

**POSSIBILITIES AND PERILS: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF  
NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and development of community college students as they navigate stigmas associated with a 2-year collegiate institution within the mid-Atlantic region. Community colleges continue to be labeled as a disservice in regard to academically and holistically preparing nontraditional students to matriculate to 4-year institutions. This persistent myth has been presented through the lens of prominent researchers. However, the literature lacks research from the perception, experiences, and most importantly the voice of the nontraditional student. This study enables this marginalized population to be heard through a phenomenological approach.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of urban community college students and how they are able to navigate through trials/tribulations and extenuating circumstances to obtain an associate's degree. More specifically, this study focused on eight student-athletes and examined these nontraditional students' holistic and wellness development, personal and academic development, and self-identity.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to God and Jesus Christ. I love you with all of my heart and soul. I will continue to walk in your footsteps and give you all the honor, thanks, and praise.

To all of my deceased family members who are smiling down from Heaven.

To my ancestors that were brought to the United States on the ship (Ernestina) from the Cape Verde islands, thank you for guiding and watching over me.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
 CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Evolution of Community Colleges .....	1
Demographics of Community Colleges.....	3
Enrollment and COVID-19.....	5
Workforce Development.....	8
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Chickering’s Seven Vectors Theory .....	11
The Six Dimensions of Wellness .....	12
Significance of the Study .....	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Chickering’s Theory of Identity Development–Seven Vectors.....	18
Developing Competence.....	19

Managing Emotions .....	20
Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence.....	21
Mature Interpersonal Relationships .....	22
Establishing Identity .....	23
Developing Purpose .....	24
Developing Integrity .....	25
Hettler’s Model of Wellness.....	26
Occupational .....	28
Physical.....	28
Social.....	29
Intellectual.....	29
Spiritual.....	30
Emotional.....	30
3. METHODS .....	32
Qualitative Research Design.....	33
Method of Inquiry .....	34
Pilot Study.....	35
Research Setting.....	36
Positionality/Relationship to Study.....	36
Study Participants .....	39
Data Collection Process .....	40
Data Analysis .....	44
Trustworthiness.....	46

4. FINDINGS.....	47
Participants’ Demographics .....	48
Participant Profiles.....	49
Participant 1: David .....	50
Participant 2: Jason .....	52
Participant 3: Anastasia.....	53
Participant 4: Anna.....	54
Participant 5: Caleb.....	55
Participant 6: Joanna .....	56
Participant 7: Michael .....	57
Participant 8: Rebekah .....	58
Organization of Findings Data.....	59
Research Question 1 .....	60
Identity Influences .....	60
Sociocultural Factors. ....	60
Research Question 2 .....	63
Developmental Experiences.....	63
Academic Support.....	63
Workforce/Career Connections.....	65
Research Question 2(a).....	66
Student Engagement/Athletic Expectations.....	66
Support Systems.....	66
Life and Career Goals .....	67

Performance .....	68
Research Question 3 .....	70
Enrollment Challenges .....	70
Transportation Constraints .....	70
Basic Needs .....	72
Research Question 4 .....	74
5. DISCUSSION .....	78
Institutional Recommendations .....	79
Development of Helping Us Grow Stronger Mentor Program .....	80
Holistic Wellness Center .....	82
Recommendations for Future Researchers .....	83
Limitations and Complications .....	84
Chapter Summary .....	86
REFERENCES .....	88
APPENDICES	
A. LETTER FOR INITIAL MEETING .....	94
B. INFORMED CONSENT .....	96
C. PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE .....	99
D. FIRST/INITIAL INTERVIEW .....	101
E. SECOND/INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEW .....	102
F. THIRD/FINAL INTERVIEW .....	103

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Research Questions and Interview Questions.....	43
2. Codes and Themes .....	46
3. Participant Profiles.....	49

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“Walk by faith and not by sight” 2 Corinthians 5:7 is what community college students have been doing since 1901. American community colleges go as far back as the early 1900s with the establishment of the first community college in Joliet, Illinois. Founded in 1901, Joliet Junior College was the first public community college to offer post diploma courses and a 2-year curriculum. The evolution of community colleges should be sited “in the context of the growth of all higher education in the twentieth century” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5). As enrollment numbers improved within secondary schools, the demand for access to college increased rapidly during the 1900s (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Community colleges continue to provide various pathways for nontraditional students to achieve a degree in higher education. This open-access option is an opportunity and, for some, a second chance to receive a postsecondary education. The importance of these 2-year institutions finding entry points into college for this marginalized population to career pipelines is essential. Nontraditional students encounter an array of challenges that make community colleges the only avenue in seeking to obtain a college degree. This study examined the importance of community colleges and if they are academically preparing and holistically developing nontraditional students to succeed at a 4-year college.

### **Evolution of Community Colleges**

The creation of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in 1920 followed by the creation of the 1944 GI Bill and the 1947 Truman Commission on

Higher Education cemented the mission purpose of community colleges in the United States. The significance of the mission of community colleges was conveyed through the post-War World II period, especially their extensive growth in the 1960s. American community colleges have evolved over time. The boom years are credited to increases in state support of these institutions, namely increases in state financial support and the development of statewide systems of higher education. Due to the expanding roles of junior colleges, the president's Commission of Higher Education (1947) recommended the use of the term "community college" to reflect the service and needs of the community (Vaughn, 1982, p. 8).

Community colleges can be attributed to playing a crucial role in higher education through their open-access mantra and serving larger proportions of low-income, adult, minority, and first-generation students (Ma & Baum, 2016). Students who enroll at community colleges tend to be older than undergraduates at 4-year colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). Additionally, community colleges continue to offer flexibility and convenience along with opportunities for social engagement. Although postsecondary opportunities for nontraditional students have been available since the 20th century, it was not until 1922 that a junior college was defined "as an institution offering two-years of instruction strictly collegiate grade" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 3). Based on the sponsors of these early institutions, their names often reflected their mission.

For instance, names used by the college's sponsor were publicized as the following: county college, branch college, and city college. Other names such as contradictory college, democracy's college, opportunity college, and the people's college were criticized by some scholars who determined that they were disregarding the

principles of scholarship on which the university had been originally instituted (Jenicks & Riesman, 1968). According to Vaughn (1982), several factors shaped early community colleges:

...the growth of the open door concept and the increases in student financial aid during this period; the role of leadership in the era of growth and in the future; the position of student services and the increase in part-time students; and the changing mission of community colleges (p. 12).

It was not until the 1990s that some community college leaders sought to seek authorization to offer its students baccalaureate degrees, but the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges stepped in and deemed community colleges as “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5).

### **Demographics of Community Colleges**

These institutions have been a representation of students who seek baccalaureate degree completion through alternate pathways of postsecondary education. Community colleges serve the most diverse student body in every respect: age, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, and degree of disability (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] & Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). Diversity and inclusion are key ingredients to the success of community colleges. Community colleges take pride in serving students from diverse backgrounds to bring a variety of unique experiences to their classrooms (Dowd & Bensimon, 2009). Many students are part-time, first-generation, older, low-income, female, minority, and find that attending a community college is their only viable choice to receive access to higher education (Dowd & Bensimon, 2009).

There has been a significant increase in the community college population; therefore, we must identify the major factors that are influencing the inflation of this diverse population to promote academic success. Community colleges expanding their access has led to notable changes in American higher education. Community colleges' open-access approach has enabled lower-income groups, ethnic minorities, and students whose academic performance prior to enrolling had been marginal to enroll in higher education. Due to open access, community colleges have attracted women, minorities, and high school students who were in the lower percentile to receive an opportunity in higher education. Community colleges were enrolling 46% of ethnic minority students and 38% of total enrollment within higher education in America by 1997 (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Among community college entrants, lower-ability students were enrolling at an alarming rate and shifting the community college student's classification as poorly prepared. "The majority of students entering open-door community colleges come from the lower half of the high school classes, academically and socioeconomically" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 44).

The NCES and Institute of Education Sciences (2007) confirmed in their study that at the turn of the 21st century, community colleges have enrolled close to half of all United States undergraduates. The community college mission is to prepare nontraditional students to transfer to 4-year institutions or to directly enter the workforce after degree completion through an open-access mission and at an affordable cost. Nontraditional students are described as being older, often having several social roles of

life (e.g., parent, etc.), financially independent, and working full-time or part-time (Treiniené, 2017).

### **Enrollment and COVID-19**

Community college enrollment increased to over 500,000 in 1960 and to more than 2,000,000 by 1970. By 1980, there were 4,000,000 community college students and nearly 5.5 million by the end of the 1990s. Between 2010 and 2014, community colleges experienced a significant decline in enrollment from 29% to 25% (Ma & Baum, 2016). Federal data reported that during the 2020–2021 academic year, approximately 7,000,000 students were enrolled at community colleges.

Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges witnessed first-hand a severe decline in enrollment. These institutions offer different pathway opportunities for students seeking baccalaureate degrees. Community colleges offer students an alternative pathway to transfer to a 4-year institution by allowing students to take a lesser load of courses, affordable access, evening classes, offering transferable credits via dual enrollment options, and dual-admissions transfer partnerships with 4-year institutions (Forbus et al., 2011).

Each alternative pathway enables the community college student to reach and achieve their academic success through a more affordable trajectory. Additionally, statistical data have shown transfer rates from community colleges to 4-year institutions are between 25% and 40% (NCES & Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). Access and affordability empower community colleges to continue to meet the postsecondary needs of many racial and ethnic populations who were left behind and underserved by higher education (United States Department of Education, 2016). Dowd and Bensimon (2009)

have collaborated on projects and studies primarily focusing on the success and educational outcomes through community colleges' open-access mission/open-door policy. These institutions have and continue to be, in many cases, the only pathway to postsecondary and career possibilities for underserved communities.

The impact that community colleges have on students is a clear indication of the progress and core values each institution exemplifies. The American Association of Community Colleges highlighted that the cost of tuition and fees at community colleges (\$3,730) were significantly lower than at in-state 4-year public colleges (\$10,440) during the 2019–2022 academic year. Lower tuition costs and fees tend to appeal to nontraditional students to enroll at community colleges due to affordability, proximity, family, and the opportunity to succeed at a 4-year college. It is a perceived notion that students from high-income families generally enroll at highly selective 4-year institutions as opposed to their counterparts from low-income families (Jaschik, 2010).

Two-thirds of college seniors graduated with an average of nearly \$27,000 in student loan debt (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2016). It is evident that there has been a significant increase in the community college population; therefore, we must identify the major factors that are influencing the inflation of this diverse population to promote academic success. The NCES and Institute of Education Sciences (2007) confirmed in their study that at the turn of the 21st century, community colleges have enrolled close to half of all United States undergraduates. During a 10-year period from 2000–2010, community colleges saw a major increase in enrollment from 5.7 million to 7.9 million and an increase in full-time enrollment from 2,000,000 to 3.3 million (Ma & Baum, 2016,

p. 2). Over this decade, the full-time status of community college students increased by four percentage points (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 2).

This increase can be credited to the fact that community colleges enroll more part-time students than 4-year colleges. Over the years, community colleges have evolved into comprehensive institutions that serve the nontraditional student. The focus and community college's mission is to prepare nontraditional students to transfer to 4-year institutions or to directly enter the workforce after degree completion. In many cases, this can be deemed a student's only choice for receiving an affordable college education due to community colleges' open-access mission.

Community colleges continue to offer flexibility and convenience along with opportunities for social engagement. The selection of an institution is perhaps the most social as well as economic decision one can make and ultimately relies on the student. Researchers have examined that college graduates have higher lifetime earnings, a longer life expectancy, commit fewer crimes, and are involved in civic engagements throughout their community (Baum & Payea, 2004). Community colleges offer nontraditional students an alternative pathway to transfer to a 4-year college.

Community colleges were designed to offer underrepresented students an opportunity to receive access to college enrollment at a low cost (Bailey et al., 2015). In the eyes of the public, schooling was perceived as an "avenue of upward mobility and a contributor to the community's wealth" (Cohen & Brewer, 2003, p. 27). Research that is primarily focusing on nontraditional students, "seeks to understand how institutions can better address the needs of this population, commonly viewed as a group that balances multiple responsibilities at school, work, and home" (Kim et al., 2010, p. 404).

## **Workforce Development**

Community colleges have consistently played essential roles in the preparation of qualified and skilled students for the nation's workforce. These two year institutions continue to prepare a majority of health-care workers, half of the nation's registered nurses, and over 80% of first responders (police officers, EMTs, paramedics, and firefighters) with postsecondary credentials (National Commission on Community Colleges, 2008). Community colleges have become the leading and first choice for workers trying to upgrade their skills and preparing to reenter the workforce. Community colleges continue to increase the percentages of the nation's technological workforce (National Commission on Community Colleges, 2008).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Community colleges continue to be labeled as a disservice in regard to academically preparing nontraditional students to matriculate to 4-year institutions. According to some scholars, academic preparations at community colleges are failing to equip nontraditional community college graduates for the academic rigor at 4-year colleges (Perin, 2013). A study written by Laskey and Hetzel (2011) indicated that one-third of all first-year college students across the United States need remediation classes. Furthermore, researchers have revealed that "almost 50% of two-year community college students are required to take expensive and time-consuming remedial courses that do not provide college credit, but increase a student's chances of dropping out" (Rath et al., 2013, p. 3).

Data from *The American Community College* by Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer indicate that over 40% of the nation's college students have started their

academic career at a community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). There is an inconsistent image about the role community colleges play in the lives of nontraditional community college students. Grace Chen (2022) argued that the following seven myths have discouraged students from enrolling at a community college:

1. Students attend community college because they did not get accepted to four-year universities.
2. Community colleges are only for people who want a vocational-technical job
3. No one successful goes to community college
4. Obtaining a community college degree is not as useful as a university degree
5. Most students who attend community college are older, with full-time jobs
6. It is not easy to transfer from a community college to a four-year university
7. Community college students cannot make it in a four-year university.

Throughout this study, internal and external factors of nontraditional community college students were explored to uncover the gaps of their unheard voices and experiences within higher education. The overarching goal was to share the stories and lived experiences of this marginalized population while advocating and promoting the successes of attending a community college. This study also explored challenges and if there is a lack of academic preparedness, holistic student development, and graduation, retention, and transfer rates at the designated community college.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of nontraditional students and how they are able to navigate through trials, tribulations, and extenuating circumstances to obtain an associate's degree. This study explored the perceptions and development of nontraditional students as they navigate stigmas associated with attending a 2-year institution within the mid-Atlantic region. The reason for this study was to portray the lived experiences of nontraditional students attending community colleges. This study was inspired by the need to relinquish the unfavorable

perceptions, myths, and barriers of community colleges and empower the nontraditional student's voice to be heard. Furthermore, the study focused on examining nontraditional students to obtain an understanding of their identity, challenges, personal and holistic development, and benefits of attending a community college.

