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THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNER/ FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR INSTRUCTOR RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNER/ FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

INSTRUCTOR RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION

By

CHRISTEL GRIDER

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Non-traditional learners are the fastest growing educational demographic in colleges throughout the country (Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002). As they transition into college, some of these students participate in first-year seminar courses – courses that assist students in making the transition to college. Given the focus of these courses it is assumed that the first-year seminar faculty member influences student's retention decisions. This thesis investigated the relationship between non-traditional learners and their first-year seminar faculty members at Kennesaw State University using a grounded theory approach. A total of 15 participants answered open-ended questions to determine emerging themes. These themes were examined to explain any re-enrollment behaviors. Additionally, 94 participants participated in a seven-point Likert scale survey modelled after Dr's. Creasey, Jarvis, and Knapcik's, (2009), "A Measure to Assess Student-Instructor Relationships" The results of that survey were used to measure descriptive statistics. The study found there to be no relationship a non-traditional student's relationship with the first-year seminar instructors and retention beyond the first-semester.

Keywords: non-traditional learner, first-year seminar, retention

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), non-traditional learners are the fastest growing educational demographic. Institutions of higher education have capitalized on this demographic, diligently working to attract non-traditional learners. Despite this growth, the non-traditional learner's ability to maintain enrollment past the first year of study remains a problem, and institutions of higher education continue to see high rates of withdrawal (Hagedorn, 2005). For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) report stated that non-traditional learners have been significantly less likely to complete their degrees within a six-year period as compared to traditional learners. Lewin (2011) confirmed that although there has been tremendous growth in enrollment, these non-traditional learners are not persisting and attaining college degrees. The first-year retention rate is particularly important to institutions because the attrition rate is highest between the first and second years of enrollment (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Departure between the first and second year was confirmed in a report by the NCES, (2013) showing that 21 percent of first-time, full-time students enrolled at a four-year institution did not return for their second year (Figure 1). Additionally, Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) emphasized that low completion rates are an area of concern.

Figure 1. Attrition between First and Second Year of Study
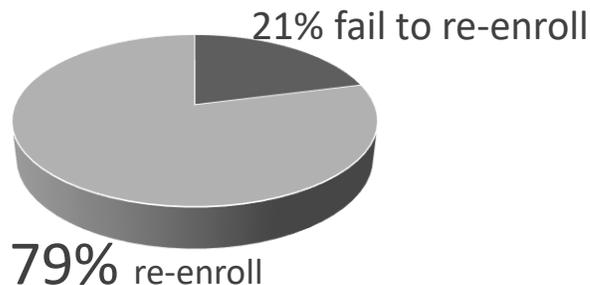
Statement of Problem

Although the enrollment of non-traditional learners has risen over the past forty years, these students are not completing their degrees at the same rate as traditional students. The NCES (2011) reported that in the 2003-2004 academic year 20% of college students were 24-29 years of age, and only 16% of those over the age of 30 graduated within six years of starting their postsecondary degrees. Brock (2010) noted that "student success in college – as measured by persistence and degree attainment – has not improved at all" for non-traditional learners (p. 109). Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) acknowledged that low completion rates are a cause of concern, and Goncalves and Trunk (2014) suggested that high attrition rates plague non-traditional learners.

Non-traditional learners are a distinct segment of the student population because their characteristics and needs differ from those of traditional students. In fact, Compton, Cox, and Lannan (2006) noted that non-traditional learners often have unique needs both inside and outside the classroom. Non-traditional learners experience a variety of obstacles to obtaining a degree, including length of time to complete a degree. Non-traditional learners often enroll in classes part-time due to work or family obligations, which can affect their eligibility for financial aid or other forms of tuition assistance (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Along with the problems associated with cost, when non-traditional learners attend college part-time, the length of time it takes to complete a degree can affect their persistence (Donhardt, 2013).

Non-traditional learners arrive at college with different needs, stressors, and issues as compared to those of traditional learners. These needs, stressors, and issues can become obstacles and barriers or constraints to the students' success. When the obstacles and barriers are not addressed, non-traditional learners are at risk of dropping out or delaying graduation.

Obstacles faced by non-traditional learners include social isolation, inter-role conflicts, lack of needed flexibility, and lack of self-confidence. The barriers facing non-traditional learners include situational barriers, institutional barriers, dispositional barriers, and academic barriers. Constraints have both direct and indirect impact on non-traditional learners. The NCES (2002) pointed out that when learners are faced with both direct and indirect constraints, the result is often a low completion rate. This finding was subsequently confirmed by Kazis, Callahan, Davidson, McLeod, Bosworth, Choitz, Hoops, et. al., (2007). Wyatt (2011) discussed another problem that inhibits the non-traditional learner from completing college: lack of the advanced skills needed for success. Given these factors, it is extremely important for the first-year seminar instructor to be aware of the unique needs of non-traditional students and consider how they can support and help guide the non-traditional learner to be a successful student.

In light of the increased number of non-traditional college students and the unique obstacles and barriers they face, institutions of higher education should consider the impact of the relationship between the first-year seminar faculty and the non-traditional learner. It is important to understand how the relationship between the first-year instructor and the non-traditional student influences that student's persistence. Wyatt (2011) proposed doing just that when he recommended that colleges look at the various factors and attributes of the non-traditional learner population and determine how institutions can serve the unique needs of that population.

While many published studies have focused on student attrition, this study uses open-ended questions and a survey reporting descriptive statistics to focus on the importance of the relationship between non-traditional learners and their first-year seminar faculty instructor in order to determine whether that relationship influences student satisfaction, academic persistence, and retention beyond the first-year. The study also examines the behaviors of the

first-year seminar instructor and explores how those behaviors might influence the first-year retention of non-traditional learners.

