desire. At the same time, some students attribute their dropout to not having enough desire to persist, regardless of their obstacles.

Four students either stated or implied that they graduated from college due to a feeling that it was the best, the only, or the expected path for them to take. Students would talk about it as their natural trajectory as Margarita did: "I knew I was gonna graduate, like I was always going to graduate. I still want to get my bachelor. This is going to be my last semester and then I'll transfer to university in [another state]." Reasons would stem from parental influence or fearing the alternative of working in manual labor jobs.

Most graduates talk about having their goal as the way to succeed. Jasmyn had originally only wanted ESL but "when I find myself I'm doing well, I stretch my goal. I now need a certificate or I need something to get me out of the house to find work with it." Now her advice to reach that goal is, "Focusing on your goal. Of course they have to have a goal first and they need to keep focusing. There is a lot interruption distraction, circumstance, other students, sometimes teachers they offer a challenge. They just keep focusing." Adriana adds that this focus helps her overcome the external obstacles:

> I think the difference is because I want to continue because I think when you want something, you try to do. For example, right now in my work they decide to pay us just only thirty two hours. They take out one day off and they increase the insurance, so that's gonna be a nice excuse to say I can't continue.

Here she acknowledges the ease to quit and the fear of financial constraints, but asserts that somehow people find the means to continue if it is what they want.

Some students, like Jasmyn above, had not had college as a goal but it became a goal for them upon success in the ESL program. Adriana captures this pivotal moment regarding her goal transformation: "When I finish ESL I say I cannot stop here. That's

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not it. There's more in front, so I want to continue with medical assistant and English one and English two." These cases of students' goals broadening provides counter evidence to the theory that community colleges provide environments where students "cool out" or lessen their goals from for example transferring to acquiring a nonacademic certificate (Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, & Spiegel, 2005).

Other students who dropped out, like Clarissa, say their lack of goal may be at hand. Even though her job was a cause for her to stop, she feels her ultimate challenge to continuing at the college is herself: "I think the biggest challenge maybe is *me* because when you wanna do something you put in your mind. You find a way to do that. Maybe I'm not ready to do. It's not the school or the course I think it's me."

To conclude student effort, students were most engaged in tutoring even though it was framed by them as a type of support. They also perceive a high amount of their own effort that is more than native speakers since they are studying in their L2, even though the survey did not capture a difference here. Some feel they should not use their L1 in order to become more successful even though it did not actually seem related to retention based on the groups who responded this way, and may stem from internalizing dominant views of how one is to learn English. Their attribution to motivation in the success of achieving their goals or as a need to return to college seems to be a driving force behind their effort. In their descriptions one can see that they discuss their internal processes as a push towards their engagement. Conversely, students who dropped out seemed to feel as though they were not motivated enough to persist through their obstacles.

Concluding Remarks on ELL Engagement

Overall, it appears that when it comes to engagement, ELLs seem vulnerable to linguistic obstacles reading and writing, concerns about their oral proficiency that faculty and peers may perceive as deficient, and gaps in advising as they do not seem to be aware of college processes that directly affect them. These findings crossed all groups. In active and collaborative learning, students felt ashamed of their accents when speaking in class and where they felt NSs would resist talking to them. Student faculty interaction is commensurate with survey findings where students do not engage in dialog with instructors, nor instructors with them. Linguisitc challenges were a particular factor in academic challenge making reading and writing in content courses quite difficult. The survey had only a few items that aimed to seek excessive challenge which seemed at least as important to impact engagement as courses not being challenging enough. Student identity seemed also a factor in this benchmark for two students who had spent some time in high school and seemed academically underprepared felt ESL was too easy and remedial courses too difficult, again alluding to insufficient advising and placement guidance. ESL courses were depicted as difficult at first especially for nontraditionally aged students. This may partly explain the findings in retention data that older learners earn lower GPAs in their first semester and that students who begin college in lower levels do not complete the ESL program as much as those in higher levels. Once students surpassed the difficulty in ESL, they felt content courses were easier. There were also some cases where a single course could influence withdrawal or even dropout if it was not engaging or too challenging. Support for learners was the highest scoring benchmark on the survey, yet there were cases where this support fell short in interviews when

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students did not know about their options nor about applying for waivers that could have saved them time and money. Finally, there was a great deal of attribution of student success to their own student effort, particularly regarding tutoring. These results further show the ambiguity between the benchmarks of student effort and support for learners.

General Discussion

Overall, the interviews supported and explained some of the findings from previous chapters, in addition to raising new questions about retention and engagement. First, the dominant causes for departure that students gave are lack of finances, full time work, and family responsibilities, just as they were on the surveys. Likewise some seemed to leave due to being academically underprepared as on the survey. Resembling those in retention and survey data, students generally left college while their GPAs were high, either "A" or "B" grades. The handful of students with "C" or lower grades struggled with academic challenge, most having to take additional remedial reading and writing courses.

There was also some explanation of nontraditionally aged students being at more risk of persisting fewer semesters, earning lower GPA's in the first semester, and graduating less. Their experiences did not seem markedly unique, but rather they seemed to have more of a chance to face more of the three main obstacles. For example, nontraditionally aged students had to take remedial math since it had been a while since they had taken math courses, adding more time in school for a group that already feels the pressure of time to complete (Kolajo, 2004). Again, students did not frame this as a cause for leaving, but it could be a factor for other students not represented in the interviews. They also talked about struggling with studying English at their age.

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In addition, students of all ages who began in the lower levels of ESL also felt the task of learning academic English was a daunting one, which could explain their lower likelihood of completing the program as found in retention results. However, there were no patterns that could offer an explanation for the finding that Hispanic residents earn lower initial GPAs.