### **Research Questions**

Researchers have alluded to the notion that community colleges lack rigor, structure, and academic preparation (Perin, 2013). During 2000–2012, a review of studies was conducted and published to indicate the number of weak areas within community colleges. Perin (2013) expressed that the community college student was not only underprepared but also lacked literacy skills that continue to be overlooked by the community colleges. This current research aimed to uncover the plagued perceptions about community colleges and in return display how they really are America's cornerstone. The experiences of nontraditional students were explored and examined through four research questions. The research questions provide a more in-depth depiction of the experiences nontraditional students acquire while attending community colleges:

1. What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?
2. How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?
  - a. How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?

3. In what ways does attending a community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?
4. How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?

These questions had the potential to explore extenuating circumstances such as financial hardships, proximity, and family that have been a driving force for community college enrollment. This qualitative study sheds light on the voiceless, focusing on the nontraditional community college student's trials and tribulations, and the reason why attending a community college is deemed a wiser and more affordable choice. The data collection of surveys and interviews assisted in conveying an understanding of the reason why nontraditional community college students decide to attend community colleges and if they feel academically prepared for the transition to 4-year colleges.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Chickering's Seven Vectors Theory***

In 1969, Chickering's seven vector theory was published amid the steadily rising growth of student development theories within higher education. This theory helped establish that one's own identity can in fact cause success when addressing issues pertaining to the developmental process (Chickering, 1969). This study explored Chickering's seven vectors of development and how each vector has contributed to the growth of college students' identity. The purpose of utilizing Chickering's theory was to examine students in a college setting and how their identity development can be affected socially, emotionally, ethically, interpersonally, physically, and intellectually. Chickering coined the term vectors of development "because each seems to have direction and

magnitude-even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a straight line, he called these vectors major highways for journeying toward individuation” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35).

### ***The Six Dimensions of Wellness***

Dr. Bill Hettler developed the interdependent model to encompass each one of his six dimensions of wellness. The Six Dimensions of Wellness addresses occupational, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional categories to promote a holistic sense of fulfillment and wellness in our lives. The term wellness “is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence” (Hettler, 1980, p. 77). The purpose of using Dr. Hettler’s Six Dimensions of Wellness was to examine the correlation of applying a wellness and holistic model to the overall success of nontraditional students attending community colleges. Dr. Bill Hettler’s wellness model explains:

- how a person contributes to his or environment and community, and how to build better living spaces and social networks;
- the enrichment of life through work, and its interconnectedness to living and playing;
- the development of belief systems, values, and creating a world-view;
- the benefits of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, strength and vitality, as well as personal responsibility, self-care and when to seek medical attention;
- self-esteem, self-control, and determination as a sense of direction;
- creative and stimulating mental activities, and sharing your gifts with others (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

### **Significance of the Study**

Giving a voice to the nontraditional student and their perceptions of attending a community college was extremely vital for the purpose of this study. The research sheds light on the voiceless by focusing on the nontraditional student’s trials and tribulations, and the reason why choosing to attend a community college is deemed a wiser and more

affordable choice for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century student. Much of the research conducted explored the importance of reflecting on the needs of the community within the community college. However, it was imperative to reach out to the researchers, policy makers, admissions recruiters, and high school guidance counselors to give a better portrayal of the community college as well as the representation of the nontraditional student who searches for baccalaureate degree completion through successful alternate pathways of obtaining a postsecondary education. The idea of fostering community colleges has been contributed to the progress of developing and cultivating nontraditional students to be able to matriculate to 4-year institutions through rigorous academic preparedness.

Community colleges continue to play such a prominent role in today's society and are often viewed as a more affordable choice for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century student. The loan burden by attending a community college is far less than most public and almost all private bachelor's degree institutions. Community colleges continue to offer flexibility and convenience along with opportunities for engagement. For community colleges to implement a new legacy to leave for the next generation, it is imperative to focus on the data pertaining to their students' progression towards obtaining their associate's degree and being academically prepared to excel at a 4-year college.

Continuing to ignore the community college nontraditional student's own voice will continue to disenfranchise this afflicted group. Some people may argue it is better to have work experience than continuing your college education because, in the end, the person who went to college is succumbed with debt. However, community colleges are rigorous preparatory spaces for the nontraditional student to receive college readiness for 4-year colleges and will be presented through the lens of Chickering's theory of identity

development and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness Model. The researcher's primary purpose was to eradicate these imbedded barriers about community colleges by utilizing both theories to give an open platform for the voiceless to be heard in a powerful and significant way.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides the reader with a clearer insight of how nontraditional students truly perceive themselves and if they are indeed being academically prepared and developed holistically. As stated in Chapter 1, the researcher's goal was to share the stories and experiences of the nontraditional community college student while advocating and promoting the successes of attending a community college. This study explored if there is a lack of academic preparedness, holistic student development, and graduation, retention, and transfer rates at the designated community college. Despite the ongoing progress of community colleges, there is still a misconception and an ongoing stigma pertaining to the lack of academic rigor and preparedness among nontraditional students as they matriculate to 4-year colleges. Community colleges will continue being the path of possibilities and need to design "a system of efficient and up-to-date training to meet the nontraditional students' needs" (Ely, 1997, p. 7).

Additionally, this study focused on the self-perceptions of community college students and their primary roles as a nontraditional student, parent, and employee. Researchers in higher education should focus on broadening their scope of students having special circumstances. Continuing to label community college students as nontraditional keeps these students at the margins. Institutional administrators and community college researchers could potentially benefit from an in-depth evaluation regarding unconventional approaches leading to the understanding of the community college student population. Research has found that the "key to the persistence of

nontraditional students is social integration, fostered by faculty members, and creating a sense of kinship” (Ely, 1997).

This research depicts the lived experiences of this marginalized group. Due to the lack of hearing from the nontraditional students’ experiences, this research enabled the voiceless to have a voice and to be heard. Emphasizing the opportunity to fill in the gap for the underrepresented nontraditional group was pertinent to paint a narrative. The National Center for Education reported that 73% of college students have some form of characteristic to be labeled as nontraditional (Compton et al., 2006). Additionally, some researchers have defined nontraditional students as those who have not followed a continuous educational path into college (Newbold et al., 2010a) and bring an array of needs and desires to campus that are completely different from their traditional counterparts (Newbold et al., 2009).

This research project provided an overview into the nontraditional student’s experience through the lens of Arthur W. Chickering’s theory of identity development, also known as Chickering’s theory, and Hettler’s Six Dimensions of Wellness model. Chickering’s theory has been attributed to the significance of theoretical and practical understandings of student success and student development (Ortiz, 1999). Chickering’s theory of identity development revealed how a college setting can affect a student’s development socially, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Chickering applied his approach to relevant issues pertaining to student development within higher education. These developments include: (a) the development of commuter students (Chickering, 1974b), (b) the problems of academic advising (Chickering, 1974a), (c) experiential learning (Chickering, 1976, 1977), (d) the concerns of adult students (Chickering, 1980;

Marienau & Chickering, 1982), and (e) the role of liberal arts education in preparation for work (as cited in Chickering, 1983).

Arthur Chickering continues to be a major force in higher education with his contributions in the field of student development, counseling, and student affairs. Chickering's work focuses on the central idea that "the college or university is uniquely suited to promote the development of human potential. No other institution is in a better position to do so" (Garfield & David, 1986, p. 483). Chickering's theory identified major aspects within the college environment that influenced student development and ideas to enhance student growth (Evans et al., 2010). This highly acclaimed theory was mainly used in student affairs and has been labeled as the foundation for extensive research within higher education (Evans et al., 2010). "Chickering was responsible for evaluating the impact of innovative curricular practices on student development" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 65).

Another renowned theory informing data collection is learned needs theory (LNT). Need theories have emerged since the 20th century from personality studies and motivation (Rutledge, 2023). The LNT research-based approach explores how student-athletes balance personal needs, academics, and athletics. Intercollegiate athletics within higher education have established competing demands that continue to jeopardize the outcomes of student-athletes' personal pursuits, academics, and athletics (Donnor, 2005; Newell, 2015; Quaye et al., 2019; Watt & Moore, 2001). Although this theory is what the data may potentially point towards, it is not a definitive angle. Furthermore, the population of participants interviewed provided insight on how sport participation

influences academic and athletic performance through LNT. This profound theory will be discussed in Chapter 4 findings.

### **Chickering's Theory of Identity Development–Seven Vectors**

The purpose of utilizing Chickering's theory was to examine nontraditional students in a community college setting and how their identity development can be affected socially, emotionally, ethically, interpersonally, physically, and intellectually. The characteristics that college students possess tend to change during their years at a college or university. Examining student development theories allowed the researcher to explore and understand why students exude certain characteristics based off of each stage of development. Chickering's theory has increased the importance to practical and theoretical understandings of student success and development (Ortiz, 1999). Distinguished changes will occur in particular students but not necessarily for all students (Chickering, 1969).

Unlike other developmental theories that occur in a precise, step-by-step process, Chickering's theory would be deemed nonlinear. This can be attributed to the movement in one vector being followed by movement in a previous vector or even from a vector demonstrating further development. Additionally, "movement from one vector to the next can also represent increased skills, strength, confidence, awareness, complexity and integration" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). Thus, each student will develop at their own rate within each vector. Students will proceed to reconstruct their own thoughts and feelings to conform them into values, assumptions, and beliefs (Evans et al., 1998).

## **Developing Competence**

The first vector is developing competence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) compared competence to a three-tined pitchfork. This comparison was to show the reader that the three tines would represent intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. The handle of the pitchfork, which is necessary if you want the tines to do their work, is a “sense of competence that stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (Reisser, 1995, p. 53). Intellectual competence involves skills and knowledge relating to a precise subject matter and development of “intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication” (Reisser, 1995, p. 506) and heightened skills in areas such as reasoning ability and critical thinking. It also involves utilizing “skill in one’s mind while building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45).

Physical and manual competence can be found through recreational, athletic awareness to wellness and involvement in artistic activities. It can also be credited to an increase of strength and fitness, self-discipline, creation, and competition (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Interpersonal competence encompasses “more complex abilities to tune into another person and respond appropriately, align personal agendas with the goals of the group, & choose from a variety of strategies to help a relationship flourish or a group function” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46).

Interpersonal competence incorporates skills in working with others effectively, communication, and leadership. An example of how a student can improve in all three of the areas pertaining to this vector would be if Cassandra decided to join the women’s basketball team on campus. On an intellectual level, Cassandra can gain knowledge about

her college, major, and classes to remain academically eligible to play basketball. To obtain the physical aspect, Cassandra is an active participant on the college's women's basketball team where she will work on her skills, drills, techniques, and athletic achievements.

### **Managing Emotions**

The second vector discusses the student's ability to manage, accept, and recognize emotions. Managing emotions is extremely vital when dealing with a more inclusive range of feelings. These feelings include but are not limited to anger, depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, desire, and embarrassment. This vector looks at how the students can appropriately express, control, and act on their feelings in an accountable manner. Managing emotions is essential to control to prevent any type of interference with educational proceedings.

This vector enhances the student's appropriateness of certain reactions and emotions in different contexts to express and control their emotions accordingly. Chickering stated that students only enter this vector when they learn "appropriate channels for releasing irritations before they explode, dealing with fears before they immobilize, and healing emotional wounds before they infect other friendships" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46). During the managing emotions vector, Chickering mentioned that many students enter college with "loaded emotional baggage" (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012, p. 218). Students will recognize to solve their own problems and heal emotional wounds before transferring negative energy onto others. Students will learn to trust and become aware of their feelings and anxieties while attending classes and activities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

## **Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence**

The third vector, moving through autonomy toward interdependence captures both instrumental and emotional independence as well as the acceptance of interdependence. Emotional independence is defined as “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). This approval can be sought from social groups, peers, and parents. It is imperative that one voluntarily accepts the disconnect from the support group to express their own opinions and achieve one’s own self goals in life. Students will learn that once they realize to solve their own problems, they will achieve their own autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Students will develop instrumental independence that includes problem-solving, mobility, and self-direction. Once developed, students will come to “recognize and accept the importance of interdependence, an awareness of their interconnectedness with others” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 68). Instrumental independence enables the student to be self-sufficient by leaving one place to become successful in another place. This will lead to the advancement and improvement of one’s critical thinking with the competence to put thoughts into action. For example, a neophyte who is pledging to be a part of a sorority may wrestle with questions of interdependence, independence, and redefining relationships with their friends and family due to wanting to be viewed as an adult capable of making their own decision while still upholding positive relationships with each friend and family member (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

## **Mature Interpersonal Relationships**

The fourth vector, mature interpersonal relationships, acknowledges that one's experiences with relationships can be attributed to the development of one's sense of self. "Maturing interpersonal relationships reflect an increasing awareness of and openness to differences in ideas, backgrounds, and values" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 22).

There are two aspects represented in Chickering's fourth vector: "(1) tolerance and appreciation of differences [and] (2) capacity for intimacy" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Tolerance can be deemed both interpersonal and intercultural with an openness to understand the qualities a person emanates instead of immediately creating false narratives and stereotypes. Additionally, both aspects entail the students appreciate differences, bridge gaps, accept individuals for who they are, and maintain objectivity (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012).

Reisser (1995) noted that both aspects "involve the ability to accept individuals for who they are, to respect differences, and to appreciate commonalities" (p. 509). A heightened sense of intimacy in one's relationship allows students to formulate unwavering commitments that are based on responsiveness and honesty. An appreciation for cultural diversity and communication can also be observed in this vector. "A movement from too much dependence or too much dominance toward an interdependence between equals becomes the norm in both dependence and dominance relationships" (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012, p. 219). The second aspect focuses on the capacity for intimacy involving students shifting from dependence on others to an interdependence among individuals in one's environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

## **Establishing Identity**

The fifth vector establishing identity is noteworthy because it builds on the previous vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This vector relies on the experiences from Vectors 1 through 4 and factors in all the emotions, relationships, competencies, and confidence in one's self (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012). Establishing Identity encompasses the complexities of differences within identity development based on one's sexual orientation, gender, and ethnic background (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students become aware that their identity is an assortment of various dimensions integrated with culture, history, and a broader society (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012). Identity includes the following: (1) comfort with body and appearance, (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, (4) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, (5) sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration. (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49)

With establishing identity, it is crucial to know the attitudes towards one's self and more specifically to truthfully know one's self. "Development of identity is the process of discovering with what kinds of experience, at what levels of intensity and frequency, we resonate in satisfying, in safe, or in self-destruction fashion" (Chickering, 1969, p. 13). Researchers have compared identity development as renovating a house or trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students will attempt to establish who they want to be after compartmentalizing aspects of development like identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Lifestyle and family considerations become major factors

when setting goals and making decisions all while students continue to establish their identity (Evans et al., 2010).