Background and Need

The Center for Post-Secondary and Economic Success (2015) predicted that enrollment of "nontraditional" learners will increase more than twice as fast as that of traditional students enrolling between 2016 and 2022 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Growth of Students between 2016 and 2022
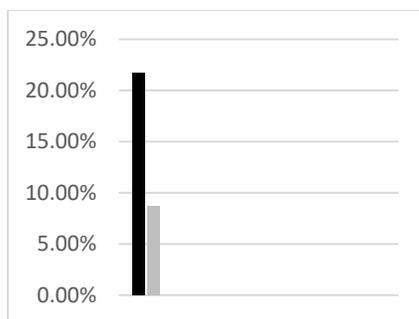
Non-Traditional Learners Traditional Learners

Notably, for this rapidly growing population of students, the classroom is often their only connection to college (Deil-Amen, 2011; Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2011), and heading the classroom is the faculty member who serves as the representative for the college. Moreover, despite the apparent significance of the first-year seminar instructor in the academic lives of non-traditional students, the wealth of published research on first-year students and the first-year seminar does not address non-traditional first-year students' perception of their relationships with their first-year seminar faculty member.

For example, Donaldson and Townsend (2007) pointed out that only one percent of articles published in seven peer-reviewed higher education journals focused on non-traditional learners. Furthermore, most of the literature on higher education has focused on the retention of traditional students, leaving a gap in the literature related to non-traditional students. Calcagno,

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Crosta, Bailey, and Jenkins (2006) noted that factors that affect traditional students are not generally the same factors that affect non-traditional students: "While nontraditional student numbers have increased, our understandings of the unique factors that predict adult student success have not increased likewise" (Lundberg, 2003, p. 665). Additionally, Taylor and House (2010) pointed out that previous research has been simplistic in viewing differences among [the] adult student population, further illustrating the need for this study. Therefore, the objective of this study was to fill the void in the literature noted above and allow for a better "understanding of how life events facilitate or inhibit learning in a situation" for non-traditional learners since "adult theory is still mostly an array of untested models" (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 222).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to increase knowledge about the relationship between first-year seminar instructors and non-traditional first-year students to determine if this relationship has an impact on retention beyond the first year. While previous research has examined the relationship between student and faculty member, there is limited research related specifically to the relationship between the first-year seminar faculty and the non-traditional learner. This study was designed to add to the body of knowledge in this area.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between various aspects of first-year seminar faculty behavior and the learning, retention, and persistence to graduation of non-traditional first-year students.

1) Is there an observable relationship between the retention rate of non-traditional learners and the behaviors of first-year seminar instructors?

2) Do non-traditional learners believe they are as well supported as traditional students by

first-year seminar faculty?

Significance to the Field

Studying the barriers that cause non-traditional learners to have higher attrition and

lower retention/graduation rates than traditional learners can help identify how first-year

seminar faculty might address and support the needs of the non-traditional learners. Student

retention has historically been a challenge for institutions of higher education, according to Berg

and Huang (2004). For this reason, colleges have become more concerned with why one student

may be successful in a course while another in the same course is not (Schumann, 2014).

Information gathered in this study will be valuable to institutions of higher education, allowing

them to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of non-traditional learners and to

determine how to better serve this population of students.

Definitions

Key terms used in this study are defined as follow:

Academic Persistence - Continuous enrollment from semester to semester toward graduation.

Attrition – A reduction of the student population because some students drop out of college

or university prior to graduation or completion (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

First-Year Seminar – Course designed to help first-year students successfully transition into

college. The course promotes academic and social integration with the goal of increasing

student retention and it is typically required of students during their first semester at

college.

Full-Time Student – A student enrolled in twelve or more credit hours each semester.

Inter-Role Conflict – Inter-role conflict occurs when individuals try to fulfill several roles

simultaneously (Markle, 2015).

Mixed Enrollment Student – Student whose enrollment status changes from full-time to part-time

or vice-versa and varies from term to term.

Part-Time Student – Student enrolled in fewer than twelve credit hours in a term.

Retention – The continued enrollment of students in consecutive semesters at the same

institution. Berger and Lyon (2004) suggested retention was when institutes of higher

education retained students from the time they were admitted until they graduated.

Social Isolation – The situation that arises when students have difficulty connecting within the

campus community. The resulting feeling of a lack of belonging leads to a sense of social

isolation within the campus community (Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014).

Student Engagement – Students' involvement, investment, and willingness to actively

participate in the learning environment; students' "participation in educationally effective

practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable

outcomes" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p.2).

Student Involvement - The quantity and quality of the physical and physiological energy that

students devote to the college experience (Astin, 1999). This involvement can be in the

form of extra-curricular activities or time invested in the overall learning experience.

Student involvement can change over time, and the degree of involvement may vary.

Success - Success in college can take many forms. In its most basic form, it can include

continued enrollment from one semester to another. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006)

identified four thematic categories for success: academic achievement (getting good

grades or improving grades), social (bonding with other students and faculty), life

management (balancing academics and social or personal life), and academic engagement (desire to learn, interest in classes, and exploring new subject areas).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this exploratory study. The results of this study are specific to students currently enrolled at one university and therefore are limited in both number and scope of participants. No data was gathered from non-traditional learners who had already dis-enrolled from the institution; rather, all participants persisted to a second semester of college. Data was collected over a two-semester span, thereby limiting both the longevity of the study as well as the potential participant pool. The study was limited to only those non-traditional learners who had completed the first-year seminar course, thus reducing the potential participation pool to a subset of all non-traditional students. Student participation was voluntary, and there was no pre-screening to identify the possible existence of personal characteristics linked to student persistence and success. Since the survey was voluntary and the number of participants limited, the findings of the study many not reflect the perceptions and beliefs of the general non-traditional learner population. Moreover, since invitations to participate in the program were sent to gatekeepers of key departments at Kennesaw State University asking that they contact department faculty for distribution of the survey link to students, those gatekeepers and faculty may have further restricted the pool of potential participants if they chose not to forward the survey link to their students.