These findings could appear to offer some explanation as to why ELLs tend to perform well but have such a high dropout rate in the retention data. However, what the survey did not capture and what the analyses of the interviews exposed were additional implicit factors that holds the college more responsible. Students across all groups of various college trajectories were not aware of important procedural knowledge. Some students were unaware of waivers that may have aided in getting approval for financial aid, for using a course they had taken for graduation, for not being aware of another course they needed to graduate, for thinking one has to graduate before applying for transfer, and for transferring before graduating due to misinformation when graduation at the community college could have facilitated the transfer of more credits.

Findings on engagement also problematize overall high benchmark scores of ELLs. On the survey ELLs rated the support they engaged in high while being significantly more satisfied with advising than nonELLs. However, as noted above, there were times when that support fell short which the students had not been aware of in terms of advising. [awk] There are other cases where the survey did not pick up on instances of the college not engaging students. Teacher styles where students felt bored, where instructors did not make accommodations for ELLs by not writing on the board or allowing extra time on a test, where instructors overwhelmed students or did not push

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them enough to prepare them for their next courses, where student faculty interaction was unidirectional from instructor to student, and where some were denied the use of their L1 at a time when they felt their inability to express themselves made them feel like they were completely worthless, were also expressed by students. Some of these findings point to the climate at the college where the status of being an ELL is not valued. Students expressed that their English is a deficit rather than a resource (Ruiz, 1984). For instance, students felt as though their pronunciation was a problem in class discussion and small groups, and that nonELLs would ignore them. Only one student talked about refusing to care when she was not accepted by others at the college. ELLs would also accept all the responsibility of their not succeeding by talking about their external factors as obstacles, their lack of motivation, and their use of L1 instead of L2. The implications of these findings will be discussed in chapter 8 which will conclude this study.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will revisit the overall findings of the study, the contribution the study makes to the body of literature presented in the review of literature in chapter 2, the practical implications of the findings, and implications for further research in the area of retention and engagement of ELLs in community colleges.

The purpose of this study was to reduce the gap in research on retention of students who begin in ESL courses, and to find out if there is a connection between their retention and engagement as there has been for other students in the literature. Previous retention literature had looked at lack of student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993) as well as race and ethnicity (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2006; Lewis & Middleton, 2003; Lujan, Gallegos, & Harbour, 2003), remedial education (Kolajo, 2004; Noel, 2006), and obstacles to engagement and enrollment (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2005; Schmid & Abell, 2003; Tovar & Simon, 2006), age (Crawford Sorey & Harris Duggan, 2008) and socioeconomic status (Alford, 2000; Dowd & Melguizo, 2008). Only one study was on ELL retention (Belcher, 1988), but other ELL research implied that engagement is a factor in persistence in terms of active and collaborative learning (Leki, 2001), student faculty interaction (Curry, 2001; Song, 2006b), academic challenge (Leki, 2007), support for learners (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1998; Song, 2006a), and student effort (Leki, 2007). Specifically, the study sought to answer the overarching question "What are the retention patterns for ELLs at a community college, especially considering their demographic variables, and is there a relationship between retention and engagement for ELLs?"

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What Did We Find?

By and large ELLs perform well and are generally engaged while they are enrolled, but they do not complete their programs as expected. Nontraditionally aged ELLs seem to struggle the most. Students attribute departure to three main obstacles of lack of finances, full time employment, and family obligations. However, there are other more implicit factors of linguistic challenges, the status of being an ELL at the college, and ELLs' lack of procedural knowledge at play that challenge findings of student reasons for leaving and that their engagement scores were overall high.

The most striking observation among these data is that on average ELLs appear to perform well in terms of their GPAs and engagement on campus, but have rather low program completion and graduation rates. Their engagement benchmark score means are higher than those of students in community colleges across the nation. The actual means of their GPAs were well above 2.00 which is the minimum requirement to graduate and even to transfer to any of the universities in the state system of higher education if transferring associate degrees in particular majors. All students report grades that would be 2.00 or above on the survey as well. Their GPAs were also significantly higher than a sample of non-ELLs that matched in enrollment status, age, and race/ethnicity. It is possible that their high GPAs are a result of their overall high engagement.

However, as found from student transcripts, only 43% successfully exit the ESL program, either by completing or testing out. And a mere 12% graduate which is significantly lower than the college rate of 23%, as well as lower than the national rate of community college first-time freshmen at 25%. Likewise, on the survey only 38% would still be attending the college within the coming year. ELL persistence is a mean of only

1.13 additional fall semesters which would not give sufficient time to complete the ESL program let alone graduate in most cases. These findings are particularly concerning when the survey and interviews indicated that the vast majority of students have the goal to obtain an associate's degree. Unfortunately, goals were unknown for students in retention data. The number of students transferring was also unknown. Students indicated on the survey that 56% of them would leave the college in order to transfer, and in interviews there were cases where students transferred before obtaining an associate's degree. But there are reasons for dropout of college or early departure from programs, as well as for successful completion that were found.

One explanation for the high dropout rate is that there appeared to be certain groups of students with more risk for dropping out. First, nontraditionally aged ELLs had significantly lower first semester GPAs, persisted significantly fewer fall semesters, and were almost four times less likely to graduate. On the survey they also engaged in significantly less student faculty interaction. In interviews, age was expressed as a factor in pursuing long term goals of graduating or transferring, as well as a factor in fighting fossilization. Nontraditionally aged students also seemed to face more external obstacles to enrollment such as working full time and taking care of family members. On the plus side, older students who faced struggles with learning a new language conveyed that studying becomes easier beyond their initial entry in the ESL program.