### **Developing Purpose**

The sixth vector, developing purpose, can be defined as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121). The definition of purpose can be broken down even further through the following three points:

1. Purpose is a goal of sorts, but it is more stable and far-reaching than low-level goals such as “to get to the movie on time” or “to find a parking place in town today.”
2. Purpose is part of one’s personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component, the desire to make a difference in the world, to contribute to matters larger than self.
3. Unlike meaning alone (which may or may not be oriented towards a defined end), purpose is always directed at an accomplishment towards which one can make progress. (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121)

Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that “developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests, and opinions, to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles” (p. 209). They also defined purpose as “a strong commitment to a value or a belief” (p. 234). Chickering and Reisser determined the importance of a student constructing a desired outcome to formulate a good plan to develop their purpose (p. 210).

Developing purpose consists of making meaningful commitments to activities, strong interpersonal commitments, and developing vocational goals. The word vocation is used “broadly to refer to paid or unpaid work within the context of a specific career or, more generally, as a person’s life calling” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69). Purpose can sometimes become confusing when you are desperately trying to be fiscally stable with a

good job after college. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained the challenges that students deal with while developing purpose as being “difficult to construct a plan that balances life-style considerations, vocational aspirations, and a vocational interest, many compromises must be made” (p. 229). Although students gradually progress through each vector, the sixth vector, developing purpose, focuses on students answering the following questions before graduating and/or transferring:

- Who am I?
- What can I do well?
- What do I feel, and why?
- How do I manage and express my feelings?
- Who am I, apart from my role as a son or daughter, parent or worker?
- Who am I, as a partner, friend, or lover?
- How do I respond to people who are different?
- How comfortable am I with myself, with my body, my gender, and my heritage? (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 209)

### **Developing Integrity**

The final and seventh vector, developing integrity, consists of “three sequential but overlapping stages” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51). These three stages are: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). During the seventh vector, students will evolve from a type of “black and white thinking on complex moral and ethical issues to acknowledging the perspectives of others as valid” (Long, 2012, p. 44). Students will experience a change in their own value system and move away from plagued dogmatic beliefs that they were taught and grew up with (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students will learn to develop their own interests and set of values.

During the first stage of humanizing values, students will “progress from rigid, moralistic thinking to the development of a more humanized value system in which the

interests of others are balanced with their own interest” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69). The second stage involves establishing a personalized value system in which “core values are consciously affirmed, and the beliefs of others are acknowledged and respected” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69). During this stage, students comprehend the importance of respecting others’ opinions and viewpoints through their own experiences while confirming their own beliefs and core values. The final and third stage, developing congruence, is where “values and actions become congruent and authentic as self-interest is balance by a sense of social responsibility” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69). During this final stage, the student’s behaviors become consistent with their own beliefs and values that they have a strong hold on.

### **Hettler’s Model of Wellness**

Dr. Bill Hettler believed students are unable to develop intellectually and psychosocially without wellness. Hettler defined the concept of wellness as a state of complete mental, social, and physical well-being. Through his research and findings, Hettler developed a holistic model of wellness that encompasses and integrates six dimensions of a student’s life during their years at college. Wellness has also been termed as “an active process through which the individual becomes aware of and makes choices toward a more successful existence” (Hettler, 1980, p. 77). One’s choices can be significantly influenced by their environment, culture, and self-concept (Hettler, 1980).

Hettler’s six dimensions of wellness are as follows: intellectual, emotional, physical, social measures, occupational, and spiritual. Each category can be attributed to reflecting the students’ unique lifestyle changes while attending college (Hettler, 1980). Hettler’s six dimensions “requires a deliberate personal commitment and time to reach an

optimum level necessary for balance” (Long, 2012, p. 50). For a student to reach their full healthy, complex, positive development and learning experience, they will have to prosper in each of the six dimensions (Long, 2012). Research pertaining to the wellness of students presented findings that an “individual’s self-efficacy regarding the regulation of self and the ability to redirect behaviors that prove unsuccessful positively affect psychological well-being” (Hermon & Davis, 2004, p.1).

The overarching goal of wellness programs and student development theories is to develop the whole person. This goal and tactical way of thinking continues to be utilized by many college counselors (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Nontraditional students tend to face diverse challenges than those of their traditional student counterparts. This is due to strenuous life demands, confronting unique barriers and developmental differences that nontraditional students face (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Research findings suggest that nontraditional students will seek higher education to fulfill personal goals and commitments to family and work (Gianakos, 1996). With commitments to work, family, and other significant obligations, nontraditional students were reported to procrastinate more on their course assignments than traditional students (Prohaska et al., 2001).

Furthermore, geographical barriers and time are the main influencers for the success of nontraditional students (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Researchers have found by using Hettler’s Six Dimensions of Wellness model that nontraditional students recognize that being a part of social activities is categorized as most important to their overall wellness and followed by physical, emotional, intellectual, occupational, and spiritual (Archer et al., 1987; Hybertson et al., 1992). As for their counterparts (traditional students), they seem to rank physical behaviors as most important to their overall

wellness followed by emotional, social, occupational, intellectual, and spiritual.

(Hybertson et al., 1992). As students utilize each of Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model, they will gain knowledge and experience to contribute developing their whole mind, body, and soul. Each dimension requires undivided time, attention, and commitment.

### ***Occupational***

Hettler's first dimension is called the occupational dimension. During this dimension, students will have an increasing awareness of personal enrichment and satisfaction through work. A student's choice of career ambitions, profession, personal performance, and job satisfaction are vital components when navigating through your life's purpose. While traveling down the occupational dimension, students will contribute talents, skills, and unique gifts. Occupational dimension follows these principles:

- It is better to choose a career which is consistent with our personal values, interests, and beliefs than to select one that is unrewarding to us
- It is better to develop functional, transferrable skills, through structured involvement opportunities than to remain inactive and uninvolved (Hettler, 1976, p. 1).

### ***Physical***

The second dimension focuses on physical activity. The physical dimension of wellness educates students on the importance of personal responsibility for self-care, understanding the meaning of physical development and monitoring one's own vital and warning signs. Feeling terrific and looking good lead to the "psychological benefits of enhanced self-esteem, self-control, determination, and a sense of direction" (Hettler, 1976). Physical wellness follows these principles:

- It is better to consume foods and beverages that enhance good health rather than those that impair it

- It is better to be physically fit than out of shape (Hettler, 1976, p. 1).

### ***Social***

The third dimension focuses on one's social dimension and the student's responsibility to make this world a better place. During this dimension, students will become aware of the impact they have on their environment and society. Interdependence between nature and others plays a leading role within this dimension. Students will energetically pursue "the beauty and balance of nature along the pathway as you discover the power to make willful choices to enhance personal relationships and important friendship, and build a better living space and community" (Hettler, 1976). Social wellness follows these principles:

- It is better to contribute to the common welfare of our community than to think only of ourselves
- It is better to live in harmony with others and our environment than live in conflict with them (Hettler, 1976, p. 1).

### ***Intellectual***

The fourth dimension focuses on the growth and stimulation of intellectual and mental activities. Students will use intellectual and cultural activities in the classroom to broaden awareness of their own gifts. Students begin to expand their skills, knowledge, problem solving, and creativity, as well as learn and explore current issues. As students develop their intellectual curiosity, they will "actively strive to expand and challenge their mind with creative endeavors" (Hettler, 1976). Intellectual wellness follows these principles:

- It is better to stretch and challenge our minds with intellectual and creative pursuits than to become self-satisfied and unproductive
- It is better to identify potential problems and choose appropriate courses of action based on available information than to wait, worry, and contend with major concerns later (Hettler, 1976, p. 1).

### *Spiritual*

The fifth dimension, spiritual, assists students with their search for purpose and meaning during life's existence. The spiritual dimension dives into the development of the expansion of life, natural forces, and having a profound appreciation for the universe. During this dimension, some students receive the opportunity to experience feelings of joy, happiness, despair, fear, pleasure, disappointment, doubt, and discovery. "You'll know you're becoming spiritually well when your actions become more consistent with your beliefs, and values, resulting in a world view" (Hettler, 1976). Spiritual wellness follows these principles:

- It is better to ponder the meaning of life for ourselves and to be tolerant of the beliefs of others than to close our minds and become intolerant
- It is better to live each day in a way that is consistent with our values and beliefs than to do otherwise and feel untrue to ourselves (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

### *Emotional*

The sixth and final dimension, emotional, focuses on the students' acceptance and awareness of their own feelings. Emotional wellness manages one's feelings, one's ability to cope with excessive stress, and the willingness to develop autonomy. This dimension is where students recognize enthusiastic and positive feelings about life. Students will take on risks, challenges, conflicts, and responsibility for their own actions (Hettler, 1976).

Emotional wellness follows these principles:

- It is better to be aware of and accept our feelings than to deny them
- It is better to be optimistic in our approach to life than pessimistic (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

By applying Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness, "a person becomes aware of the interconnectedness of each dimension and how they contribute to healthy living" (Hettler, 1976).

If students approach Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model with openness, enthusiasm, and time, they will receive a holistic explanation about each dimension:

- How a person contributes to his or her environment and community, and how to build better living spaces and social networks;
- The enrichment of life through work, and its interconnectedness to living and playing;
- The development of belief systems, values, and creating world-view;
- The benefits of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, strength and vitality, as well as personal responsibility, self-care, and when to seek medical attention;
- Self-esteem, self-control, and determination as a sense of direction;
- Creative and stimulating mental activities and sharing your gifts with others (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

Research found that applying a wellness approach can attribute to developing fullness with every human endeavor. Three questions regarding Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness can address the degree of wellness being obtained by students and colleges.

These questions can be asked as the following:

- Does this help students achieve their full potential?
- Does this recognize and address the whole student (multi-dimensional approach)?
- Does this affirm and mobilize student's positive qualities and strengths (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness can be incorporated within higher education to promote holistic health and optimal living among nontraditional community college students.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The objective of this study was to enlighten the reader regarding the importance of community colleges. These remarkable establishments continue to serve as a cornerstone for nontraditional students seeking to obtain a college degree. Community colleges have been deemed as the people's college in hopes of providing nontraditional students with a path to possibilities. Community colleges allow open access to those not fortunate enough to be afforded the opportunity to attend a 4-year college due to the lack of financial resources, support, and other extenuating circumstances. This study focused on the lived experiences of eight nontraditional community college students from all walks of life.

The purpose of this study was to provide a platform to nontraditional students to share their experiences and provide a personal story about their journey within higher education. Their lived experiences and self-perceptions aim to provide an understanding on how nontraditional students view community colleges and most importantly themselves. The research questions addressed in this study investigated the experiences nontraditional students encountered while attending a community college:

1. What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?
2. How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?
  - a. How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?

3. In what ways does attending community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?
4. How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?

### **Qualitative Research Design**

To answer the research questions, a phenomenological approach was selected to assist with the qualitative research design (Litchman, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The phenomenological approach provided the researcher with a narrative analysis to explore the lived experiences of the participants selected for the study. This approach facilitated data analysis by bracketing the participants' views and ensuring their perceptions were captured. The goal was to explore a new perspective on this marginalized population who have been given an opportunity to seek open access to higher education through the trajectory of a more affordable pathway to possibilities. Additionally, this study intended to capture personal opinions regarding the participants' self-perceptions of attending a community college as a nontraditional student.

Many prominent researchers have defined qualitative research as an appropriate portrayal of one's experience through a phenomenon. Lichtman (2013) eloquently described qualitative research as "a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings" (p. 6). The use of qualitative research allowed the researcher to understand this phenomenon and the participants' experiences through their

perceptions, actions, attitudes, and motivations in the form of descriptive language and words (Deniborin, n.d.).

### **Method of Inquiry**

Qualitative research aims to interpret and narrate the complete context of what is being studied from the participants' frame of reference or vantage point (Lichtman, 2013). This preferred research method is interpretive, pragmatic, grounded, and explores the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative research is not only fluid but also multidimensional and relies deeply on the voices of humans (Lichtman, 2013). One of the main goals of qualitative research is to allow the researcher to accurately depict the authenticity of each description that represents and fosters an understanding of a particular experience or phenomenon (Munhall, 1994). This type of research supports the researcher in using inductive reasoning to succor the movement from specifics to general information (Lichtman, 2013).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the lived experiences from the nontraditional students' point of view. Examining the participants' personal experiences was useful to authenticate their side of the story to fill in the gaps about the importance of community colleges and how the participants have benefited from attending one. Qualitative research was the best approach to secure the participants' responses to reveal an unpretentious meaning. The three in-depth interviews enabled the participants to share their lived experiences and be completely transparent. The utilization of Chickering's theory of identity development and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model as part of the researcher's framework supported the

researcher with exploring if nontraditional students at the community college are being emotionally developed and academically prepared to transition to 4-year institutions.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted prior to the three in-depth interviews. One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study could provide insight if the instruments or proposed methods are too complicated or inappropriate, if research protocols have not been followed all the way through, and to give warning as to where the main research could potentially be unsuccessful (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

A formal pilot interview was conducted in January 2023 with a nontraditional student who identified as a student-athlete. The interviewee was taking online classes from a highly recognized U.S. educational company to become eligible to compete during the second half of the season. The interview lasted approximately 70 minutes and provided the researcher with insightful feedback pertaining to the applicability of the interview questions and confirmed the validity of the study to be presented to the eight selected participants. The findings from the pilot interview were able to shed light on a major concern regarding the lack of academic preparedness from transitioning to college from high school. Additionally, the pilot interview captured concerns pertaining to adapting to the demanding and rigorous expectations of collegiate athletics and academic coursework while being a first-generation nontraditional student. Based on the pilot study, no questions were changed. The researcher was able to gauge the interest of the desired population to compile rich data and gather noteworthy participation.

## **Research Setting**

The participants provided more of a distinctive voice to the voiceless in hopes of enlightening people about the importance of community colleges. Over 630,000 students have passed through the doors of Palm Tree Community College (PTCC, pseudonym) aspiring to obtain an associate's degree or certificate and distinctive ways to improve their workplace skills and lifelong learning. Student enrollment at the college consists of the following: 36,658 students taking noncredit and credit courses, 16,088 full-time equivalent students, and 29,034 students enrolled in credit classes. There are 66% more women than men and an increasingly diverse population of African American (55.2%), White (26.6%), Latino (9.1%), Asian/Pacific Islander (8.5%), and Native American (0.6%) students. The faculty and staff consist of the following: 427 full-time faculty, 682 part-time faculty, and 479 administrative and support staff. The faculty at Palm Tree Community College is fully equipped with master's and doctorate degrees from various 4-year institutions across the nation (PTCC, 2016).