The descriptive statistics portion of the study was conducted on-line which can average 11% lower than other survey forms (Lozar, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar, (2008). Consequently, the response rate was low, as was anticipated. The survey itself may have been a further limitation. The survey was a Likert seven-point scale, which limited the

response options of the participants. Moreover, participants may have interpreted the survey questions and responses differently than was intended. In addition, as with any self-reported responses, there is the possibility that participants falsely recorded one or more answers. The descriptive statistics portion of the study was also voluntary and included many of the same limitations mentioned above.

Ethical Considerations

The research for this study involved collecting data from people regarding their experiences (Punch, 2005); therefore, procedures were put in place to secure confidential information about participants. Guidelines as established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed to assure participants' rights were protected in this research study (Appendix A). Participants were not harmed in any way during this research, and they were respected and treated in a dignified manner.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the greatest challenges faced by colleges is student retention (Berg & Huang, 2004; Clay, Rowland, & Packard, 2008-2009). Significantly, as many as 75 percent of students who leave college do so during or immediately after the first semester (Davig and Spain, 2003); thus, the one-year retention rate is particularly important to institutions of higher education because the attrition rate is highest between the first and second years of enrollment (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Moreover, Tinto (2006) and Wild and Ebbers (2002) contended that student retention rates measure colleges' accountability and are an indicator of the colleges' effectiveness and accountability. Consequently, retention is a focus for most institutions of higher education.

Although institutions have diligently worked on improving retention, low completion rates for non-traditional learners remain an area of growing concern (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005), and institutions still have not adequately focused their efforts on ensuring that non-traditional learners successfully complete their education (Hagedorn, 2005). In fact, Guido and Dooris (2007) noted that non-traditional learners were the group of students mostly likely to not graduate. This was confirmed by Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan, and Bhimdiwali, (2017) in their report in the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center, which found that only 33.7 percent of non-traditional learners completed their degrees; that is 27 percent lower than the completion rate for first-time students (Figure 3). The retention rate of non-traditional students should be of particular concern given that the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) noted that in 2011-2012 about 78 percent of all undergraduates had at least one non-traditional characteristic and the first-year retention rate of non-traditional learners was approximately 52.7%.

Figure 3. Comparison of Degree Completion

Completion of Degree
Non-Traditional Learner

33.7% Complete
Degree

72.3%
Withdraw

Completion of Degree
Traditional Learners

49%
Withdraw

51% Complete
Degree
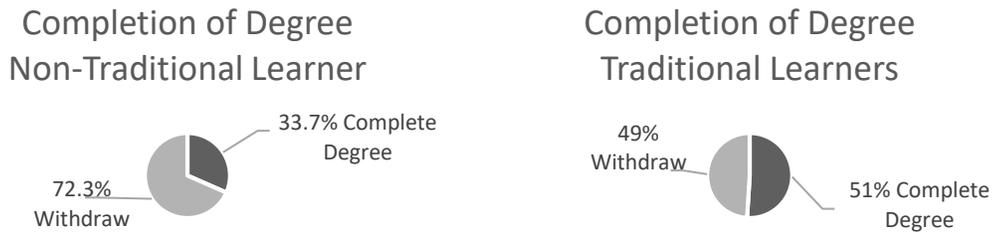
Colleges are enrolling non-traditional learners, but they are not retaining those students through graduation. Despite numerous approaches, Fowler and Boylan (2010) mentioned that colleges are unsuccessful in implementing methods and incorporating strategies to retain adult learners. Ultimately, institutions are not meeting their objective of providing non-traditional learners a successful college education and therefore have high attrition rates among this student population (Blackburn, 2010).

The success of non-traditional learners must be made a priority on campuses (Rice, 2003), and their specific needs must be understood if colleges hope to retain these students through graduation. Non-traditional learners often need assistance in building self-confidence, learning to manage time, and developing study skills, or they may need complete refresher courses to succeed. As colleges become aware of the number of non-traditional learners enrolling in classes, they should provide resources to assist non-traditional learners overcome the obstacles they face. These obstacles include family responsibilities and other off- campus obligations (Ryan, 2003), economic challenges, a desire for professional or personal advancement, and work demands (Kelly & Strawn, 2011). By addressing the specific needs, desires, and expectations of non-traditional learners, colleges can help facilitate the retention of these students (Nesbit,

2001). One way to address the needs of non-traditional students is through the first-year seminar and the students' interactions with the first-year seminar faculty member.

The relationship non-traditional learners have with first-year seminar faculty is important because these faculty members set the expectations for non-traditional learners' college career. Smart, Feldman, and Ethington (2000) mentioned that the student and faculty interactions are crucial to understanding student persistence, satisfaction, and success. Specifically, developing a strong bond with the first-year seminar faculty member provides non-traditional learners with a sense of security and affords them a greater chance of staying motivated and succeeding academically (Davis & Dupper, 2004). Thus, research has shown that the relationship between non-traditional learners and first-year seminar faculty is often the key factor in retention beyond the first year in college (Jaeger & Hinz, 2008).

Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) indicated that when students were satisfied with their educational experiences, persistence and retention rates increased. Kuh and Hu (2001) added that the quality of the student–faculty interaction had a direct effect in their study and played a primary role on a student's effort, satisfaction, and learning gains in college. Kinzie (2005) confirmed that the student-faculty interaction resulted in students being more satisfied with their overall college experience, as was revealed in a study conducted by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2005). Additionally, student engagement has a direct impact on increased retention rates, particularly freshmen to sophomore retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). This impact of student engagement was reiterated by Creasey, Jarvis and Gadke (2009), Turner, Midgley, Meyer, Gheen, Anderman, and Kang, (2002), and Urdan and Midgley (2003) when they noted that as faculty communicate positive achievement messages, students have greater confidence. It is important that first-year seminar faculty build

a strong relationship with non-traditional learners because these relationships can influence retention rates (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, & Rahtz, 2006).

Characteristics of Non-Traditional Learners

The term "non-traditional learner" encompasses a variety of student characteristic. In its broadest sense, the term refers to students who did not take the traditional path to college straight from high school. According to the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (2000), non-traditional students meet one or more of the following characteristics: 1) delaying enrollment into post-secondary education, 2) attending part-time, 3) being financially independent, 4) working full-time while enrolled in college, 5) having dependents other than a spouse, 6) being a single parent, or 7) lacking a high school diploma. Over time, there has been constant and steady growth in the number of students who have had an extended time-lapse between exiting high school and entering college (Remedios & Richardson, 2013). Chong, Loh, and Babu (2015) have identified these students as single parents, part-time students, working students, and students who did not receive a traditional diploma. Given the variety of ways in which non-traditional students are defined, Kim (2007) concluded that there is no standard definition of non-traditional learners.

Using the U.S. Department of Education's (2002) definition of non-traditional learner, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) determined that 73% of all undergraduates could be classified as non-traditional. Hussar and Bailey (2009) noted that NCES projected the trend of non-traditional learners to remain stable and possibly increase. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (2018) noted that the enrollment of non-traditional learners was projected to rise to more

than 9.6 million by 2025. This increase in enrollment has resulted in non-traditional learners becoming the fastest growing population in higher education (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006; Finn, 2011).

Compton, Cox, and Laanan (2006) stated that non-traditional learners are the "majority rather than the exception on today's campuses" (p. 73). The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) confirmed that non-traditional learners make up an increasing part of the college population, and between 2000 and 2009, non-traditional student enrollment increased by 43%. Non-traditional learners are a varied group and far from homogenous. To begin, their age range, which can encompass a 50-year span, is one of the most distinctive characteristics that differentiates traditional from non-traditional learners (Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2014). This group of students may work full-time, part-time, or not at all. Non-traditional learners may or may not have dependents. Non-traditional learners may or may not be first-generation students (i.e., those students who are the first in their families to go to college). Ross and Gordan (2011) also included that students who did not take the traditional path to higher education to the definition as non-traditional.

For the purpose of this study, a non-traditional learner is defined as a student who meets one or more of the seven criteria, as identified by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2002): experienced delayed enrollment in college, attends classes a minimum of part time, works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled in classes, is financially independent, has dependents, is a single parent, or completed a GED versus earning a high school diploma. It is difficult to obtain reliable data on non-traditional learners. Colleges who participate in federal aid programs are only required to report data on traditional students and first-time degree seekers under the age of 24 who attend a four-year public or

private nonprofit institution full-time. Without reliable data on non-traditional learners, it is difficult to identify and understand their needs.

Delayed enrollment. Osborne, Marks, and Turner (2004) defined delayed enrollment as a time when a student does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year in which he or she finished high school. The U.S. Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (2000) noted that delayed entrants are more likely to come from low-income families, have parents who did not attend postsecondary education, and are more likely to have family responsibilities of their own. Additionally, Osborne et. al. (2004) suggested that negative factors that influence delayed entry to college can include lack of confidence, fear of debt, and worries about work and time demands.

Part-time enrollment. Students who are enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours per semester are considered part-time, and Choy (2002) determined that 64 percent of college students attend part-time. Similarly, Kasworm (2003) concluded, "The majority of adult students are part-timers" (p. 5).

Financially independent. Students are considered financially independent if they do not rely on others for financial support.

Full-time employment. A student working 35 hours or more per week is considered to be employed full time (Choy, 2002). Niner (2006) stated that students who were employed full time were the fastest growing segment of the higher education market.

Dependents other than spouse. Often these dependents are children and/or relatives for whom the student is providing more than half of their financial support. According to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) report from (2006), support can include money, gifts, loans, housing, food, clothes, car, medical and dental care, and payment of college costs.

Single parent. A single parent is an individual who has physical custody and responsibility for supporting a child(ren). This person has never been married or is separated or divorced from a spouse/common-law partner or is widowed.

No high school diploma. Choy (2002) noted that students attending college without a high school diploma often have a General Education Development (GED) certificate.

Obstacles for Non-Traditional Learners

Non-traditional learners arrive at college and are often unaware of resources and support services available to them as compared to the traditional learner. This is problematic because these same students encounter more obstacles in obtaining a college education than do traditional students; these obstacles include work, family, and other obligations (Ryan, 2003). Without adequate knowledge of the support systems available, non-traditional learners often find their academic success hindered by these obstacles in addition to emotional challenges, which can include the feeling of social isolation.