Another group that presented high dropout risk in retention data was of students who began in lower levels of ESL as they were five times less likely to complete the ESL program. In interviews, students who started in lower levels would talk about learning English as overwhelming. Fortunately, like nontraditionally aged learners, they also

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noted that their studies would become easier with time and experience using English. In addition, it can be inferred that once students make it out of ESL, level is no longer the biggest factor. Instead, age becomes the significant factor inhibiting graduation. The third population that presented some risk was Hispanic residents as they had significantly lower GPAs in the first semester, yet no other significant differences were found. Interviews could not explain this finding.

There were also some differences among demographic groups shown in descriptive statistics that could indicate high risk. Although they were not subject to inferential tests, findings in the interviews added potency to them. Students who were eligible for Pell had higher GPAs, persisted more fall semesters, completed the program more, and graduated more than students who were not eligible. Even though one might have expected eligible students not to perform as well given that eligibility could be an indication of economically disadvantaged students, findings in interviews showed a depiction of lack of eligibility as a serious problem. Conversely, those who qualified for financial aid seem to attribute it to their success in persisting and graduating even when it did not cover all expenses. Unfortunately, there were not enough Pell students to put in regressions, so significant differences are unknown. In addition, when regressions were conducted on age, enrollment status, and Hispanic residency status, these factors accounted for a very small variance. This implies that there are other factors at hand that affect enrollment and achievement, such as Pell eligibility for which there were few cases, or first generation college status and generation 1.5 status for which there was no information on the college record system.

Another explanation for ELL high dropout rate that students expressed is facing external obstacles that present risk. The three main obstacles included lack of finances, full time employment, and family obligations. In addition, one student was waiting to be accepted in a competitive nursing program and two students seemed to have too much academic challenge. Lack of finances was represented as the biggest obstacle on the survey where 51% of students claimed they would not return in the next academic year because of this factor. Interviews corroborated this finding when lack of finances was represented as a decisive factor on not returning. We also saw that Pell eligible students outperformed ineligible students. Full time employment seemed to be the next most influential factor on retention. On the survey 33% of students would not return due to full time employment and in interviews there was a distinct pattern of students who dropped out having full time jobs and graduates having no job or only part time jobs. While only one student directly attributed dropping out to her employment, others who dropped out talked about the added strain full time work presented, taking valuable time away from studying and attention in class. Having family obligations was a third influential factor where 36% claimed they would not return due to caring for dependants. Yet 89% reported feeling support from their families. These two facets of family life, support and demand, were also discussed in interviews.

One less prevalent obstacle but with a potentially large impact is academic under-preparedness that was evidenced in a number of ways. In the retention data, students who did not graduate had significantly lower GPAs than those who graduated. On the survey there were cases of students who would not return due to feeling academically unprepared (22%). In interviews, there were two cases for whom excessive academic

challenge was a factor especially when compounded with work and family. One had a direct impact when her academic progress resulted in her financial aid cancellation.

Yet an important finding from the interviews is that some students are able to overcome obstacles that influence dropout, implying that it is not as simple as the presence or absence of those obstacles. There were two cases in interviews of students persisting despite the multiple challenges of full time work and family obligations, by sacrificing time with their families and their sleep. The utilization of family to negotiate more time devoted to homework made me consider the finding on surveys where 89% of ELLs reported that they felt supported by their families of attending the college. Some students also overcame the struggle between ESL and remedial course, often by seeking tutor support.

There are also implicit risk factors that came out in interviews and deserve attention such as linguistic challenges, the status of ELLs at the college, and ELLs apparent lack of procedural knowledge. While not stated as having a direct impact on retention, students' feelings about their ELL status affected all students in the interviews. For example, students would talk about their reluctance to participate in class due to their feelings of embarrassment about their pronunciation. This finding could explain the finding that ELLs participated in class significantly less that non-ELLs on the survey. It was also mentioned that ELLs felt NS would ignore them because of their accents. The fact that these difficulties were experienced by students who dropped out and by those who succeeded in persisting, graduating, or transferring shows that these challenges can be overcome. Some talked in terms of forcing themselves to participate because they understood that it was an expected part of a course. However, these findings suggest that

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ELLs are not valued on campus, and the danger of this campus climate may impact a students' perseverance. Not every student was strong enough to consciously reject the dominant view of them as inferior.

Linguistic challenges in the academic challenge benchmark, however, could have had more detrimental effects. One area in academic challenge had to do with taking remedial courses of which ELLs took significantly more than non-ELLs. As we saw above, some students were able to overcome challenges of having to take remedial courses. Remedial math courses were discussed as especially helpful. But for the two who struggled between ESL and Critical Reading, when added to the factors of work and family obligations, they were not able to persist. There were cases when placement and advising at the college were questioned as students did not seem to be aware of their choices between ESL and remedial reading and writing courses and did not feel like they fit in either place.

Another benchmark item that was prominent was lack of student faculty interaction. Surveys and interviews show ELLs depicting their interactions as positive but unidirectional from faculty to student rather than dialogic. While students did not offer reasons for the lack of interaction with faculty, there were cases where ELLs talked about instructors not listening to them. There was also no pattern in enrollments as the finding crossed all groups of students. It is possible, however, that with more interactions with faculty students could gain more procedural knowledge as they did during interviews with me.

This leads us to a third implicit risk factor of students' lack of procedural knowledge that could have assisted students in navigating the college system. In fact, on

the survey ELLs report significantly higher general support for learners from the college, significantly more satisfaction with advising, and significantly more participation in college orientation. Students did not realize until interviews that there were procedures that could have aided in enrollment, graduation, and reinstatement of financial aid. In the case of two students, this could be having a direct impact where neither knew that they could apply for a waiver to have aid reinstated. The impact could have been more widespread had some students not had other support systems such as being able to live with their parents. The factor of not knowing pertinent information due to inadequate advising may have affected students in their attempt to transfer, two who could have transferred more credit and another who thought he should wait to transfer until he graduated.