## **Positionality/Relationship to Study**

As an athletic administrator with a little over 11 years of experience working at an urban community college, I have been afforded the opportunity to work with the nontraditional student population. I have been fortunate to work with a resilient population of student-athletes, students, faculty, and staff from all walks of life. Through my years of experience, I have witnessed so many trials and tribulations that our nontraditional students have had to constantly overcome. Many have and continue to be overlooked due to the struggles of life and the cards they have been unfairly dealt. The public school system in many ways has failed these very students who walk through our

doors looking for an opportunity to obtain an associate's degree and/or a different avenue to matriculate to 4-year institutions.

My administrative position enables me to bridge the gap between the faculty and student-athletes through the National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association (NJCAA) eligibility guidelines. This overarching association demands us to follow their rules, regulations, code of conduct, and guidelines for our staff, coaches, and student-athletes to be eligible at the collegiate level. Our student-athletes understand the importance of being academically eligible to continue playing for the college. The eligibility requirements are as follows:

- You must be enrolled full-time carrying a minimum of 12 credits and remain in at least 12 credits during the semester of competition
- Earn 12 credits with a minimum 2.0 GPA each semester
- Complete a physical examination prior to the season
- Complete an NJCAA eligibility affidavit
- Submit a copy of your official high school transcript(s). If you have not attended a U.S. high school for the last 3 years, please submit a high school diploma and proof of age (birth certificate, passport or driver's license)
- Submit college transcripts from previous institution(s) if you transferred from another college (NJCAA, 2022, p. 10).

Our department seeks to foster an environment that provides student-athletes at the college community with the opportunity to develop their full potential athletically, physically, and academically. Through athletics, we strive to teach lifelong skills, such as discipline, teamwork, sportsmanship, self-control, cooperation, hard work, playing by the

rules, and respect for authority through athletic competition and recreational activity. The Athletic Department also provides support for students by:

- Recognizing students' academic needs as primary and athletic achievements as secondary.
- Broadening the horizons of students by creating diverse program of activities that serve to enhance their overall experience at the college.
- Providing students with the tools to become well-rounded individuals and achieve their goals.
- Sponsoring seminars that enhance the students' understanding of college life, academic experiences, and college resources.

Among other responsibilities at the college, being responsible for intramural events has allowed me to interact with the non-student-athlete population on a daily basis. Having an open-door policy within our department creates a trustworthy foundation for all students to discuss their issues and/or concerns. In addition, being a chair for the judicial hearing committee has allowed me to see students with temperamental issues through different lenses.

Not everything is exactly what it appears to be. Having the ability to empathize and look at things from a different perspective is imperative when governing student sanctions. The goal of my research was to shed light on the voiceless by focusing on their trials and tribulations and the reasons why they chose to attend a community college. Also, the research on community colleges will continue to serve and reflect the needs of the community. The idea of fostering community colleges has been contributed to the

progress of developing and cultivating nontraditional students to be able to matriculate to 4-year institutions through rigorous academic preparedness.

### **Study Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to select eight nontraditional students with varied backgrounds (student-athletes, international, first-generation, single parent, and full-time/part-time employment) to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability method that occurs when the researcher uses judgment when selecting criteria for their study (Saunders et al., 2012). This type of sampling allows the researcher to make meaningful comparisons, generate data, explore processes, and test suggested theory to account for differences and similarities (Mason, 1996). This type of sample was based on the researcher's relationship to the community college and access to the student population.

Due to the researcher's administrative position at Palm Tree Community College, they were able to have full access to an exclusive population. This unique population consisted of student-athletes. This marginalized group provided another identity of the nontraditional student attending a community college. It was the first time this underrepresented population had been given a voice and an opportunity to address their experiences at this community college. The countless trials and tribulations that this population endures on a daily basis will be shared among senior college leaders, policymakers, and researchers within higher education.

A formal consent form was handed to the eight participants. The form was completed by each participant prior to the three in-depth interviews. The eight participants are student-athletes from a surrounding urban community college and were

chosen through a purposive selection strategy. The aim was to empower the participants to share their story about their experience at the designated community college and shed light on having the opportunity to seek open access to higher education through the trajectory of a more affordable pathway to possibilities. The age range for the eight participants was between 21–23 years old. This age bracket validates certain criteria for being a nontraditional student attending community college. The NCES (n.d.) defined a nontraditional student as follows:

most often age (especially being over the age of 20) has been the defining characteristic for this population. Age acts as a surrogate variable that captures a large, heterogeneous population of adult students who often have family and work responsibilities as well as other life circumstances that can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives. Other variables typically used to characterize nontraditional students are associated with their background (race and gender), residence (i.e., not on campus), level of employment (especially working full time), and being enrolled in non-degree occupational programs.

This population is extremely intriguing due to the steadfast numbers for those who are enrolling as well as attending community colleges across the nation.

### **Data Collection Process**

Prior to any research, the Temple University’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects reviewed and approved this research study. After Institutional Review Board approval was granted, the researcher began the recruitment process and identified potential participants using purposive sampling.

It was extremely vital to communicate with each participant the importance of confidentiality and the promise that the participants’ name and/or any other personal information would be protected by the researcher and would not be disclosed to any other source for the protection of the study (see Appendix A). The eight participants willing to

partake in the research study were asked to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Additionally, an audiotape form (see Appendix C) was given to each participant to be viewed and signed. After both forms were completed and signed, each participant was asked to create a pseudonym that was written on all research materials for confidentiality purposes.

The first/initial interview was coordinated during February 2023. The researcher had access to a larger population due to the beginning of the spring semester and the selected participants being in-season for men's and women's basketball and women's outdoor track and field. The eight participants were student-athletes at the community college. The researcher was able to interview seven out of the eight participants in-person. The eighth participant was unable to attend in-person due to transportation constraints and had to depend on the video conferencing platform Zoom.

During the first/initial interview, the participants completed an informational form pertaining to their date of birth, first or second year of athletic eligibility, college major, graduation date/anticipated graduation date, race/ethnicity, living arrangements, ownership of a vehicle, and transportation to the community college. This was immediately followed up with the first/initial interview (see Appendix D) containing 13 questions gathered from the research questions. The questions were centered on Chickering's theory of identity development and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model to address the lack of literature as it pertains to nontraditional community college students. The first/initial interview was designed to collect background information linked to the participants' identity, academic experience, factors that have led to attending a community college, employment status, parental/guardianship status, extracurricular

activities, and additional thoughts to assist with the research. The first/initial interview enabled the participants to answer whether they considered themselves to be nontraditional and/or first-generation and describe their community college experience.

The second/intermediate interview was held in the same facility to establish a familiarity between the participants and researcher. This second/intermediate interview was also scheduled during February 2023. The interview provided a more profound understanding about the participants' lived experiences through 15 in-depth questions (see Appendix E). These questions gathered information about the reason for choosing a community college, family support, student support services, campus resources, academic preparedness, and student development. This interview gave the participants an ample opportunity to express their feelings and for their voices to finally be heard.

The theoretically based questions addressed the participants' experiences, benefits, family support, campus resources, student support services, relationships, academic preparedness, personal development, holistic wellness, mental health, LGBT identity, challenges, myths/misconceptions, and any additional thoughts while attending a community college. At the end of the second/intermediate interview, each participant was given the opportunity to add any additional details they may have withheld or were hesitant to share.

The third/final interview was held during March 2023 in a private office space within the department of athletics. The third/final interview contained three questions (see Appendix F) to allow the researcher to recap all of the feedback and information from the previous two interviews. This debriefing process is also called "member checking." Member checking is to ensure that the findings derived from the interviews

are credible. This process is to validate and access the accuracy of the participants results from the interviews (Birt et al., 2016). If the researcher needed to add or subtract any additional information from the participants, it was completed during this last encounter.

**Table 1**

*Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research question (RQ)	First/initial interview	Second/ intermediate interview	Third/final interview
RQ1 What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?	3,8,10,11,12,13	5,10,11,12, 14,15	3
RQ2 How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?	4,7,9,12,13	3,4,7,8,15	3
RQ2 (a.) How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?	2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10, 11,12,13	2,3,4,5,7,8, 9,10,11, 12,13,14,15	3
RQ3 In what ways does attending community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?	2,6,7,8,9,13	2,6,9,10,12, 13,14,15	3
RQ4 How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?	9,12,13	3,7,8,15	3

During the final gathering, each participant was provided with a print-out of the researcher’s transcripts from the first two interviews to be reviewed and approved. They were asked if they needed more clarity regarding the summary of information. If a participant wanted to edit or change their copy, a revised copy would be printed and available for immediate pick-up. Although there are struggles with in-depth interviews, this process allows researchers to take a deeper look at the findings. Some researchers

believe “it is like opening up an artichoke and looking at the layers upon layers until you reach the core” (Lichtman, 2012, p. 22). These in-depth interviews enable researchers to focus more on the words and visual data collected from the participants. The research questions and interview questions are outline in Table 1.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary sources of data were the interview transcripts and participants’ demographic information. The field notes taken during each interview aimed to strengthen the study’s validity. Field notes are recommended in qualitative research as it is a means of documenting and capturing contextual information (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Audio recording can only capture each participant’s voice but not their body movements and gestures. The field notes coincided with adding reflective and descriptive actions of the eight participants.

The interview questions were aligned with each of the research questions. A coding scheme was developed through dissecting and categorizing the information received. It was imperative to enforce a strategic process to conceptualize the data. Lichtman’s (2013) three Cs were imperative when it came to coding, categorizing, and using concepts during the data analysis process. The six-step process includes the following steps:

1. Initial coding. Going from responses to summary ideas of the responses
2. Revisiting initial coding
3. Developing an initial list of categories
4. Modifying your initial list based on additional rereading
5. Revisiting your categories and subcategories
6. Moving from categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2013, p. 265)

Following Lichtman's (2013) six-step process, the data were organized and analyzed by hand. Interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and hand-written notes

were taken during the interview. The researcher also used Zoom for one of the interviews due to the fact that transportation constraints played an integral role for the participant not being able to travel to campus. After the interview, the participants' information was transcribed by hand while listening to the recording. Each recording was listened to at least three times to correct and improve the transcription's accuracy. The process started with the predetermined coding scheme based on the literature review and conceptual/theoretical framework (e.g., identity, development, sense of purpose, benefits, and challenges). This included an intentional analysis of the data based on Chickering's theory of identity development and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model.

Additionally, the researcher made individual folders for each participant that included their signed consent and audiotape form, interview questions, demographic information, interview answers, and field notes. The researcher engaged in a deductive review of transcripts to identify examples of the codes across participants (Litchman, 2013). Using different colored markers to differentiate codes, these smaller chunks (i.e., codes) of data were then collapsed and organized into larger broad themes. These themes were then linked to each of the research questions. An Excel spreadsheet and dry-erase board was also used to organize, analyze, and store the codes and themes from each interview (see Table 2).

After analyzing the collected data, five broad codes were created along with 11 emergent themes (as shown in Table 2). The five broad themes that were created are as follows: (a) identity influences, (b) development experiences, (c) student engagement/athletic expectations, (d) enrollment challenges, and (e) mental health concerns. The 11 themes emerged were: (a) social-cultural factors, (b) academic support,

(c) workforce/career connections, (d) support system, (e) life and career goals, (f) performance, (g) transportation constraints, (h) basic needs, (i) counseling resources, (j) awareness trainings/workshops, and (k) wellness activities. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study in response to the four research questions. A discussion from the experiences of the eight participants' experiences is presented using Chickering's theory of identity development and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model.

**Table 2**

*Codes and Themes*

Broad codes	Emergent themes
Identity influences	1. Sociocultural factors
Developmental experiences	2. Academic support
	3. Workforce/career connections
Student engagement/athletic expectations	4. Support system
	5. Life and career goals
	6. Performance
Enrollment challenges	7. Transportation constraints
	8. Basic needs
Mental health concerns	9. Counseling resources
	10. Awareness trainings/workshops
	11. Wellness activities

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher was able to ensure qualitative validity and trustworthiness. This was done through member checking—providing rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences—and peer debriefing. The researcher was able to observe, write, and record as much information as possible through their researcher role. Detailed descriptions were fundamental when it came to reporting accurate data from each interview.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this research study was to gather and provide data on the lived experiences of nontraditional community college students and how they are able to navigate through trials, tribulations, and extenuating circumstances to obtain an associate's degree. The researcher was able to utilize this study to explore the perceptions and development of nontraditional community college students as they navigated through stigmas associated with attending a 2-year collegiate institution within the mid-Atlantic region. This study focused on eight student-athletes and obtained an understanding of their self-perceptions, personal development as a nontraditional community college student, and the importance of community colleges. In detail, the research examined the nontraditional student's holistic and wellness development, personal and academic development, and self-identity. Additionally, the research addressed issues that have plagued societies' perceptions about community colleges and reclaimed the fact that they are indeed America's cornerstone.

This chapter reflects on the responses from the three in-depth interviews to give the reader a sense of understanding and empathy regarding the participants' lived experiences from attending an urban community college. Three in-depth interviews were administered to eight nontraditional students to seek an understanding of the importance of community colleges and how they are being academically and holistically prepared to matriculate to a 4-year college. Having a better understanding about this marginalized population may provide insight to the practitioners in higher education and stakeholders concerning the benefits of attending a community college. The literature review found

that there seems to be a misconception and an ongoing stigma pertaining to the lack of academic rigor and preparedness among nontraditional students as they matriculate to 4-year colleges. Arthur W. Chickering's theory of identity development, also known as Chickering's theory, and Hettler's Six Dimensions of Wellness model provided a more structured lens for the researcher to dive in and address if there was a lack of academic preparedness, holistic student development, and graduation, retention, and transfer rates at the designated community college.

The first part of this chapter provides the reader with the findings from the participant profiles and demographics of the eight participants. The second part of this chapter discloses the study's findings from the three interviews to answer the four research questions through the overarching themes within the scope of the research study. The last part of this chapter divulges the dialogue of the findings. This chapter enables the researcher to provide the results from the research study. The voice of this marginalized population will create a different narrative pertaining to the misconceptions of nontraditional community college students.

### **Participants' Demographics**

A pseudonym was given to each of the eight participants. Prior to each interview, the researcher encouraged participants to speak freely and be as transparent as possible. Reassurance of their identities being kept confidential was reiterated before each interview to ensure that each participant felt comfortable. Table 3 displays a demographic profile of each of the eight participant's background information and pseudonym gathered from the interviews. The profile captures the participants' pseudonym, age, community college, graduation year, major, and sport.