Social isolation. When students are satisfied, they tend to be more successful, and when non-traditional learners feel socially isolated, their success can be impacted (Wyatt, 2011). Therefore, social and academic integration is important to student success and retention (Pompper, 2006). In a study by Liu (2010), the findings confirmed that social isolation or alienation had a negative effect on first-year student retention. This was confirmed by Gibson and Slate (2010), who pointed out that failure to engage and integrate with other students is an indicator of high drop-out rates. Non-traditional learners often find it difficult to connect with traditional students and, thus, lack a sense of belonging (Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014). Additionally, non-traditional learners during their first year can feel isolated when placed in large classes (Tinto, 2002). Kasworm (2005) further noted that large class settings not only cause

feelings of isolation but also anxiety about being older, thereby increasing the risk of academic withdrawal.

Social isolation may be one of the greatest barriers non-traditional students need to overcome. They may feel cut off and distanced from their social network and support system (Exposito & Bernheimer, 2012). Providing non-traditional learners with programs that encourage social and active academic engagement within the campus community has been shown to increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied and successful (Wyatt, 2011).

Role conflict. Non-traditional learners face many obstacles in obtaining a college education, such as work and/or family obligations (Ryan, 2003). St. John and Tuttle (2004) stated that men typically have more concerns over the financial pressures of returning to college, possibly due to social pressures to be the provider for their families. Calcago, Crosta, Bailey, and Jenkins (2006) confirmed that non-traditional learners face added obstacles including work and family responsibilities that can impede a student's academic success. Role conflicts can be defined as simultaneous, incompatible demands from two or more sources; these can lead to role contagion. Role contagion occurs when students are preoccupied with one role while performing another. A related challenge is, role overload, which occurs when students do not have sufficient time to meet all the demands they face (Home, 1998). Several studies that have focused on the role conflicts of female students who are the primary caregiver in the home (Adebayo, 2006, Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Darab (2004) believed for women, there was greater conflict since they [women] were expected to maintain their roles and responsibilities in the home as primary and school demands were to be secondary.

Another obstacle faced by non-traditional learners is inter-role conflict. Inter-role conflict occurs when fulfillment of one role (parent, worker, etc.) hampers a non-traditional

learner's ability to fulfill his or her role as a student (Markle, 2015). Such inter-role conflicts can be due to structural barriers presented by the institutions and include course availability and course times that do not fit into the students' existing roles (Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014). Markel (2015) suggested that women in particular noted being overwhelmed and encountering inter-role conflict more often than men.

Needed flexibility. Non-traditional students need classes that are offered outside of the traditional school day. For example, Kirby, Biever, Martinez, and Gomez (2004) noted that weekend classes substantially reduced the impact of returning to school on non-traditional students' family and employment. Similarly, Kirby et al. (2004) reported that the Weekend College program allowed non-traditional students to attend college without significant negative impact on their family, work, and social obligations. These findings were backed in a report by Gonclaves and Trunk (2014) stating that "courses [are] designed for traditional students, [and] nontraditional students report frustration in the lack of course availability and course times, particularly in the evening" (p. 164-172). Additionally, flexibility in assignment deadline (Home, 1998) and more flexibility in providing credit for prior learning experiences, skills, and knowledge (Fairchild, 2003) have also been suggested as options to offer greater flexibility to non-traditional students. Finally, non-traditional learners also need distant learning opportunities opportunities, which they can more easily fit into their schedules (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home & Hinds, 2000).

Lack of self-confidence. Some researchers observed that non-traditional students experienced a feeling of discomfort in the classroom, and they attributed this to the non-traditional learner's fear regarding success and their lack of self-confidence (Kasworm, 2005). In a recent study, Coker (2003) examined the experiences of African-American female adult

students in higher education and found that they often had higher anxiety about their ability to do college work after many years away from school and that they frequently worried about whether they were able to keep up with traditional students.

Barriers

Jefferys (2007) noted that the lack of support from peers, faculty members, and family/friends was a barrier to academic success. This lack of support resulted in feelings of stress and guilt, and often caused the non-traditional learner to withdraw from college (Eppler, Carsen-Plentl, & Harju, 2000).

Situational barriers. Non-traditional students are less likely to complete their degree programs and more likely to have a higher rate of attrition as compared to traditional students due to situational barriers (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Situational barriers are life factors, including conflicting roles and responsibilities in daily life such as family, work, and community. Colvin (2013) described situational barriers as "those relating to scheduling problems, home responsibilities, child care, finances, and health" (p. 22). These barriers limit the time that non-traditional learners can devote to classes and homework as compared to traditional learners. Research indicates that situational factors such as dependents other than spouses, children, and work can have conflicting effects on non-traditional learners that can adversely affect the completion of their postsecondary education (Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2000). A non-traditional learner may feel conflicted and pulled between the competing demands of college and home life; this can affect both the initial and subsequent quality of the student's goals and his or her level of commitment (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Tinto, 1993). This conflict may occur because their identities have been "embedded in communities of practice—of family, work, and societal involvements" (Kasworm, Sandmann & Sissel, 2000, p. 456) rather than identifying as

"students." Because their primary identify is not that of "student," non-traditional learners may not receive needed support from employers, family, or friends. Additionally, these potential sources of support may not value the importance of education. Thus, the non-traditional learner may be forced to choose their priorities and determine whether higher education offers a positive return on the time invested (Silverman, Aliabadi, & Stiles, 2009).