Just as important as knowing the reasons for dropout is discovering the paths to success. We saw above when discussing risk factors that successful students would not face as many, but even more compelling is that some could overcome them by making sacrifices and negotiating with family members. In addition, seeking professional tutoring in the college learning and ESL centers seemed to be a key factor in success. ELLs participated in significantly more tutoring than the matched sample of non-ELLs, who scored lower than nation in the support for learners benchmark. Perhaps this explains the significantly higher GPAs of ELLs over non-ELLs in the retention data, even in their final fall semesters. Even though tutoring comes under the student effort benchmark, students always associated tutoring with support from the college in interviews.

Successful students also attribute their success to their own extra efforts when discussed in interviews. The survey did not capture this finding in terms of ELLs putting

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forth more effort than non-ELLs. But in interviews ELLs felt they invested more effort

due to their having to do academic work in their L2 which required more time than if

they did it in their L1. Students who had used English for some time also talked in ways

that emphasized the effort it took to reverse the effects of fossilization. Some felt the use

of their L1 was problematic, but there was no apparent relationship to enrollment. There

was a distinction in the way successful students talked about their motivation toward their

educational goal as the driving force of their success and the way students who dropped

out felt they lacked the motivation to continue. Next we will explore the implications of

all of these findings to college practice.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

An integral part of Astin's (1985) theory is the implications of retention research

for implementing changes to increase student engagement, and thereby increasing

retention. The final postulate reads, "The effectiveness of any educational policy or

practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student

involvement" (Astin, 1985, pp. 135-136). He also calls on college faculty and staff to

actively engage learners. As mentioned in the theoretical framework in chapter 3, there

are implications that reach program, individual college, and colleges in general which

Tinto (1993) had noted when he synthesized retention studies. We turn to these aspects in

implications now.

ESL Program

Some findings that have implications for ESL programs are drawn on results that

the curriculum in certain courses may be overwhelming or under challenging, as found in

Curry (2001) and Song (2006a), but that students feel a great deal of support from the

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ESL department. Retention data showed that less than half of students who begin in ESL do not complete the program and even fewer graduate. While the figures were higher than for Belcher (1988) whose research site was an ESL program she acknowledged was in need of curriculum changes, the figures at EPCC could also be improved.

Some courses were problematic enough to cause dropout. ESL Writing III, an intensive grammar course that centers on clause-level structures, seemed to have too much content for one semester. ESL IV, the final course in the ESL sequence designed to prepare students for regular college work, was at times perceived as not bridging to content courses well enough for students to feel academically prepared. Accounts in interviews also indicated that teaching approaches could also be to blame. Level I was also indicated as extremely daunting for two learners who had arrived late in the semester and felt they were denied access to bilingual resources which they feel would have helped them. Use of L1 and L2 was often a concern for students and should be considered in curriculum and teaching methodologies given individual cases. There is also a perception of students in lower levels not performing well even though no significant differences were found in their GPAs. Students who persist and graduate beyond the lower levels, however, note that academic work becomes easier with time and experience. Implications for the program are to share with students that the work does become easier. Like Belcher's (1988) study, this type of research can highlight specific areas that programs can address to improve retention.

Another area for ESL program implications regards early departure from the program even when students remain enrolled elsewhere. Two students skipped the final level of ESL for different reasons: one to seek a greater challenge which she felt English I

would give her, and the other to move fast feeling the pressure of time to complete all of his goals. One did not face challenges from the move, whereas the other did when he had to withdraw from English I and struggled to find his major advisor. However, he managed to continue persisting at the college. Despite the fact that international students appear to outperform residents in terms of persisting, graduating, and earning higher GPAs, it may be worthwhile to consider whether there is a way to retain students who seem to need linguistic support when students feel pressure to move quickly through too many ESL courses which can interfere with students feeling the pressure to finish in a given amount of time.

College

There were implications for the individual college and community colleges in general as well. Members of the college community can use findings to improve communication between the students and faculty and staff with more outreach efforts by the latter. In addition, attention to placement in remedial education and ELLs is warranted.

The stories of student success such as those we saw in chapter 7 can aid staff to make recommendations to students experiencing some of the same major obstacles of lack of finances, work, and family obligations. Given that lack of finances is perceived as a decisive impact on enrollment and affected most persistence on survey, community colleges must find additional ways to fund students. One way is to assist with the process of receiving and maintaining financial aid for students, and particularly ELLs who may not be aware of waivers or other crucial procedural knowledge.

Faculty and staff can also attempt to raise awareness in students that full time work, especially when it is not related to a student's program, definitively interferes with studies. When there is not an option to reduce work hours to part time, faculty and staff can share with students that others have overcome this challenge by negotiating their obstacles if in fact they want to invest in school. In addition, perhaps successful students who talk about their motivation and enthusiasm to their goals could be asked to talk with or mentor students who are facing such obstacles. Colleges should be made aware of these factors that present high risk and enable a system where students with such risks can be identified and mentored. Perhaps work/study positions could be created for second year students to be mentors for incoming first time freshmen.

Then, regarding remedial coursework, while math was not perceived as an obstacle, additional courses will add more time to the academic journey. Time saving efforts into preparing students for academic math should be investigated. As for remedial reading and writing, there was a split in students finding them helpful or too challenging. Again staff should be aware of the complexities of learners' academic needs and advise them accordingly with the flexibility to allow for changes and options (Bunch & Panayotova, 2009).