**Table 3***Participant Profiles*

Participant	Age	Race	Status	Eligibility	Major	Sport
David	21	Black*	Nontraditional	1st year	Dental Hygiene	MBB
Jason	21	Black	Traditional	2nd year	Secondary Education	MBB
Anastasia	22	More than one race	Nontraditional	1st year	Nursing	WBB
Anna	22	More than one race	Nontraditional	1st year	HealthCare Studies	WBB/WTRK
Caleb	22	Black	Nontraditional	2nd year	Business Leadership	MBB
Joanna	22	More than one race	Nontraditional	2nd year	Business	WBB
Michael	22	Black	Nontraditional	2nd year	HealthCare Studies	MBB
Rebekah	23	Black	Nontraditional	1st year	Liberal Arts	WBB

*Note.* \* Participant self-identified as Black and clarified that he was born in Ghana, Africa. MBB = Men's basketball; WBB = Women's basketball; WTRK = Women's track & field.

**Participant Profiles**

The participant profiles are from eight student-athletes from Palm Tree Community College. There is an equal number for first-year student-athletes (4) and second-year student-athletes (4). Out of the eight student-athletes, one is deemed an international nontraditional student from the continent of Africa. All eight participants have declared their major to obtain their associate's degree at Palm Tree Community College. The voices of the eight selected participants will be heard for the first time regarding their lived experiences at one of the largest mid-Atlantic community colleges.

***Participant 1: David***

The first participant named David is from the continent of Africa. This is his first year at Palm Tree Community College. David is majoring in dental hygiene and is planning to graduate in May 2024. David became obsessed with oral hygiene at a very young age. His mom heavily pressed on him to pursue a medical career but was fine with David being a dental hygienist, which is also considered part of the medical field, to represent his country.

David chose Palm Tree Community College due to his sister already being enrolled and attending. His interest has always been in the sport of basketball and dental hygiene. Thanks to growing over a foot in high school, David now stands at 6 feet 7 inches and is in his own elite group. There are only 130,000 men in the United States who are 6 feet 7 inches tall. David's height immediately caught the attention of the head coach for the men's basketball team at Palm Tree Community College.

There's an old saying in athletics: "one thing you can't teach, is height!" David's passion allowed him to try-out for the nationally ranked basketball team in hopes of being able to make his country proud. Unfortunately, COVID-19 hit the United States and Palm Tree Community College had to shut its doors until it was safe to open in-person again. This meant that all intercollegiate athletics were put on hold due to the devastating pandemic. David and his sister had to continue their higher education from home via online classes.

This had an immediate effect on David as he felt that the amount of time he spent home taking online classes took away his ability to socialize effectively. Prior to the pandemic, David was a social person who felt like he was finally fitting in to society due

to his growth spurt and receiving positive recognition/attention from everyone. The gap year helped David decide that he wanted to remain at Palm Tree Community College due to the fact that it was the best fit for him and his sister financially. It was pretty much a no-brainer having no loans while attending the community college. At first, David did not really understand what the whole community college was about but then realized that it was actually a path to possibilities.

Once the doors of the community college were safe to reopen after the pandemic, David explained that it was not what he expected. He thought there was going to be residential living (dorms) for the students to live in. He wanted the same experience that he had seen on television with other college students. David did not realize that a lot of community colleges do not offer residential life like the 4-year colleges. It is said that because there is not a demand for residential life, community colleges do not normally offer housing for its constituents.

A majority of the student population are considered commuters and live at home with their parents and/or guardians to save money. After his brief disappointment, David grasped the fact that there is so much help and many connections at Palm Tree Community College. As big as the community college is, he was able to go to one department and mention someone's name and everyone is affiliated and connected with each other to ensure that students receive the correct help to resolve their situation. Additionally, David found solace in his one true love, basketball. He was happy to hear that he had made the men's basketball team post-pandemic and was going to be their starting center. His proud moment would not last long as he was severely injured with a high ankle sprain during the first week of practice.

This extenuating circumstance would not keep David from remaining on and being a part of the team as they captured conference and regional wins to make it to the national tournament. David understood that he could still accomplish a lot in 2 years at a community college. He knew that this is college and this is life. This is the profound moment when you realize that you are in charge of your own life. You must be a student first because the athletic association has strict eligibility requirements to remain eligible to compete on the court.

***Participant 2: Jason***

Jason is a second-year student who graduated with an associate's degree in secondary education–social studies in May 2023. Jason was recruited by a well-known 4-year college for basketball, but due to the pandemic and an insufficient grade point average, he had to take a gap year. Jason now comprehended that he was unable to get into a good school due to his truncated 2.00 grade point average. Out of the gloomy sky came a bright shining light that was his second opportunity to play basketball at the college level. The head coach for the men's basketball team at Palm Tree Community College heard about Jason and his God-given basketball skills/talents and offered him an opportunity to receive a college degree at an affordable cost as well as to earn a spot on his nationally ranked team.

Jason had no other place to go to play college basketball because his high school grade point average was lower than a 2.00. He now has a second chance to earn better grades and work on his basketball game. With Jason's tenacious hard work, he became the team's starting forward and was ranked in the top 20 for rebounds. Jason's transformational leadership qualities and traits were the driving force for the men's

basketball team winning the regional championship. Furthermore, Jason traveled for the first time on a plane to compete at the national championship. Finally, Jason had the opportunity to increase his grade point average to a 3.30.

Jason was named to the all-academic, all-region, and all-conference teams. Jason had a bland experience and recognized that he could have participated more and branched out at Palm Tree Community College. His primary focus has always been to compete at the NCAA Division-I level to be respected and valued as a top-tier student-athlete. Furthermore, Jason viewed Palm Tree Community College as a miniature college with random adults walking around. Metaphorically, a community college is bite-sized before taking on the whole thing (4-year college).

***Participant 3: Anastasia***

Anastasia is a first-year student at Palm Tree Community College. Anastasia had the opportunity to go to a 4-year college to pursue her degree in nursing. Due to the pandemic and personal reasons that she did not feel comfortable elaborating on, she decided to leave the 4-year college. She explained that the environment was not the same at the 4-year college as it is at Palm Tree Community College. The 4-year college did not have access to resources like Palm Tree does.

Anastasia was going to attend Palm Tree Community College with her older brother, but plans changed and she ended up enrolling by herself. She felt there was no motion for her while working towards her degree and she was not getting there while being at her designated 4-year college. The more she communicated the more transparent Anastasia became. She felt comfortable informing the researcher about some personal

reasons for her leaving the 4-year college. The 4-year college that Anastasia previously attended mandated vaccination shots to be eligible to compete against other colleges.

She decided that she needed something fresh and more beneficial. Anastasia was the miracle that the women's basketball team needed to finish the season. A few of the women's basketball players lost eligibility and if the team had not found another eligible student, they would have had to forfeit the season. Anastasia did what she needed to do to become eligible and was added to the spring roster. She used this momentous break as motivation to advance her basketball skills and increase her grade point average to be accepted into one of the top nursing programs in the mid-Atlantic region.

***Participant 4: Anna***

Anna is a first-year student majoring in healthcare studies at Palm Tree Community College. She plans to graduate with an associate's degree in May 2024. Anna originally got accepted to an out-of-state 4-year institution straight out of high school but then the pandemic happened. Anna made an executive decision to stay home and continue to remain safe from the pandemic. This is what transpired into a gap year from college.

The following year, Anna made the final decision to attend Palm Tree Community College due to the affordable cost, location, and convenience. Anna spoke about the flexibility of her classes and that the 4-year college she was planning on going to after high school did not offer online options. Anna talked about the flexibility of her online courses and that it allows her to have time to do more things throughout the day. She appreciated the structure she has experienced at Palm Tree Community College by being a dual sport student-athlete. While talking about the major accolades she has already

received both academically and athletically at Palm Tree Community College, Anna's face immediately brightened with a wide smile showing her perfectly straight and white teeth.

Anna has realized that Palm Tree Community College is a better choice due to her disclosing her mental health issues and diagnosed learning disability. She did not feel comfortable with the name of her diagnosis being part of this research study. Anna assured that she would make an appointment with the Department of Disabilities to inquire if she would qualify to receive academic accommodations and support. She did not want anything to impede her acquiring her associate's degree and to achieve an athletic scholarship to participate at a 4-year college. Anna's tenacious goal of graduating from Palm Tree Community College with high honors in the field of healthcare studies and matriculating to a 4-year college with a full athletic scholarship is becoming closer to a reality.

***Participant 5: Caleb***

Caleb is a second-year student-athlete at Palm Tree Community College. Caleb had financial issues at the first college he attended. His older brother graduated from Palm Tree Community College and expressed that he should enroll as soon as possible. Caleb's brother educated him about Palm Tree Community College having a good history of graduating students with an associate's degree and being able to transfer to a prestigious 4-year college.

Caleb acknowledged the fact that he sometimes limits himself and decided to take a leap of faith and applied to Palm Tree Community College. After taking the college placement test, he was excited to receive the scores that immediately placed him into

college-level courses. Caleb developed a strong passion for business and decided to major in business leadership at the college. He wants to make his Haitian culture proud and to provide encouraging business advice to his family and friends. Caleb admitted that he has finally gotten the hang of attending a community college.

In the beginning, it was tough, and Caleb would sometimes procrastinate when it came to being vigilant and completing his class assignments on time. Some days he would be more organized than others. Caleb had to adapt to creating an academic/athletic/life schedule. Once he adapted to his schedule after the first 2–3 weeks of the semester, in his eyes, he was good. Being a student-athlete is what helped motivate Caleb to stay on top of his studies. Caleb really loved and cared for the sport of basketball. He knew that academics and athletics went hand and hand. Without good grades, he would not be eligible to play on the college's nationally ranked men's basketball team.

***Participant 6: Joanna***

Joanna is completing her second year at Palm Tree Community College. Her major is in business and she plans on graduating at the next commencement in May 2024. Joanna is coming from a prominent community college where they had residential life to provide a learning environment that was engaging and safe for their students. Also, Joanna played on their women's basketball team where she received athletic aid to pay for her classes to remain eligible to compete against other college teams. She led the nation in three-point shooting and assists and would be considered as an elite women's basketball player.

Due to the pandemic, Joanna did not feel supported at the college where she was attending and decided to take a gap year and transferred to Palm Tree Community College. She heard really good things about the number of resources, majors, and support former student-athletes received who attended years ago. Joanna knew and respected the head coach for the women's basketball team as he had a long history of producing elite student-athletes who received full scholarships to top NCAA Division I and II women's basketball programs. She wanted a change of scenery and craved the environment to meet new people. She knew no one was going to hold her hand but wanted to receive that support to be a part of a team/community college whose mission is to ensure that her grades would be on point.

Joanna felt in her heart and soul that this community college would be a great new start to advocate for what she needed and to know her self-worth. She really wanted to get to know her professors and build long lasting relationships with each one for one day she would also become a professor at a college. Joanna transferred from another community college in hopes of having and enjoying a better experience. Joanna immediately felt the atmospheric difference and that the people at Palm Tree Community College were more down to earth and had better energy. For the first time, Joanna did not feel alone and was not surrounded by fakeness at her new community college. At this point, she was creating impactful bonds and friendships with her new teammates and felt really good about her decision to transfer to Palm Tree Community College.

***Participant 7: Michael***

Michael is a second-year student majoring in healthcare studies and graduated May, 2023. Michael expressed his disbelief that he is actually going to graduate and

receive an associate's degree from Palm Tree Community College. He literally had no idea that he would make it this far in life. Michael is extremely thankful and grateful that he stuck it through and never once gave up on his dream of earning a college degree. Michel acknowledged that he would be the trendsetter and first to graduate from a college.

His older sister is also in college but has not graduated yet. Michael explained his experience and what led him to come to Palm Tree Community College. He informed the researcher that he was recruited by the head men's basketball coach from high school and really wanted to keep playing at the collegiate level. His love and passion have always been for basketball and now for the medical field. Just last week he became a certified phlebotomist with hopes of pursuing a job that pays well.

Michael stated that he has remained disciplined and strives to maintain over a 3.00 grade point average. Coach never had to worry about Michael remaining eligible because he was always on top of his studies. He was an intrinsic leader and led by example on and off the court. Michael was revered and respected by his teammates and coaches for being able to produce key shots under pressure to win many games. Michael was a major factor for the team winning the regional championship and representing Palm Tree Community College at the national championship.

***Participant 8: Rebekah***

Rebekah is a first-year student at Palm Tree Community College. Her major is liberal arts and she plans on graduating in May 2024. Rebekah comes from a college-based high-performing academic high school. She was recruited to play women's

basketball by the head coach. Rebekah's 6-foot-1-inch very strong stature makes her a force to be reckoned with on and off the court.

Rebekah hails from the same prominent community college as Joanna. Rebekah is older than Joanna and her reason for transferring to Palm Tree Community College was due to her basketball season being cancelled for not having enough eligible players. She decided that she wanted to play with her friends at Palm Tree Community College. Rebekah's main focus is to receive her associate's degree and transfer to a 4-year college to demonstrate to her 3-year-old daughter that you can be and do anything in life as long as you put your mind to it. Many times, she wanted to quit but triumphed through for the sake of her family, dreams, goals, and aspirations in life.

Rebekah wanted the support that her friends bragged about receiving while playing for Palm Tree Community College. They informed her that Palm Tree Community College was about resilience and holding student-athletes accountable for earning their associate's degree. She explained that it was more than athletics and more about pursuing her own path to possibilities. It was her time to shine and be the first in her family to obtain a college degree. It does get hard sometimes, but in the end, Rebekah believes without a doubt that this was indeed the smarter and more affordable choice to making her dream come true.

### **Organization of Findings Data**

The data from this research study are organized by four research questions:

1. What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?

2. How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?
  - a. How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?
3. In what ways does attending a community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?
4. How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?

### ***Research Question 1***

What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?

The eight participants shared their opinions on how they perceive identity as a student attending a community college. Each participant was asked if they knew what it meant to be a nontraditional student as opposed to a traditional student. Out of the eight participants, only one identified as a traditional student. The one major theme that emerged from Research Question 1 was sociocultural factors. Below are examples of the participants' factors that have led to their own self-identity.

### ***Identity Influences***

**Sociocultural Factors.** The third question of the first/initial interview asked if the participants identified as a nontraditional student. When the question was asked, each participant except for one asked for the definition and what it meant to be nontraditional. The participants were informed that being nontraditional defined students as being much older, working full-time/part-time, having family obligations/responsibilities, being a

single parent, enrolling years after high school, having life circumstances and a diverse set of experiences, and being financially independent. Sociocultural factors include beliefs, values, demographics, social classes, sexuality, lifestyles, attitudes, religion, and education. Lifestyle and family considerations become major factors when setting goals and making decisions while students continue to establish their identity (Evans et al., 2010). The data from the first/initial interview questions (3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13) and second/intermediate interview questions (5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15) were recorded from participants David, Anastasia, Rebekah, Joanna, and Jason. David shared that he identified as nontraditional, international, a student-athlete, and a caregiver:

Transitioning from Africa as an international student, I felt I wasn't ready to immediately jump into the four-year college. It is very important in my culture to earn a college degree. A college means everything to my family in Ghana. As a Black international student, I wanted experience college at a community college level first because it was best financially. With us not having a lot of money and financial support, I don't have the money to attend a four-year college right now. I need to take care of my little sister and family.