Institutional barriers. Institutional barriers are a second type of barrier faced by non-traditional learners. Institutional barriers are limitations non-traditional learners may face because of institutional practices. These barriers can begin with the registration process and registration fees. Even though they understand the registration process, non-traditional learners may have difficulty registering for classes due the days and times of classes and conflicts with home or work life. El-Khawas (2003) noted that non-traditional learners often find that "institutional services, including the Registrar's Office, financial aid, the library, and the bookstore, do not offer convenient times for their schedules" (pp. 54-55). Gonclaves and Trunk (2014) acknowledged that once non-traditional learners are registered, they may have issues related to advisors who are unprepared to assist non-traditional learners. Additionally, non-traditional learners may find it hard to navigate the campus because they are unfamiliar with policies and the campus culture. Gonclaves and Trunk (2014) further noted that, once in the classroom, non-traditional students find that their classes are designed for traditional learners, and non-traditional learners become frustrated.

Potter and Ferguson (2003) noted that institutional barriers may be created by faculty "biased against or ignorant of the needs of adult learners" (p. 8). Often non-traditional learners are expected to adapt and act like traditional learners, but they do not fit the mold of the traditional learner. The model of the traditional learner assumes that all "students can fully

participate in the academic and social life of the institution" (Philibert, Allen, & Elleven, 2008, p. 583). Additionally, Selingo (2006) found that non-traditional learners may be perceived by faculty as inferior to the traditional learners. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) found that the status of non-traditional learners is often devalued, and they are classified as "other"; they are "invisible since traditional-age student experiences are treated as universal" (p. 37). Finally, non-traditional learners experience barriers because of the length of time it takes them to complete a college degree (Donhardt, 2013). This is especially significant for female students with children who are enrolled part-time (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006); they are also at higher risk for not completing their degree (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005).

Dispositional barriers. In addition to situational and institutional barriers, non-traditional learners also experience dispositional barriers. A dispositional barrier exists when a non-traditional learner has a time lapse from an educational setting. Non-traditional learners often have a difficult time making connections with prior learning and understanding the expectations of college classwork (Nelson Laird, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; Merrill, 2002). In 2003, Lundberg proposed that non-traditional learners often feel disconnected from higher education. Dispositional barriers, as noted by Jameson and Fusco (2014), can be a result of prior negative experience, and Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) suggested that prior learning experiences may leave the non-traditional learners lacking self-confidence. Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007) noted that low self-esteem and negative attitudes about being an adult learner can be dispositional barriers to learning success. Dispositional barriers are often evident from non-traditional learner's comments, such as "I am too old," "I don't enjoy school," "I can't do the work," "I don't have the time," and "What do I need to know that for?" Social situations can also cause dispositional barriers. This occurs when non-traditional learners are told by their family,

friends, and even faculty that they are not be capable of completing college-level academic work.

   Academic barriers. Non-traditional learners often have one or more years of delayed enrollment from high school to college. This delay in enrollment can be an issue for non-traditional learner's academic success. Non-traditional learners may have forgotten many of the skills needed to be academically successful, or they may have never been exposed to information pertinent to educational success. A United States Department of Education (2013) survey estimated 21 to 23%, or 40 to 44 million adults in the United States, demonstrate low literacy skills. Furthermore, Howell (2001) noted that non-traditional learners may be inadequately prepared academically and psychologically for college-level work and learning. Additionally, Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004) agreed that the lack of preparedness could be a result of high schools not adequately preparing students for college-level curriculums. Zafft (2008) noted that when non-traditional learners come to college and need remedial courses, they are less likely to complete their program of study. Nonetheless, he added that remedial courses are a necessity for non-traditional learners with inadequate exposure to algebra and reading and writing assignments. Horn, McCoy, Campbell, and Brock (2009) agreed that remedial courses or study skills classes in literacy, writing, mathematics, and computer skills were often necessary for the non-traditional learner. Miller and Lu (2002) agreed that non-traditional learners found technology challenging, and Cohen and Brawer (2003) noted that half of non-traditional learners' reading test scores placed at the lowest two of the five tiers. This is especially important for non-traditional learners who completed a GED because, as Choy (2002) stated, only 22.5% of non-traditional learners who completed a GED earned their college degree.

Motivation

Non-traditional learners are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Students with intrinsic motivation are driven by curiosity and seek to master challenges. Students with extrinsic motivational factors need external rewards such as grades, praise, and approval. Thorkildsen (2002) defined motivation as "an internal force that activates, guides, and maintains behavior over time" (p. ix). Motivation is a broad theoretical concept used to explain why and when people engage in actions. Additionally, Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece (2008) stated that motivation is "the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (p.4). Though motivation has been identified as important to a student's academic success, "few studies have examined nontraditional students' motivation to achieve once enrolled in college" (Justice & Dornan, 2001, p. 237). Based on Decker's (2005) view that people can be motivated "to be moved into action" or "to be moved into cognition, feeling, and action" (p. xiii), first-year faculty maybe an influence that motivates non-traditional learners.

Tinto (2012) suggested that motivation is based on what the student expects of him or herself. Ryan and Deci (2000) observed that motivation can be divided into two categories: extrinsic or external drives and intrinsic or internal factors. The researchers defined extrinsic motivation as a "construct that pertains whenever an activity is done to attain some separable outcome" (p. 60) and intrinsic motivation as "doing an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence" (p. 56). According to Svinicki (2004), instructors must seek out resources to enhance students' intrinsic motivation, showing them how the course applies in the real world.

Relationship with First-Year Seminar Faculty

Several studies, including one by Oseguera and Rhee (2009), have examined student-faculty relationships and college persistence, noting that the student-faculty member relationship affected student persistence. In their study, Oseguera and Rhee noted that several faculty behaviors can possibly affect these relationships. Their study indicated the non-traditional learners need faculty who are flexible, approachable, competent, approachable, and who show concern for student learning and success.