The fact that students who entered the ESL program in the third and fourth level having better graduation rates suggests that taking only one or two extra semesters of ESL course work does not seem to be a particular obstacle to graduation. On the other hand, beginning in the first and second level of ESL reduces chances for completing the ESL program and thus affects their chances of graduation.

Advising also seemed to be lacking especially when ELLs were in their programs of study. Advice about waivers to save students time and money could have been helpful. For example, students seemed unaware of procedures and waivers for reinstating financial aid. There were also cases where the transfer process could have been communicated to students more effectively, possibly saving students more time and financial resources. Time is already a limited resource for ELLs who perceive that they invest more time studying than they would in their L1 or than native speakers would. Overall, ELLs appear to have similar struggles as first generation college students would where they are unaware of a college system, not knowing which questions to ask or what is negotiable.

Another issue with even gathering research on students who drop out is their inaccessibility. As noted in the methods chapter, mail would get returned, phone numbers were disconnected, and reachable students were too busy to come in for the interview. An implication is to incorporate interview tactics such as those presented in this research at the point of exit to learn more about why students leave and see if they know the steps to come back so it could facilitate their return later.

One implication of the finding on support for learners perhaps is that overall services for ELLs could be a model for non-ELLs who match in demographic characteristics and may be more at risk, but that more investigation into engaging nontraditionally aged learners is needed especially when age is compounded with cultural differences that might inhibit adult ELLs from engaging with faculty.

Colleges should also review curriculum and teaching techniques, as well as placement policies especially for generation 1.5 students since concerns in these areas

could affect persistence negatively. However, the support that ELLs get from tutoring seems helpful and should be considered implementing at other colleges. At community colleges, faculty and staff should initiate engagement with students to insure advising with consideration that ELLs may not be aware of college procedures to overcome certain obstacles. In addition, they can keep good tracking systems of ELLs student progress past the ESL program, through their college enrollment, and beyond transfer.

In addition to having a better tracking system of where students go when they leave, it would be helpful to continue tracking student progress as they move on past EPCC. For example, maintaining contact with all of the transfer students could add to retention data on how ELLs persist beyond the community college. Perhaps of greater concern is the case of lateral transfer where Hai (Vietnam, 19) transferred from one community college to another. Cases such as these are not always viewed in the lens of retention (Bahr, 2009). Part of tracking students should also be having a systematic way to obtain ELLs' goals when they begin in academic ESL courses. In addition, there should be measures taken to see if students are actually first time freshmen even if the college attended was in another country.

An underlying theme with many of the above implications involves overall campus climate as it affects ELLs' perceptions of their own status. There are cases where ELLs felt their English was considered a deficit rather than a resource (Ruiz, 1984). For example, their feelings about their accent prevented them from participating in class discussions or interacting with peers. Yet there were cases when students felt as though they could participate in classes where their ideas were valued and where they did not feel judged. This implicates instructors as having an affect on students' perceiving

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themselves as legitimate members of a classroom. This climate needs to be addressed by the college. College administrators can give value to ELLs' perceptions of their language by implementing policies and trainings. In classroom observations, attention could be made to focus on the inclusiveness of ELLs in content courses. The college could also directly show the value of English as an additional language by allowing ESL course work to be used toward graduation, which it currently does not at EPCC.

I conclude this section on the implications of this study with questions that Astin initiated about how to increase student involvement: What can colleges do to inspire the kind of desire that the program completers, transfer students, and graduates in this study talk about? Is there anything a program or a college can do to decrease the likelihood that outside obstacles interfere with enrollment? Perhaps further inquiry can get us closer to an answer.

Suggestions for Future Research

There were several issues raised that had not been addressed by previous research and still need attention to gain better understanding.

One area of focus that would shed light both on ELLs and certain populations of non-ELLs is more information about the non-ELLs who match in demographics with the ELLs since they did not perform as well as ELLs in some cases or than the college and the nation in other cases. Is there something particular about this population that affects their persistence and engagement? Do they face similar obstacles as ELLs because of their ethnicities and ages for example yet lack the support that ELLs receive from the ESL and tutoring centers? Or were differences coincidental? More research is needed in this area.

More attention to retention of generation 1.5 students is needed. Students who came through US high schools at times face internal conflict about their English abilities compounded with students' and faculty's impressions of them, not unlike Harklau's (2000) depiction of instructors positioning students as "picking up bad habits" or boring them with curriculum designed for acculturating newcomers. While some students talked about their experience in high school as an advantage to gaining English, others pointed out what they felt were gaps in their literacy development.

This status once again raises the concern about better information-keeping systems at community colleges. It would be useful to solicit more information on students, not only on their goals and reasons for leaving, but on their educational backgrounds such as whether they attended US high schools. Another effect of community colleges being open admissions is that high school information is not required.

Another area of future research has to do with students at community colleges who attend with the hope that they will be admitted to a program with competitive admissions such as the nursing program at EPCC. This type of attrition seems particular to community colleges as four-year institutions probably would not have students attending before being accepted. At community colleges most majors have open admissions, and courses are open save for a few that have pretesting requirements, so students who are waiting to get into a competitive program may take the prerequisites and general education electives while they are waiting. Then when they are not accepted, they become "drop outs" in the database rather than as simply not being admitted by selective universities. This type of occurrence has not been represented in studies nor has it been

addressed in retention theory. Overall, there is much we do not know about where ELLs go when they leave college before completing ESL or content programs.