Anastasia expressed that she identifies as nontraditional, LGBT, a student-athlete, a full-time employee, independent, and a caregiver:

I definitely identify as a nontraditional student. I am pretty much on my own from coming out to my family as being a lesbian. We are from a strict religious background. I wasn't allowed to have friends. I basically live on my own and work a full-time job (40 hours a week/overnight). No one in my family has gone to college and not really thinking about it either. I had to do it to show my seven younger siblings (5 sisters and 2 brothers) the importance of having a college degree if you want to make a living and survive in this world. I was left to tackle the college thing with only having my auntie in my corner. I am trying to be a role model for my siblings.

Rebekah identifies as nontraditional, a single mother, a student-athlete, a full-time employee, and independent:

It's definitely hard trying to take care of a 3-year-old child, work full-time, and take classes. I literally have no help from my family or friends. Things just happen the way that you would never expect it to. Life happens. I didn't expect to be 23 with a 3-year-old child. I am the sole provider for me and my daughter. I make it happen each day! Trying to stay focus while only getting 2-3 hours a sleep each night is rough. I need to take care of my daughter to show her that just because you are a single parent, you can still get a college degree. I am doing this for her!

Joanna identifies as nontraditional, spiritual, religious, a student-athlete, a part-time employee, and independent:

Being a nontraditional student is not for the weak. I have strength from the Lord. I have a full-time job working 12:30am – 6:30am 6 days a week. There's no mail on Sundays. Every day is a blessing and looking forward to overcoming each challenge that seems to come my way on a daily basis. My dad is not pressed on me going to a community college. He thinks that it's for losers who didn't make it to the four-year colleges. He definitely looks at me with disgust. I am not understanding why he feels that way because he didn't even go to a college. I don't have a lot of support at all. I feel like he is jealous because I am actually trying to be something in life other than a statistic. It's hard out here for us. I am just trying to survive and make it in life through my strong faith.

Jason identifies as a traditional student, a student-athlete, and independent:

I consider myself to be a traditional student. My family don't impede in my life. I am able to go to school, practice, and come home. I do my homework to the best I can and span it over multiple days. I am an only child so I don't have any family obligations. The only reason why I came to a community college in the first place was because my grades were low in high school. My grade point average wasn't high enough to get me into the college that I was recruited by. I have parents who pay for my schooling and don't have to work. No offense but this is kind of like high school 2.0. A miniature bite sized college to get acclimated to the college life before you take on the whole thing. It's like random older adults wandering around.

Prior to research, the fifth vector of Chickering's theory of identity development (establishing identity) and the fifth dimension of Hettler's wellness model (spiritual)

emerged from the first/initial and second/intermediate interviews. Establishing identity encompasses the complexities of differences within identity development based on one's sexual orientation, gender, and ethnic background (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The participants became aware that their identity as an assortment of various factors integrated with culture, history, and a broader society (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012). As participants mentioned their experiences, the spiritual dimension from Hettler's wellness model was communicated through the development of their expansion of life, natural forces, and having a profound appreciation for the universe (Hettler, 1976). The participants expressed their feelings of joy, happiness, despair, fear, pleasure, disappointment, doubt, and discovery.

### ***Research Question 2***

How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?

Each of the eight participants disclosed their thoughts on how their experiences at Palm Tree have helped them develop academically and individually while attending a community college. During the first/initial interview questions (4, 7, 9, 12, 13) and from the second/intermediate interview questions (3, 4, 7, 8, 15), two themes materialized that pertained to development: academic support and workforce/career connections. Below are passages taken from participants Caleb, Anna, Michael, and Jason regarding their development at Palm Tree Community College.

### ***Developmental Experiences***

**Academic Support.** Caleb explained the academic support at Palm Tree saved him:

The academic support that we get is amazing. I am able to Zoom my professor when I don't understand something in class. I have used the resources from the Learning Lab to Zoom with tutors. I just wished that someone was able to walk me through everything during my first year. You still feel lost with everything because you don't know what to expect or do. Even though this is a community college, it is still a lot to take in especially when you have none to help you. I was a little intimidated my first year but I had support from amazing people. Being able to Zoom with different tutors is what saved me from being ineligible to play basketball. The support that I was able to get was good.

Anna expressed her appreciation for the academic support she received:

Being a scholar at the community college, we are provided with workshops and weekly check-in meetings with our scholar coaches. They really make you feel like you belong here and want you to succeed. I was nervous and had major anxiety coming to school after the pandemic. I didn't feel academically prepared and was worried about being enough. With my mental health issues, it's sometimes hard for me to understand and concentrate. A lot that I am seeing in my classes is for a second time and I am trying to remember. I struggle sometimes and it feels good to have people who actually care. This is all new to me and I am doing it on my own. To have someone who knows what I am going through to help me would be nice. I don't know if they offer that here but they should.

Joanna shared the following:

I am thankful to have transferred from another community college in hopes of having a better experience. The relationships with my professors here have allowed me to excel in the classroom to remain eligible to play basketball. I definitely didn't receive this kind of one-on-one attention at my previous college. The professors, my coaches, and the athletic staff really want to see me succeed in life academically and athletically. I never considered myself to be academically prepared to succeed in college. In high school, the teachers would just look out for you if you were a really good athlete to be able to stay on the team and win championships for the school. There wasn't any focus on the students to really be developed to make it in college. Having this type of support is new to me but I like it and want to make everyone proud.

**Workforce/Career Connections.** Michael explained how the college provided workforce/career connections for him:

I am graduating in May with my major being in Healthcare Studies. Palm Tree equipped me with the knowledge and training to succeed. I worked very hard and have a 3.20 grade point average in this field. Prior to this interview, I just became a certified phlebotomist. They make a lot of money starting off. I attended a Graduate Career Fair and the Career Center that Palm Tree has for students who are about to graduate. I am desperately looking for a job but have also applied to a four-year college to earn a degree in nursing. I have always wanted to be a nurse and help people. My fascination with blood began when I was a young kid.

Jason explained that he can now be a social studies teacher:

I can be a social studies teacher right now if I wanted to. I am about to graduate from Palm Tree Community College with a 3.30 grade point average. My degree is Secondary Education – Social Studies. I really enjoy teaching kids. I want them to know that they can also earn a college degree no matter what they think or what people may tell them. The system is rigged for us to fail. I am going to pursue my dreams and play basketball at the next level. That way I can earn my bachelor's degree and possibly my master's if the four-year college pays for it.

The participants shared that their experiences with their development at Palm Tree Community College were through academic support, selecting a major, and knowing what career they wanted to pursue. Most participants mentioned that the relationships with their professors assisted with their path to possibilities. The experiences of Caleb, Anna, Joanna, Michael, and Jason were consistent with Chickering's fourth vector (mature interpersonal relationships) and Hettler's first dimension (occupational). The fourth vector, mature interpersonal relationships, acknowledges that one's experiences can be attributed to the development of one's sense of self. This aspect focuses on the capacity for intimacy involving students shifting from dependence on others to interdependence among individuals in one's environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Aligned with Hettler's occupational dimension, the participants expressed their skills, talents, and unique gifts. Their choice profession, career ambitions, personal performance, and job satisfaction are vital components while navigating through their life's purpose. The occupational dimension follows the principle that "it is better to choose a career which is consistent with our personal values, interests, and beliefs than to select one that is unrewarding to us" (Hettler, 1976, p. 1).

### ***Research Question 2(a)***

How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?

Developing a sense of competence and purpose was articulated from the illustrated emergent themes of support systems, life and career goals, and performance. These themes derived from the broad coding of student engagement/athletic expectations gathered from the first/initial interview questions (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13) and second/intermediate interview questions (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). The following responses were recorded from participants David, Michael, Caleb, Joanna, and Jason.

### ***Student Engagement/Athletic Expectations***

**Support Systems.** David explained that the support system is what kept him at Palm Tree:

The athletics staff helped me a lot. I unexpectedly received a lot of support, help, and assistance here at the community college. I have been going through a lot and the staff held it down for me. I was able to share a lot of personal things with the athletic staff and that really helped me mentally wise. My teammates who are in their second year, I relied on to lead me in the direction that was positive with basketball and gave me the information that I needed in order to be successful. They are older and really took me underneath their wing. Being a part of a team really had a

major impact on my life. A bond that we all shared can never be broken. I am glad that I came to Palm Tree Community College. All of my coaches, teammates and athletics staff helped me to experience what it really means to be fully and genuinely supported in life. Mentally, physically, and emotionally I was able to receive support. Being a part of a team with a winning tradition is everything. The positive reinforcement that I have constantly received from the athletics staff is almost unreal. I don't even receive this from my family.

Michael detailed his experience with the support systems at Palm Tree Community

College:

I have received a lot of support from everyone here at the college. The athletics staff really kept me calm and sane. It really means a lot to me when you are being checked in on mentally. I have gone through a lot in life and still going through some things. The staying calm, long talks and real conversations about academics, basketball, and life is what really got me through a lot of things. Having support from each one of my professors is unbelievable. I haven't had a bad professor the entire time I was here. Each professor showed patience and wanted the best for each and every one of their students. This is stuff that you only see on television or in the movies.

Caleb described his experiences and how the support had such an impact:

Palm Tree Community College is extremely supportive. The entire college supports our teams. Win or lose it's still the same love. The athletic staff is super supportive especially with my overall mental health issues. When we made it to the nationals, the love that we received and felt from the College was priceless. Just being there for us and making sure that our mental health was good traveling, playing, and even when we didn't win. I like that the College offers time management and stress management workshops. If it hadn't been for the athletics staff, coaches, and teammates, I am not sure I would still be here at the College. I have never received so much positive reinforcement in my entire life. It feels good and I am going to miss it when I graduate and play for a four-year college. I know it won't be the same but I am going to enjoy it while it lasts.

**Life and Career Goals.** Michael explained the importance of his life and career

goals:

I know where I have to be, where I want to be in 3, 4, 5 years from now. I think about that every single day. No matter what you do, I know time doesn't wait for anybody. Time is going to keep rolling no matter what. Keep all of that in mind and that's what keeps me going. I work hard now

and play for the rest of my life and then be able to enjoy it! I plan on making a lot of money being a phlebotomist. I know I can make more with having a bachelor's degree in nursing. I have applied and know that I will be accepted based off of my grade point average here. I feel that Palm Tree Community College really prepared me to make in life and succeed at the next level.

Joanna explained that she is striving for a better life:

It's time for me to leave. I want to play at the next level and open my own business. I need to prove to my dad that Palm Tree was a great choice for me. If I went anywhere else, I wouldn't have had the same experience. Going through the diversity and having people by my side. Closed mouths don't get fed! Showing your true character and being your authentic self. I have been offered opportunities and scholarships to play at a four-year college. To graduate with an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree will be a dream come true. God has placed me here and I have prayed that He continues to show me the way.

**Performance.** David explained how performances made him second guess himself:

I was so excited to play for the team and then I got injured. I have never felt pain like that in my life. My ankle blew up like a cantaloupe. To see the look of disappointment on my teammates and coaches' faces was unbearable. I worked so hard to be a starting contender and then this happens. I live for basketball. It's what has kept me in school. This is my escape from my family obligations. I can't stand going to practice to just sit and watch. To not be able to help out and play is hard. I feel like a let down to the team. I want to just rush back on the court but don't want to do any more damage to my ankle. I use to be seen and now I am not. Why don't we have a facility and on call trainer where we can get better and back on the court fast?

Jason shared his struggles:

Going from winning the regional championship and not even making it to playoffs was an embarrassment. The College supported us so much as we flew to nationals. I miss having all of that attention, praise, and energy. When you win everyone likes you and wants to know your name. You are being interviewed; high fived and the girls want your number. When you lose nobody cares. This was my worse season. I didn't do anything. Yeah, I won some awards but we didn't go anywhere. Four year colleges don't want players who don't win. I keep everything inside and to myself. I need to work on my game to become faster and stronger. I was invited to workout at a four-year college and could barely keep up with the players

on the team. It's my dream to play at a NCAA Division I. I am good enough to play at that level. My passionate temper and thoughts sometimes get the best of me on and off the court.

Caleb wavered between his performances:

I lost over 30 pounds over the summer and trained my butt off. I came for a starting position this season. I worked so hard. I know I failed two classes but I was able to retake them over the summer to become eligible to play. At tryouts I was better than everyone and finally earned a starting position. The new coaches were impressed with my skills. But at the first week of practice, guess what happened to me? I broke my finger on my shooting hand. I was pissed and didn't understand why. All my life it has seemed like I always have to go through something. This was my year, my time to finally shine for the team. I could even shoot a free throw. I felt useless like no longer a part of the team. I had to prove to these new coaches that I was good and deserved to start.

Through the lived experiences of participants David, Michael, Caleb, Joanna, and Jason, Chickering's first vector (developing competence) and sixth vector (purpose) and Hettler's second dimension of physical activity were validated. The participants expressed a "sense of competence that stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully" (Reisser, 1995, p. 506). The intellectual competence that was involved through the participants' skills and knowledge related to a precise subject matter and development. The participants developed competence by utilizing their mind "while building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45).

Additionally, their purpose was defined as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121). Purpose can sometimes become confusing when you are desperately trying to be fiscally stable with a good job after college. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that "developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests, and opinions, to clarify goals, to

make plans and to persist despite obstacles” (p. 209). This was accomplished through the gradual progress of the participants focusing on their life’s purpose before graduating and/or transferring to a 4-year college.

Furthermore, Hettler’s second dimension of physical activity focused on the understanding of physical development and monitoring one’s own vital and warning signs. The participants shared an array of diverse challenges they face on a daily basis while attending a community college. This is due to their strenuous life demands, confronting unique barriers, and developmental differences that nontraditional students face (Hermon & Davis, 2004). The physical dimension of wellness educated the importance of personal responsibility for self-care. The participants feeling tremendous and looking good led to the “physical benefits of enhanced self-esteem, self-control, determination, and a sense of direction” (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

### ***Research Question 3***

In what ways does attending community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?