Flexibility. Offering students flexibility may result in stronger student-faculty connections, which in turn can impact student success. Creasey, Jarvis, and Knapcik (2009) noted that when students had stronger connections with faculty, their learning outcomes and academic achievements increased. The type of flexibility that is needed by non-traditional students can include the instructor allowing for assignments to be turned in late. This flexibility may lead non-traditional learners to perceive faculty as more approachable; and is a reflection of student attitudes as much as faculty behaviors.

Approachability. It is important for the non-traditional learner to feel welcome in the learning environment, and faculty who are approachable create a welcoming classroom environment (Krapp, 2002; Harackiewicz, Durik, Barron, Linnenbrink-Garciam & Tauer, 2008). Denzine and Pulos (2000) stated that faculty approachability must be demonstrated in order to facilitate positive teacher–student interactions. Approachability can be verbal or non-verbal (Song, Kim, & Luo, 2016). When faculty are approachable, students become more confident and their academic skills improve along with their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Komarraju, et.al. 2010).

Vogt (2008) added that faculty need to share personal information with the non-traditional learners in order to promote a more personal and approachable relationship. Faculty who self-disclose about their professional practice, views, and personal history show an openness and accessibility (Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009; Hosek & Thompson, 2009); this, in turn, can make them seem more approachable. However, Sibii (2010) noted that, when self-disclosing, it is important for the faculty member to maintain the role of teacher and be "a friendly individual but not a friend" (p. 531).

Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) pointed out that students' academic self-concept is strongly related to their relationship with their instructors and their perception of the professors' accessibility and approachability. It is important for faculty to periodically remind and encourage non-traditional learners to come to them for help because, when students have the high levels of anxiety common among non-traditional students, they are often reluctant to ask for help (Karabenick, 2003). Further studies by both Cox et al. (2010) and Meyers (2009) mention the importance of the instructor demonstrating a genuine interest in non-traditional learners and acknowledging these students as people. These actions make a positive impact on a student's success.

Competence. According to Knowles (1984) non-traditional learners emphasis on learning is based on four aspects of learning: 1) independence; 2) experience; 3) readiness to learn; and 4) learning orientation. Therefore, it is important for non-traditional learners to have faculty who challenge and push them out of their comfort zone, as shown in a study by Devlin and O'Shea (2012). Additionally, Wlodkowski (2003) revealed the importance of the relevance of topics to non-traditional learners; the more interest they have in the topic, the more motivated they are to learn. Furthermore, non-traditional learners need faculty to ensure there is no

favoritism towards traditional learners but rather that they equally appreciate all of the students in the class. Rugutt and Chemosit (2009) and Zepke and Leach (2010) emphasized that non-traditional learners need a first-year seminar instructor who is passionate about the field and able to motivate students. Learners who feel motivated "seem more likely to have a continuous interest in and to use what they have learned" (Wlodowski, 2008, p. 6). Once non-traditional learners have been exposed to new information, it is important for them to be provided with well-established timely feedback: "the more immediate and precise the feedback is, the stronger the effect on learning" (Boud & Falchikov, 2007, p.58).

Concern for student learning and success. Non-traditional learners need first-year seminar instructors who are concerned with their academic progress (Cokley, 2000; Rosenthal, Rosnow, & Rubin, 2000) and who contribute to their intellectual development. One way that this can be established is by the instructor showing genuine care, accessibility, and dedication towards the students (Muraskin, Lee, Wilner, & Swail, 2004). These findings were backed in a study by Olsen and Carter (2014), who reported that retention rates were significantly increased when students perceived that faculty genuinely cared about them.

First-Year Seminar Faculty and Non-Traditional Learner Interaction

The relationship between non-traditional learners and first-year seminar faculty is extremely important. Given that the first year of college is considered the foundation of the entire undergraduate experience (Swing, 2001), first-year seminar instructors can have a tremendous impact on non-traditional learners and can be effective in increasing student retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that it is important for first-year seminar faculty to understand that the interaction with non-traditional first-year students is significant in helping them feel a connection to the college environment and adapting to the culture of the institution. Reason,

Terenzini, and Domingo (2005) confirmed that non-traditional learners need more exposure to faculty than traditional learners. This contact between the faculty and non-traditional learner can be direct or indirect, formal or informal, or can be as simple as prompt personal feedback, acknowledgment of their experiences, or even skillful utilization of electronic technology (Kuh, et al., 2010). Thus, it is important for first-year seminar faculty to build a strong, positive relationship with non-traditional learners in order to keep them motivated and to create a greater chance of retention and academic success (Davis & Dupper, 2004). Strong relationships have been found to increase retention (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, & Rahtz, 2006)

Derby and Smith (2004) pointed out that it is important for non-traditional learners to develop relationships in order to facilitate their success. Their study illustrated how that can occur, and they also noted that without these relationships, non-traditional learners may struggle academically. The interaction between faculty members and non-traditional learners can be either positive or negative and can result in the success or failure of non-traditional learners (Kuh, 2002; Umbach, 2007).

First-year seminar faculty need to help encourage interaction between all students in the class because non-traditional learners need academic support from their fellow students as well as the faculty (Thompson & Mazer, 2009). Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2005) studied the relationships between faculty and new students in the first year of college and evaluated the effects on academic competence. Gonclave and Trunk (2014) noted that when non-traditional learners miss connecting with the faculty and other students, they may feel as though they are an afterthought and develop a feeling of not belonging in the class environment. When instructors are concerned and available for their students, persistence increases (Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). Cotton and Wilson (2006) reported that there was more satisfaction with the overall academic experience when there was any form of faculty/student interaction.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is defined by Harper and Quaye, (2009) as "participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom [that] leads to a range of measurable outcomes" (p.2). In a revision of his definition, Kuh (2009) redefined student engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what instructors do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). Krause and Coates (2008) went on to include: "the extent to which students are engaging in activities that higher education research has shown to be linked with high-quality learning outcomes" (p. 493). Student engagement is not simply involvement and/or participation but rather requires feelings and sense-making (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Coates (2007) determined student engagement to be either social or academic and studied formative communication with academic staff and in relationship to student engagement. This type of communication is needed to increase student engagement and the feeling of being supported by the university and is therefore is an important factor in success. For the purpose of this study *student engagement* refers to the *s*tudents' investment and involvement or their willingness to actively participate in their learning environment.