Suggestions can also be made concerning the use of CCSR survey data. Some categories seem to overlap. ELLs scored significantly higher in the support for learners benchmark but also in seeking more tutoring services which was part of the student effort benchmark. When students were asked the general question that had also been on the survey about whether they feel the college has supported them, they often generated responses about tutoring, showing that they see it as college support. Perhaps this mismatch stems from CCSSE being a derivative and questiona about support centers were added subsequently to try to make the survey more appropriate for community colleges. In addition, to follow Ignash's (1995) advice, since CCSSE has included the item that identifies ELLs, there should be questions that pertain to them such as whether any aspect of language or culture has a positive or negative impact on their engagement. This would add a quantitative program to interview findings that indeed ELLs' engagement was at times impeded by linguistic challenges or their status of being ELLs at the college. In addition, there could also be a parallel item to asking if the college promotes learning about students with different demographic background, but whether those with dominant characteristics have understanding of the student. The survey could also elicit not only whether or not they experienced risk factors but the quantity or intensity of those risk factors. For example, instead of asking whether or not students have dependants, it could ask how many dependants they have.

One of the benefits to multiple methods is that there is an opportunity for quantitative methods to inform qualitative and vice versa. Discovering from interviews

that some first-time freshmen had actually attended college previously reminds researchers that retention data is limited in representing reality. It is also important to keep in mind any time one is research community college settings is that some students merely "stop out," a practice unique to community colleges which allow breaks in enrollment when students need time or are overwhelmed by coursework. Conversely, there were cases of dropout due to academics as well as outside obstacles which can explain some of the variance found in the retention analyses. Future retention research should include this type of mixed methodology. Future research should also replicate the design of the present study but with the same populations in each set of data in order to directly correlate findings.

Conclusion

This study suggests that while overall achievement and engagement of ELLs at a community college appear higher than for non-ELLs, there are gaps and groups with high risks that influence their dropout which is also higher than the college as well as the nation. The triangulation of data using quantification of student records and surveys with qualitative interviews, helped illuminate trends and offer explanations for ELL enrollment, none of which could be accomplished with one part alone. But as suggested in the implications above, there is still so much that we do not know about where ELLs go when they do not complete ESL and college programs as implied by the high degree in variance that was not accounted for in the regressions. At the very least, we sketched a picture of factors in retention that have immediate implications for community colleges. At the most, it is hoped that this is the beginning of a research trend that includes ELLs in discussions of community college retention.

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APPENDIX A

Student Profile sheet preceding interviews (adapted from CCSSE toolkit, CCSSE, 2003a)

Student Information Sheet (all answers will be kept confidential) (current)

1. What is your gender?
☐ Male
☐ Female

2. How old are you?
☐ 18-21
☐ 22-24
☐ 25-44
☐ 45 or older

3. Are you an international student or foreign national?
☐ Yes
☐ No

4. Did you enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school?
☐ Yes
☐ No

5. What is your enrollment status?
☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time

6. At this college, in what range is your overall grade average?
☐ A
☐ B
☐ C
☐ D
☐ A-
☐ B-
☐ C-
☐ D-
☐ B+
☐ C+
☐ D+
☐ F

7. What is the highest level of education obtained by your:

Father   **Mother**

Father	Mother
☐ 8th grade or less	☐ 8th grade or less
☐ Some high school	☐ Some high school
☐ High School or GED	☐ High School or GED
☐ Some community college	☐ Some community college
☐ Certificate	☐ Certificate
☐ Associate degree	☐ Associate degree
☐ Some four-year college	☐ Some four-year college
☐ Bachelor degree	☐ Bachelor degree
☐ Master's degree	☐ Master's degree
☐ Doctorate degree	☐ Doctorate degree
☐ Unknown	☐ Unknown

8. What is the highest academic credential you have earned?
☐ None
☐ High School Diploma
☐ GED or other High School Equivalent
☐ Vocational/Technical Certificate
☐ Associate Degree
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's/doctoral/professional degree

9. Are you employed?
☐ Yes
☐ No
If yes, how many hours do you work each week?
☐ 1 to 5
☐ 21 to 30
☐ 6 to 10
☐ More than 30
☐ 11 to 20

10. Do you have children or other dependents living with you at home?
☐ Yes
☐ No

11. What category describes you best?
☐ Black (non-Hispanic)
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ White (non-Hispanic)
☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan
☐ Hispanic
☐ Other (Please Specify)_____
12. Are you receiving any financial aid?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Student Profile sheet preceding interviews (adapted from CCSSE toolkit, CCSSE, 2003a)

Student Information Sheet (all answers will be kept confidential) (past)

1. What is your gender?
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female

2. How old are you?
   ☐ 18-21
   ☐ 22-24
   ☐ 25-44
   ☐ 45 or older

3. Were you an international student or foreign national?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

4. Did you enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

5. What was your enrollment status?
   ☐ Full-time
   ☐ Part-time

6. At this college, in what range is your overall grade average?
   ☐ A
   ☐ B
   ☐ C
   ☐ D
   ☐ A-
   ☐ B-
   ☐ C-
   ☐ D-
   ☐ B+
   ☐ C+
   ☐ D+
   ☐ F

7. What is the highest level of education obtained by your:

Father   **Mother**

Father	Mother
☐ 8th grade or less	☐ 8th grade or less
☐ Some high school	☐ Some high school
☐ High School or GED	☐ High School or GED
☐ Some community college	☐ Some community college
☐ Certificate	☐ Certificate
☐ Associate degree	☐ Associate degree
☐ Some four-year college	☐ Some four-year college
☐ Bachelor degree	☐ Bachelor degree
☐ Master's degree	☐ Master's degree
☐ Doctorate degree	☐ Doctorate degree
☐ Unknown	☐ Unknown

8. What is the highest academic credential you have earned?
☐ None
☐ High School Diploma
☐ GED or other High School Equivalent
☐ Vocational/Technical Certificate
☐ Associate Degree
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's/doctoral/professional degree

9. Were you employed?
☐ Yes
☐ No
   If yes, how many hours did you work each week?
☐ 1 to 5
☐ 21 to 30
☐ 6 to 10
☐ More than 30
☐ 11 to 20

10. Did you have children or other dependents living with you at home?
☐ Yes
☐ No

11. What category describes you best?
☐ Black (non-Hispanic)
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
☐ White (non-Hispanic)
☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan
☐ Hispanic
☐ Other (Please Specify)_____
12. Were you receiving any financial aid?