The eight participants conveyed their experiences as they pertained to the challenges and benefits of being a nontraditional student at a community college. The two themes that emerged from the first/initial interview (2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13) and second/intermediate interview (2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15) were transportation constraints and basic needs. Below are the statements captured from Caleb, Jason, David, Rebekah, Anastasia, and Anna.

### ***Enrollment Challenges***

**Transportation Constraints.** Caleb expressed his struggle with transportation:

I prefer online classes because it is extremely convenient. Not having to worry about transportation to college. My family and I share one car. I don't have money to pay for parking on campus. My job is near my house so all I have to do is walk there. As soon as we received the practice and game schedule for basketball, I made sure that I would be able to get the car on those nights. In high school we had a student fare card until 8:00pm. This helped me out a lot especially getting home after games and practices. I really like having online classes so I don't have to use public transportation to get to campus sometimes late.

Jason enjoys taking public transportation:

Public transportation is fun for me. I enjoy people watching and catching up on some shows on my phone. I don't live near campus so it does take me a long time to get to school. I like to be on time but I can't help it when the train is delayed all the time. My parents need both cars for work so I am left with public transportation. I was able to get rides home with my coach but he is no longer coaching here at the college. Some nights after practice or games, my teammates will give me a ride if they are staying up my way. I stay on campus pretty late so if I do have to take the train home it's not as packed with people. I love the space that I have when there are not a lot of people on the train. I am a tall person and need my leg room.

David had a hard time navigating the public transportation system:

Being from Ghana, most transportation is by road. You can either take a bus, walk, or taxi. Everyone pretty much takes the bus to places. At first, it was confusing and hard trying to figure out how to get to and from school. It helps being 6'7 in the neighborhood so everyone wants to help you out. They assume that I play at a big time college because I am super tall. I am not saying that I liked the Pandemic but it did make things easier staying home and taking online classes. I didn't have to worry so much about how I am going to (a) get to school, and (b) have the money to eat because I had to pay for transportation. I wish the college would give the students free passes for public transportation.

Rebekah had a vehicle but it broke down:

I had my own vehicle but it broke down on the side of the road on our way to a game. Because it is just me with no family and/or friend support, I had to leave it there. It was my coach that helped me get it towed back to my apartment. I always tried to avoid public transportation but now I have to take it to get to school. I can't afford to get my car fix. It will cost me way too much money. Money that I need to feed my 3-year-old child. It would be nice if the college was able to provide us with free fare passes like we use to get in high school. Sometimes it's a struggle getting to campus

because when I had my car I only had to rely on myself. Public transportation is no joke.

Anastasia relies on public transportation or Uber:

Most days I take public transportation to school but when they want to act up, I take Uber. I am only able to do that because I work a full-time job. Yes, I want to save my money to buy my own car but I also have to eat and pay for rent. I can't stand taking public transportation because there are some sketchy people there. I feel like people are always staring at you and wanting to get your IG (Instagram) name. I am just trying to go to school, play ball, work, and come home. That's all. I have no time for a relationship, especially not with a guy. It would be nice to have free fares but I don't expect anything from no one.

**Basic Needs.** Anna's needs are almost met by attending Palm Tree Community

College:

I love taking advantage of the free resources at the college. There's free food provided to you from the snack rack food pantry or garden. I am part of one of the first scholar programs at the college. All we have to do is go to workshops each month and then receive a stipend. It's almost like I am getting paid to go to school. The resources at Palm Tree are on point! A lot of my friends are actually jealous at the amount of resources that I receive here that they don't have at their four-year. It helps me out a lot because I am only able to work part-time (10-15 hours/week). I have some mental health issue which has been challenging for me since high school. I have been diagnosed but I don't want to say with what. I am big on self-meditating and making sure that my space is only filled with good vibes and energy. I am able to speak with counselors on a bad day but would like if we had a wellness center to just be able to walk in and speak with someone anytime I want to. My friends tell me that they have a sports psychologist and a student activity center where they can climb walls and stuff. That would be cool if we had that here.

Rebekah described her needs for her 3-year-old child:

What happened to the free child care that I was receiving at the college? I was able to receive assistance to drop off my child and not have to worry about going to my classes. This college really helped me out a lot. I was told that they no longer have that program. Like the college got rid of it. Why? There are so many of us here that just need some help. Not everyone has parents or family that helps them out. I had to miss multiple basketball games because I didn't have someone to watch my child. I am not sure if I am going to be able to complete my degree because it's hard for me to take care of my child and go to class in-person or online.

Caleb relies heavily on a refund check:

You save a lot of money going to a community college. I get a refund check at Palm Tree to spend it on whatever I want to. The money that you don't spend (financial aid) you get back. Bookstore credits and the fact that the bookstore doesn't just sell books. I really needed air pods for my Zoom meetings (online classes). I couldn't afford them but thanks to my refund check I bought them. They are wireless and helped me out a lot. They also sell clothes and school merchandise. You can order online and have it delivered to the college bookstore and just pick it up before practice. I am not going to lie; this has made my life just a little easier.

Chickering's third vector, moving through autonomy through interdependence, and Hettler's fourth dimension (intellectual) and sixth dimension (emotional) were gathered from the information discussed in Research Question 3. The participants developed independence that included problem-solving, mobility, and self-direction. Consistent with Chickering's third vector, the participants were able to "recognize and accept the importance of interdependence, an awareness of their interconnectedness with others" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 68). Participants acknowledged that they were able to solve their own problems and achieve their own autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Analysis of the fourth dimension, highlighted how participants focused on the growth and stimulation of intellectual and mental activities. It is at this dimension where the participants use intellectual and cultural activities in the classroom to broaden awareness of their own gifts. The participants showed their abilities to expand their skills, knowledge, problem solving, creativity, and learning capabilities and explore current issues. Intellectual wellness follows the principle that "it is better to identify potential problems and choose appropriate courses of action based on available information that to wait, worry, and contend with major concerns later" (Hettler, 1976, p.2).

The sixth and final dimension explored how participants take on risks, challenges, conflicts, and responsibility for their own actions (Hettler, 1976). The participants

focused on the recognition of their enthusiasm and positive feelings of life. The emotional wellness piece embraced the participants' management of their own feelings and abilities to cope with excessive stress and the willingness to develop autonomy. This was attributed to the participants' acceptance and awareness of their own feelings.

#### ***Research Question 4***

How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?

The eight participants disclosed their experiences describing the role a community college plays regarding their holistic development and wellness. The three topics that emerged from the first/initial interview (9, 12, 13) and second/intermediate interview (3, 7, 8, 15) were counseling resources, awareness trainings/workshops, and wellness activities. Below are the excerpts taken from Anna, Caleb, Anastasia, and Joanna.

Anna said,

The biggest struggle for me is mental health. It is very much a reoccurring thing in my life. I feel supported here at the college when it comes to my mental health. I am able to make an appointment with the counseling department to receive help when it comes to my stress and anxiety. I like that the college offers a meditation group and wellness workshops for the students. The facilitators/people there are nice, friendly, and extremely supportive. Attending both really helps keep my anxiety in check. The college needs a center for students who deal with mental health issues. That would really help us out.

Caleb explained the following:

The college has played a major role in my life when it comes to staying consistent or mentally strong. At times I might check-out and shut down. I am my worst critic and get so frustrated with myself. Worrying if I am going to fail or pass my classes to remain eligible to play basketball. Being provided with the support from the athletics department and college mentally/holistically really helped me get through some tough times. Participating in the weekly cardio strength class that is offered in the athletics department provides me with that endorphins high I need to get through the day. It's like having a red bull but without the caffeine and

sugar. I would feel better if we had a sports psychologist and a full-time athletic trainer to help us holistically, mentally, and athletically. It would make us even better on and off the court.

Anastasia said,

I have really bad anxiety and would always just put myself through it. I have to stay busy. Basketball is what keeps me busy. I have had mental breakdowns before games because I am just so nervous. I need to work more on consistency. Being in-season really helped prepare me for attending my classes faithfully. Life can be such a challenge. After seeking help, I found out about the Yoga class and the Mind, Body, and Spirit series that are offered here. The amount of positive reinforcement and support that I have received makes me feel like I am worth something. That there is nothing wrong with me.

Joanna described the following:

The college has been amazing with helping me deal with my life problems and trying to balance that with school. Time management and balancing life are two key challenges that I deal with. I am part of a Scholars program here at the college and they mandate us to attend time management, self-management training, and self-care workshops. Every Sunday I pray to the Lord to help me make a balanced schedule. I let Him take the wheel and take the path to make everything smooth like a river. My self-motivation is knowing that each day is a blessing and to take everything one step at a time.

Chickering's second vector (managing emotions) and final and seventh vector (developing integrity) and Hettler's social dimension were evident in participants' experiences. Managing emotions is essential to control, prevent, and act on one's feelings in an accountable manner. The participants learned to trust and become aware of their feelings and anxieties while attending classes and activities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). These feelings included anger, depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, desire, and embarrassment. The participants were able to identify "appropriate channels for releasing irritations before they explode, dealing with fears before they immobilize, and healing emotional wounds before they infect other friendships" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 46, 83). The participants were able to recognize how to solve their own

problems and heal their emotional wounds before transferring any type of negative energy onto others.

The final and seventh vector, developing integrity, was expressed as the participants learned to develop their own interests and set of values through their lived experiences while attending Palm Tree Community College. It is imperative for the participants to experience change in their own value system and move away from the plagued dogmatic beliefs that were bestowed upon them while growing up (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). During this final stage, comprehension of respecting others' opinions and viewpoints through their own experiences while confirming their own beliefs and core values is most important. This is where "values and actions become congruent and authentic as self-interest is balance by a sense of social responsibility" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69).

Hettler's social dimension focuses on the individuals' responsibilities to make this world a better place. The participants displayed their awareness of the impact they have on their environment and society. To energetically pursue "the beauty and balance of nature along the pathway as you discover the power to make willful choices to enhance personal relationships and important friendships, and build a better living space and community" (Hettler, 1976). This was captured through Hettler's social wellness principle that "it is better to contribute to common welfare of our community than to think only of ourselves" (Hettler, 1976, p. 2).

Previous research has also provided insight on how sport participation influences academic and athletic performance through learned needs theory (LNT), as described in the literature review. The LNT emerged through the collected data based off of the eight

participants' lived experiences. Needs theories have prevailed since the 20th century from personality studies and motivation (Rutledge, 2023). The LNT research-based approach explores how student-athletes balance personal needs, academics, and athletics.

Intercollegiate athletics within higher education have established competing demands that continue to jeopardize the outcomes of student-athletes' personal pursuits, academics, and athletics (Donnor, 2005; Newell, 2015; Quaye et al., 2019; Watt & Moore, 2001).

For many student-athletes, college is a mere stepping stone to garner athletic success as opposed to academic achievement. Student-athletes are constantly growing, changing, adapting, and developing through their involvement in intercollegiate athletics. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, rules and regulations have seemed to dilute the importance of post eligibility success. The new transfer portal requirements are now geared towards promoting student-athletes' success in athletic careers instead of the importance of graduation with a college degree.

The "going pro in something other than sports" mantra is slowly beginning to diminish from intercollegiate athletics. LNT is a useful theoretical framework to comprehend how student-athletes achieve success during sports participation and post eligibility. LNT examines the factors that affect student-athletes' outcomes by diving into their obstacles and demands that may influence their athletic performance and life goals.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of nontraditional community college students and how they are able to navigate through trials, tribulations, and extenuating circumstances to obtain an associate's degree. Through the in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to explore the perceptions and development of nontraditional community college students as they navigate stigmas associated with a 2-year collegiate institution within the mid-Atlantic region. The need for this study was to relinquish the unfavorable perceptions, myths, and barriers of community colleges and enable the nontraditional community college student's voice to be heard. Furthermore, the focus was on examining the nontraditional community college student to obtain an understanding of their self-perceptions, personal development as a nontraditional community college student, and the importance of community colleges.

Providing a better understanding of nontraditional students attending a community college provides stakeholders and senior-level administrators within higher education a clearer depiction of how this underrepresented population experiences their journey at a community college. The participants in this study were eight student-athletes from a large mid-Atlantic-region community college. The data were analyzed, coded, and organized. After analyzing, coding, and organizing, themes were then developed. This qualitative study was based on the following research questions:

1. What are the primary ways nontraditional community college students identify themselves? What are the intersecting identities?

2. How do nontraditional students describe their development in community college?
  - a. How do these students describe their ability to develop a sense of competence, purpose, and their identities?
3. In what ways does attending community college challenge and/or benefit nontraditional students?
4. How do nontraditional community college students describe the role of community college in their holistic development and wellness?

### **Institutional Recommendations**

This final chapter focuses on the depiction of financial trends, lack of academic preparedness, and institutional frameworks facing our community colleges. Community colleges were once seen as small entities that only needed modest funding; now, the expenditures of these colleges have become more prominent in the eyes of the public. Community colleges' budgets have annually totaled \$21,000,000,000 and demand serious attention. There are over 1,200 community colleges in the United States. These 2-year institutions make up over half of the nation's undergraduate population with an enrollment of over 10,000,000 students.

Extreme pressure has been placed on community colleges to improve academic outcomes for their students to earn an associate's and baccalaureate degree within 6 years (Bailey et al., 2015). Community colleges are encouraged to reject traditional educated models and instead adapt guided pathways: "clearer, more educationally coherent programs of study that simplify students' choices without limiting their options and that enable them to complete credentials and advance to further education and the labor

market more quickly and at a less cost” (Bailey et al., 2015). Community colleges continue to strive to implement a new legacy for the next generation; therefore, it is imperative to focus on the data pertaining to their nontraditional students’ progression towards their academic goals.

### **Development of Helping Us Grow Stronger Mentor Program**

Developing a Helping Us Grow Stronger mentoring program for first-generation and first-year students would assist in their first-year experience as nontraditional students attending a community college. This program would include one-on-one mentoring and provide guidance, advice, and experiences from the designated second-year students. The overall objective would be to share each experience and knowledge about the community college. Students can share advice about the same major, student engagement, intercollegiate athletic connections, campus resources, how to register for classes, grasping an understanding about financial aid, or simply navigating the high anxieties of being a college student while being back in-person from the pandemic.

Research studies have evaluated whether peer-mentoring has had an effective impact on first-generation/first-year students and results have indicated that students who received peer-mentoring felt more integrated and connected with the college (Yomtov et al., 2017). The students who were partnered with a peer-mentor felt they received a significant amount of support and believed they were more of an active part of the college as opposed to the non-peer-mentored students (Yomtov et al., 2017). Tinto’s (1975, 1993) social integration theory discusses the importance of peer mentoring in higher education and how it can be extremely beneficial in seeing an increase of persistence and graduation rates. Peer-mentoring programs are a vital tool to target low-

graduation and college-retention rates. This is primarily due to the fact that students who had a peer-mentor felt more supported, confident, and integrated at the college.