☐ Yes
☐ No

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol, Graduates and recent ESL Program completers

Prompt: Only 13% of the students who start in ESL actually go on to **graduate**. I would like to know about your experience studying here since you started in ESL *and* graduated.

[Only 37% of the students who start in ESL actually finish the **ESL Program**]

First of all, when did you first start at this college? How long did you study you here?

Did you ever take a break (a semester off) during that time [if longer than a semester]?

When you first started, how far did you think you were going to go? [grad? Transfer? If transfer, follow up Q's to compare to community college]Did you plan on finishing? If not, did someone push you to finish? [for ESL completers: Do you plan on graduating college with a degree or certificate? Are you enrolling next semester? If not, why not? What is the most important reason you will not complete a degree? Is there anything the college/others could do to help you finish a degree?]

What challenges did you face while you were trying to finish the ESL Program/degree? [take notes] [what made it difficult?]

Was language a challenge? If so, how?

Which courses were the most/least difficult?

Did you take any remedial courses? Were you required to take them? Were they helpful? Why or why not?

You mentioned _____ as challenges. Which was <u>most</u> challenging? [English or other?]

How much do you think other students have any of these challenges?

What knowledge or resources do you think a student would need to be able to overcome these challenges?

What did you do to overcome these challenges?

Why do others stop attending? [which group]Why do others continue? What do you think is the difference between you (who were able to complete) and others who were not?

What helped you finish? From whom did you get important information?

Did anyone help you while you were attending college courses?

Did you ask faculty/staff for help?[ask Q's, visit office, HW, more?] [if not why not]

Did you feel that you could talk to faculty or staff? [if not why not]

What kind of support did faculty/staff give you? [if applicable]

What did you think about their support? [if applicable]

Is there any other type of support you got from the college?

Did you have any friends on campus? Who were your friends? Did you feel you could talk to them for support? [if not why not] What kind of support did they give you?

Do you like challenges? Did you feel academically challenged? Did it help/hurt you?

How much effort did you put into studying? More specifically, when did you study? How much per week? How did you study? Did you miss assignments/skip classes?

Did you participate in class? How? [in what ways? If not, why not?]

Did you have a job while you were taking classes? How many hours did you work? Did that hurt your studies? Did it help you in your studies?

What advice would you give to other ELLs, knowing what you know now?

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol, Stop before finishing ESL or finish ESL but stop before graduating

(Prompt) I am interested in your experience of studying here at the college for my study.

First of all, when did you first start at the college? How long did you study here? Did

you ever take a break (a semester off) during that time [if longer than a semester]?

When you first started, how far did you think you were going to go? Did you plan on

finishing ESL? Did you plan on graduating with a degree here? Do you have plans for

college in the future? [if transferred, follow up Q's comparing to community college]

I see that you didn't finish. Why didn't you finish? What is the most important reason

that you [are leaving] stopped coming to the college? What would have helped you to

complete the program/graduate (if you wanted to)? Is there anything the college could

have done to help you complete? What?

What challenges did you face while you were studying here?

Was language a challenge/factor in keeping you from continuing? How?

Which courses were the most/least difficult?

Did you take remedial courses? Required? Helpful? Different from ESL?

You mentioned ____as challenges. Which was the most challenging? [language or other?]

[if different from reason to leave, Did that challenge affect your decision to leave?]

How much do you think others have these challenges?

[if completing ESL was only goal: What knowledge or resources do you think a student

would need to be able to overcome these challenges? What did you do to overcome these

challenges? What do you think is the difference between you who were able to complete

ESL and others who were not? What helped you finish? Did someone push you? From

whom did you get important information?]

[At this college, only 37% of the students who start in ESL finish the **ESL Program.**

And only 13% of the students who start in ESL **graduate]**

Why do you think other ELLs stop coming to college before finishing program/degree?

[Which group?] How are other ELLs able to continue?

Did anyone help you while you were attending college courses?

Did you ask faculty/staff for help?[ask Q's, visit office, HW, more?] [if not why not]

Did you feel that you could talk to faculty or staff? [if not why not]

What kind of support did faculty/staff give you? [if applicable]

What did you think about their support? [if applicable]

Is there any other type of support you got from the college?

Did you have any friends on campus? Who were your friends? Did you feel you could

talk to them for support? [if not why not] What kind of support did they give you?

Do you like challenges? Did you feel academically challenged? Did it help/hurt you?

How much effort did you put into studying? More specifically, when did you study? How

much per week? How did you study? Did you miss assignments/skip classes?

Did you participate in class? How? [in what ways? If not, why not?]

Did you have a job while you were taking classes? How many hours did you work? Did

that hurt your studies? Did it help you in your studies?

What advice would you give to other ELLs, knowing what you know now?

APPENDIX E

Letter of invitation

Cate Almon
ESL Department, Richardson Hall 215
Northampton Community College
(610) 861-5552 ~ calmon@temple.edu or calmon@northampton.edu

Dear _____,

I am interested in learning about students' experiences of coming to Northampton Community College for a research project called "English language learner engagement and retention in a community college setting."