The program's main focus would be geared toward helping first-generation/first-year nontraditional students feel more connected and supported. The success of this program would in turn predict a lower likelihood of dropouts by ensuring that each mentored student feels more connected to the college (Tinto, 1997). Research has provided positive insight pertaining to implementing a peer mentorship program on campus. The results showed that the paired students with mentors had a significant level of support (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Mallinckrodt, 1988), academic success (Leidenfrost et al., 2011; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003; Salinitri, 2005), and feelings of integration (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Hughes & Fahy, 2009; Tinto, 1997). This would be credited to the students having individualized attention from their mentors along with more opportunities to be engaged and involved while on campus.

By implementing a peer mentor program, Palm Tree Community College would be able to receive feedback from the first-generation/first-year nontraditional students' needs, experiences, and perceptions and if they are truly being heard on campus. It is essential to ensure that this underrepresented population feels a sense of belonging and are authentically being represented at the college. To measure if their experiences are impactful, validated, and inclusive is key to being able to shift the narrative. The benefits of peer mentoring have shown that the first-generation/first-year students partnered with a peer mentor received help with personal issues, emotional support, motivation, general advice, and encouragement. Having peer mentors who are also students at the college

cultivates the integration of the first-generation/first-year students and emanates positive attributes (Yomtov et al., 2017).

### **Holistic Wellness Center**

The responses provided from the eight participants exposed the lack of resources for mental health and holistic development. It would be strongly urged to develop a holistic wellness center for students, faculty, and staff. This center would provide nontraditional students with resources pertaining their well-being and self-care. A plethora of workshops should be offered to tackle mental health concerns and provide wellness training. The focus of this center should be designed with programs and services geared towards physical health, intellectual development, social relationships, and spirituality.

Mental health issues are at an all-time high with many concerns being attributed to the social injustice in our communities and society. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental illness has risen in the United States by approximately 20%. This increased percentage can also be attributed to social media and societal acceptance. The holistic wellness center can develop partnerships with community organizations to provide enhanced access to medically related resources, health, well-being, and basic needs. Prior to the pandemic, community colleges were facing a demand for mental health services that far outpaced the traditional counseling center that seemed to be short-staffed and ill-equipped to solve each issue and overcome every challenge.

According to the Healthy Minds Study, during the 2020–2021 academic year, data were collected from 373 nationwide campuses and revealed that over 60% of college students acknowledged that they suffer from a mental health problem (Lipson et al.,

2022). Furthermore, Palm Tree Community College should invest in a sports psychologist to work with student-athletes to assist with the enhancement of their overall performance and mental side of the game. Sports psychology has worked with a variety of challenges student-athletes face on a daily basis. These challenges include but are not limited to motivation, lifestyle management, stress management, teamwork, and visualization. The sports psychologist may offer activities to deal with underperforming, injuries, unexpected challenges, and stress.

### **Recommendations for Future Researchers**

It would be highly recommended for future researchers to continue to build on providing an emphatic platform for voiceless students to be heard and acknowledged. A larger sample size would provide the researcher with more input and data to determine if the nontraditional students' lived experiences are different or quite similar. Utilizing technological apps such as Zoom, FaceTime, and Skype and email, social media, and text messaging could be extremely useful to the researcher when trying to interview similar community college students. These technological apps allowed the researcher to organize competent and well-timed interviews. This study only captured a small group of nontraditional student-athletes representing men's basketball, women's basketball, and women's track and field.

Additionally, it would be beneficial for future researchers to include men's and women's intercollegiate athletic programs (i.e., volleyball, baseball/softball, and cross country) to provide an altered view from nonrevenue teams. Also, interviewing traditional students to interpret their lived experiences compared to their counterparts (nontraditional students) would be valuable. A more in-depth portrayal and representation

of nontraditional students from all walks of life could hone in on English language learners, LGBT students, and students with disabilities. Their experiences may be different, but vulnerable students are also considered an underrepresented population within higher education and it would be interesting to compile their view on this research topic. The uniqueness of having such an array of marginalized groups would add a more profound depiction to the lived experiences of community college students within higher education.

### **Limitations and Complications**

Although this research study had a small sample size of eight participants, the informative data received from the three in-depth interviews were extremely critical to the research study. The selected participants were affiliated under the umbrella of the department of athletics, which falls under the division of student development. A larger sample size containing student-athletes from all athletic programs would have provided even more enriched data, input, and diversity. The department of athletics not being able to fill a complete roster for a couple of teams slightly hindered the selection process. Furthermore, the gymnasium was offline for an entire semester from untimely and unfinished renovations.

During the first interview, the student-athletes who the researcher had the privilege of knowing longer were more inclined to trust the process. Having an impactful rapport with those student-athletes allowed the interview process to go a lot smoother. These student-athletes were a lot more transparent and happy to provide in-depth answers through previously established open dialogue. In the beginning, the first-year/season participants were less open with sharing their personal stories and lived experiences.

After asking follow-up questions, urging this group to dive more into their responses, and ensuring that they could trust the researcher and feel safe with them, the conversation immediately started to flow.

It seemed as if they could energetically feel that the researcher's pure intentions were sincere and authentic. This type of method allowed the researcher to curate the interview process. The researcher considered the fact that all of the interviews were structured during the end of the season when the student-athletes are preparing for playoffs. The researcher had to consider that the diverse population had other obligated duties besides practices, games, study hall, and classes. A significant number of the student-athletes work full-time/part-time jobs to provide for their family.

The interviews had to be scheduled during the day so as not to impede with the students' hectic schedules. Transportation was also a drawback because some of the student-athletes were taking online courses to save money on transportation. By taking online classes, they were able to only worry about coming to campus for practices, games, and study hall. Another obstacle to consider was interviewing the student-athletes after their season may have eased the anxieties and stresses of life and provided more input/time for all three interviews. Although there are multiple limitations of this research study, the amount of value and information provided to other researchers is undeniably impeccable.

The purpose of this study was to provide researchers with a better understanding of the nontraditional student attending a community college. The information written about their lived experiences should lessen the gap in the lack of research pertaining to this underserved and marginalized group. The researcher aimed to provide clarity and

awareness about what the nontraditional student goes through as they try to figure out their path to possibilities at a community college. This study captured exactly that. The voice of the voiceless has been heard and shared for others to read and empathize.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 5 outlined institutional recommendations, recommendations for future research and limitations. Community colleges continue to offer flexibility, convenience, and opportunities for personal development for nontraditional students. Nontraditional students continue to triumph over trials and tribulations each day in pursuit of earning their associate's degree. Not everyone has the opportunity to start at the finish line in life. The perseverance and resilience of this underrepresented population should be a motivational creed for others to also earn a college degree.

In the words of Booker T. Washington, "success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed" (Quote Canyon, n.d.). It may sound a little cliché, but it genuinely takes a village to empower, enlighten, and encourage nontraditional students to cross that finish line and see the light at the end of that tunnel. When life feels like it has only thrown darkness, rain, thunder, and lightning, know that after every storm the sun comes out to shine upon us. Exploring the lived experiences of nontraditional community college students through in-depth interviews allowed their stories to be heard. As an athletic administrator at one of the largest community colleges within the mid-Atlantic region, the researcher felt it was their responsibility to answer the call and provide researchers, stakeholders, and senior-level administrators within higher education with a

strategic outline on how we can be more supportive and empathetic when it comes to understanding the lived experiences of our nontraditional students.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER FOR INITIAL MEETING

Dear Student,

I am a current doctoral student at Temple University studying educational leadership. I am in the dissertation stage of my program where I am conducting research about the benefits of attending a community college and how community college students actually perceive themselves. Specifically, I am evaluating and utilizing student development and wellness model to hone in on eradicating the myths pertaining to the holistic development for nontraditional community college students. Through three in-depth interviews, it is my hope to gain more of a clearer insight of the nontraditional student's overall community college experience.

You have been identified as someone who meets those criteria's for this study. I graciously invite you to participate and share your story. By meeting with you, I hope that our conversation will motivate you to partake in my research that is being supervised by my advisor, Dr. James Earl Davis, Professor of Higher Education and Educational Leadership (phone: 215-204-3002; email: [jdavis21@temple.edu](mailto:jdavis21@temple.edu)).

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out the form provided below. Please note that you are not bound and/or committed to participate in this study just by completing the form. Submission of this information is completely voluntary and refusal to provide it will not subject you to any hostile treatment. Instead, your personal information will enable me to contact you to set up a preliminary meeting that includes you and myself. At this meeting, it will give me the opportunity to discuss the nature of the interview process and the purpose of the research project.

Please feel free to contact me at [lgrace01@temple.edu](mailto:lgrace01@temple.edu) if you have any further questions and/or concerns pertaining to your potential participation in this research study.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Blessings,

Lynsey Jae Grace  
Palm Tree Community College  
Department of Athletics  
[lgrace01@temple.edu](mailto:lgrace01@temple.edu)

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

1st year or 2nd year: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your major: \_\_\_\_\_

Graduation Date/Anticipated Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- Self-Identity (Race) – Please Circle One:
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Black
- White
- Two or More Races
- Other: please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Do you live with your family? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have or own a vehicle? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you get to CCP? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT

**Title:** Possibilities and perils: Examining the experiences of nontraditional students in community colleges

**Investigators:**

James Earl Davis, Ph.D.; (215)204-8017, deanjed@temple.edu

Lynsey Jae Grace; (215)669-9515, lgrace01@temple.edu

#### RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research.

##### **Why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

According to some scholars, academic preparations and holistic development at community colleges are failing to equip nontraditional community college graduates for the four-year colleges (Perin, 2013). This study will explore your experience as a nontraditional community college student/student-athlete and will allow your voice to be heard and validated. This study will explore your lived experience as a nontraditional community college student/student-athlete and explore the holistic development as you navigate while attending a community college within the Mid-Atlantic Region. The goal is to have a better understanding of the resources needed to accommodate community colleges to successfully prepare nontraditional students/student-athletes academically/holistically as they matriculate to the four-year colleges.

Students that are 18 years or older are being asked to participate.

##### **How long will I be in this research?**

It is expected that participation in this research will take approximately 180 minutes while completing three interviews. Collection of the three interviews data will take place in March 2023.

##### **What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?**

Participants will complete three 60-minute interview sessions during February and March 2023. The three interviews will be the extent of involvement. Interviews will be taped with

interviewee permission. In person interviews will take place in the Department of Athletics office. Participants will be anonymous.

### **What are the risks of this study?**

There are no expected risks or discomfort for participating in this research. Although, it may cause participants to reflect on their community college experience as a nontraditional community college student-athletes.

### **Will being in this research benefit me?**

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research. Although, it may cause participants to reflect on their community college experience as a nontraditional community college student-athletes.

### **What happens to the information collected for this research?**

Your anonymous survey responses could be shared with individuals and organizations (if applicable) that conduct or watch over this research, including:

the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) that reviewed this research

- Temple University
- Palm Tree Community College

We may publish the results of this research. However, since your responses will be anonymous, your name and other identifying information will not be included. We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data collected in this research might be used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent.

### **Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or feel that this research has hurt you, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

**What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?**

You may begin the initial interview and then later change your mind and not complete it. Additionally, your decision to participate or to withdraw will be confidential and will not be shared with other participants.

**APPENDIX C**

**PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE**

Researcher's Name: Lynsey Jae Grace, M.Ed.

Department: Temple University, College of Education, Educational Leadership

Project Title: Possibilities and perils: Examining the experiences of nontraditional students in community colleges

Subject Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

I give Lynsey Jae Grace permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose:

**RESEARCH**

This audiotape will be used as part of a research project at the Palm Tree Community College. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research study. I acknowledge and understand that at no time will my name be used.

**WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?**

I agree to be audiotaped during the period (to be filled in at the interview)

\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?**

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from (to be filled in at the interview)

\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?**

I understand that I can withdraw from my participation at any time. Upon my request and withdrawal of my permission to audiotape, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not hinder my relationship with Temple University in any type of way.

**OTHER**

I understand that I will not receive monetary gifts/rewards/compensation for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions and/or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Researcher's Name and Contact Information:      Lynsey Jae Grace, M.Ed.  
Palm Tree Community College  
Department of Athletics  
lgrace01@temple.edu

I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research participant, I may contact Temple University's Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) by calling (215) 204-6875.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **FIRST/INITIAL INTERVIEW**

#### Initial Interview

The initial interview will include the following questions:

1. Do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as part of this research?
2. What factors led to you wanted to attend a community college?
3. Do you consider yourself to be a nontraditional student?
4. How was your high school experience and do you feel that your high school academically prepared you to succeed at a community college?
5. Are you a first-generation college student? If so, what led to you wanting to attend a community college?
6. Do you have any family member that have attended and graduated from a community college and/or four-year institution?
7. Is this your first semester at a community college? If so, how has your experience been?
8. What year/semester are you in? How has your community college experience been?
9. Are you a student-athlete or involved in extracurricular activities at the college? If so, what sport, club, organization, and/or activity are you affiliated with?
10. Do you have a job? If so, how many hours do you work daily/per week?
11. Do you have any kids? If so, how many and do receive support from your family/friends?
12. How do you manage work, school, and team/organization/club/activity?
13. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share regarding your experiences?

## APPENDIX E

### SECOND/INTERMEDIATE INTERVIEW

#### Intermediate Interview

1. Do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as part of this research?
2. Do you plan to graduate and obtain your associate's degree or do you plan to transfer to another two-year/four-year college? If so, could you please explain your reason for wanting to stay or transfer?
3. Do you feel that you receive full support at the community college? If so, who do you rely on at the community college (coaches, athletic staff, academic advisor, counselor, tutor, professor, etc)?
4. What has been your biggest struggle while attending a community college?
5. How do you identify yourself?
6. Do you receive financial aid? If not, how have you managed to pay for your classes?
7. How do you balance classes, practices, tutoring, games, study hall, social life, family life, etc?
8. Do you feel prepared (academically, athletically, mentally, and holistically) to transition to a four-year college?
9. What are the benefits of attending a community college?
10. Do you feel your experience at a community college has been good, bad, or indifferent?
11. Do you perceive yourself as a nontraditional community college student?
12. Have you ever been judged or made fun of for attending a community college?
13. What are the factors that led to your decision to attend a community college?
14. What are some myths and misconceptions of attending a community college?
15. Are there any additional thoughts that you would like to share regarding your overall experience?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **THIRD/FINAL INTERVIEW**

#### Final Interview

The final interview protocol included the following questions:

1. Do you give your permission to participate and have this interview recorded as part of this research?
2. At this time, I would like to provide you with a transcript of your two interviews. Would you like to add or delete anything in this transcript?
3. Do you have any questions and/or concerns regarding this research project?