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview on this topic because of your recent experience taking courses at this college.

You are free to decide at any time before, during, or after the interview that you don't want to participate in the study. There is no penalty in any way if you want to withdraw from this research. I will not feel or treat you any differently in any way if you decide you do not want to be a part of this study. It will not affect your grades in the future or any future interactions that we have.

The interview will take approximately one hour.

Here are some dates and times available for you to chose:

To set up an appointment, please contact me:
      Cate Almon
      Call: (610) 861-5552
      Email: calmon@temple.edu or calmon@northampton.edu
      Stop by: Richardson 215

I will also follow up this letter with a phone call and email. I hope to see you soon!

Sincerely,

Cate Almon

APPENDIX F

<u>Consent Form</u>

<u>Title:</u> "English language learner engagement and retention in a community college setting"

<u>Investigators:</u>

Cate Almon, Student Investigator, (610) 861-5552; calmon@temple.edu or
calmon@northampton.edu

Dr. Yasuko Kanno, Principal Investigator, (215) 204-7729; ykanno@temple.edu
CITE/TESOL Department, Temple University

<u>Purpose of Research:</u>
Cate Almon is conducting a study on student success for her doctoral dissertation. The purpose
of the research overall is to see how students act and succeed here. This part today is to find out
what challenges students have when trying to finish a college program (like ESL or a degree), and
then to find out how students overcame those challenges. She would like you to participate in
this study because of your recent enrollment at the college so that the information can help us
help students who have the same challenges.

<u>Procedures:</u>
We will ask you to participate in an interview. First you will be asked to complete a student
profile sheet. Then you will be asked some questions. The total conversation will be for one (1)
hour in Richardson Hall 217. We will audio tape the session in order to help the researcher
remember and analyze what we talked about. Cate will analyze and write about your
contributions for one year; the research report will be finished by May 2009. It is possible that
results will be written in published research articles or presented at conferences in the future.

Risks for this participation are no more than minimal but may include inconveniently taking up
some of your valuable time or causing you to remember challenges that were and still may be
uncomfortable for you. There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study but it will
hopefully benefit students who attend the community college in the future.

Cate will assure confidentiality of your responses by keeping the audio tapes and all other
identifiable information in a locked cabinet, and all analysis will be saved on password protected
computers. Each participant will be given a code and care will be taken not to write it in a way
that a reader would be able to figure out who said a particular comment. All information that
would identify you will be destroyed as soon as possible.

You are free to decide at any time before, during, or after the interview that you don't want to
participate in the study. There is no penalty in any way if you want to withdraw from this
research. Cate will not feel or treat you any differently in any way if you decide you do not want
to be a part of this study. It will not affect your grades in the future or any future interactions that
we have.

-over-

Please ask me any questions you have about this research in person, by phone, or by email and we will answer you: Cate Almon, (610) 861-5552, calmon@temple.edu or calmon@northampton.edu

Or you can ask Dr. Jill Hirt at Northampton Community College who can also answer your questions: (610) 861-5421, Jhirt@northampton.edu

You may also contact Temple University:

> "I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact Richard Throm, Program Manager & Coordinator at Office of the Vice President for Research of Temple University by phoning (215) 707-8757."

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to participate in this study.

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____

Student Investigator's Signature   Date

Project Title: "English language learner engagement and retention in a community college setting"

Permission to Audiotape

Project Title: "English language learner engagement and retention in a community college setting"

INVESTIGATORS:

Cate Almon, Student Investigator, (610) 861-5552; calmon@temple.edu or calmon@northampton.edu
Department: ESL, (610) 861-5552

Dr. Yasuko Kanno, Principal Investigator, (215) 204-7729; ykanno@temple.edu
CITE/TESOL Department, Temple University

Subject: _____ Date: _____ Log #:_____

I give Cate Almon permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose:

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Northampton Community College.
I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: _____ to _____.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from: _____ to _____.
(Note: Data will be stored for three (3) years after completion of the study. I will destroy the tapes by May 2011)

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Cate Almon in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

-over-

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name: Cate Almon
Department: ESL   Institution: Northampton Community College
Street Address: 3835 Green Pond Road City: Bethlehem   State: PA Zip Code:18020
Phone: Office (610) 861-5552 e-mail: calmon@temple.edu or calmon@northampton.edu

You can also ask Dr. Jill Hirt at Northampton Community College who can also answer your questions: (610) 861-5421, Jhirt@northampton.edu

You may also contact Temple University:
  "I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject,
  I may contact Richard Throm, Program Manager & Coordinator at Office of the Vice
  President for Research of Temple University by phoning (215) 707-8757."

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

Title: "English language learner engagement and retention in a community college setting"

Please print

Subject's Name:
Date:
Address:
Phone:

Subject's Signature:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

(Or signature of parent/legally responsible person if subject is a minor or is incompetent to sign.)

Relationship to Subject:

Subject cannot sign because:

but consents orally to be audio taped under the **conditions described above**.

＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
Witness Signature   Date

＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
Witness Signature   Date

Appendix H

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION | COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Center for Community College Student Engagement
3316 Grandview Street · Austin, TX 78705 · (512) 471-0807 · fax (512) 471-4209 · www.cccse.org

March 12, 2010

To whom it may concern:

Cate Almon has specific permission to use data collected by the Center for Community College Student Engagement. CCCSE has provided the data set to Cate for the purpose of completing a doctoral dissertation. The permission to use the data does not extend beyond this purpose. The data set includes respondent data from the administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. This permission also extends the right to append the copywrited CCSR survey to her dissertation with appropriate citation.

Thank you,

Jeff Crumpley

Associate Director

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