First-Year Seminars

Noel-Levits (2013) stated that first-year seminars are a primary institutional retention strategy. Padgett (2013) added that first-year seminar courses provide students with exposure to develop and improve skills in time management and stress. Furthermore, Young and Hopp (2014) identified first-year seminars as a program implemented as an intervention designed to

assist students' transition to college, both social and academically. First-year seminars can take a variety of different forms, and the goals of the course may include encouraging academic and career success in addition to improving students' academic performance. Lake (2012) observed that students who completed first-year seminar courses received better grades in other courses than did those who did not enroll in the seminar. Leeger (2012) added that students who completed first-year seminar courses were 11% more likely to graduate than students who did not.

First-year seminar courses are offered at almost 90% of higher education institutions, according to Padgett and Keup (2011). Additionally, Young and Hopp (2014) observed that more than half of those institutions with first-year seminar classes enroll more than 90% of their students in these courses. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that "the weight of evidence indicates that first-year seminar participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college" (p. 403). Furthermore, first-year seminar courses provide students with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and academic preparedness needed for college success (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007), and, they offer learning strategies (Crede & Phillips, 2011) and study skills (Crede & Kunce, 2008) in addition to helping students understand the need to engage in self-regulated learning (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2009).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intent of this research was to explore and understand how non-traditional learners perceived the relationship between instructor and students and whether this relationship affected retention beyond the first-year of college. Non-traditional learners are a distinct population with different learning characteristics and traits that distinguish them from traditional learners. Developing a student identity, or perception of what a student should be, can be difficult for many non-traditional learners. They may be restricted because of situational, institutional, and dispositional/psychological factors that differ from those of the traditional learner. Because of these factors, non-traditional learners have a greater risk of not completing a college degree and an even greater chance of not finishing the first-year of college. Faced with the challenges to increase graduation rates, colleges and universities must find strategies to help retain the non-traditional learner population. Understanding how non-traditional learners perceive their relationship with their first-year seminar faculty member can give colleges an insight into ways to increase persistence and, ultimately, graduation rates. Despite the abundance of published research on first-year students, currently there is a lack of research on the influence of first-year seminar faculty members on the retention rate of non-traditional learners. The low retention and graduation rates of non-traditional students have accentuated the need for such a study.

Setting

This study was conducted at Kennesaw State University, a public, coeducational, doctoral research institution with moderate research activity, located in Kennesaw, Georgia. Kennesaw State University is the third largest university in Georgia and is among the top 50 largest universities in the United States. Kennesaw State has two campuses: one in Kennesaw, Georgia,

and a second campus in Marietta, Georgia. Kennesaw State, established in 1963, is part of the University System of Georgia and is governed by the Georgia Board of Regents. The majority of students are from Georgia (i.e., in-state enrollment for 2016 was 95.6% of the total student body).

The university enrolls over 35,000 students, of which 7,770 are classified as first-year students. In the fall of 2016, there were 15,122 incoming first-time first-year applicants. Of those, 8847 were admitted; and 5,347 were enrolled, for an acceptance rate of 59% and an enrollment yield of 60%. Approximately 75% of KSU's students are enrolled in full-time studies, and the overall retention rate for first-year students from fall 2015 to fall 2016 was 80.1%. As of the fall of 2015, 1% of all first-time first-year students were age 25 and older, while 22% of all undergraduates fall into this age category.

According to the Kennesaw State University 2015-1016 Fact Book, the distribution of male to female students was nearly equal: 51% male and 49% female. College enrollment by race and ethnicity in descending order is White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Multiracial, Undeclared, International, Native American, and Pacific Islander (2016).

Participants

For convenience, the study participants were chosen from the researcher's home university. Participant selection was purposive in that it restricted the pool of potential participants to non-traditional learners (as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics), who had previously taken or were enrolled in the first-year seminar class during the spring 2018 semester. A total of 94 (N=94) non-traditional learners participated in the research study. The majority of the participants 57.45% (n=54) were 18 to 22 years old, 21.28% (n=20) of

the participants fell in the range of 23 to 29 years old, 14.89% (n=14) of the participants were

between 30 and 29 years of age, and 6.38% (n= 6) were 40 years old and older (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Ages of Respondents

Ages of Respondents
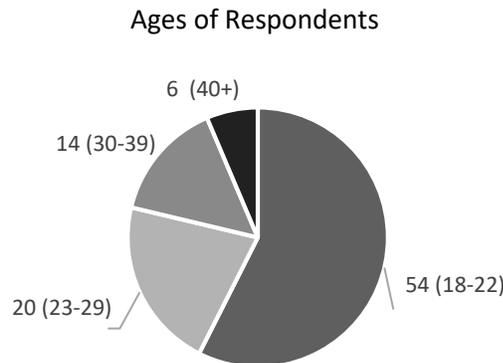
Of the 94 participants in the quantitative portion of this study, males made up 40.45%

(n=38) and female 59.67% (n=56). The participants represented a diverse background consisting

of African American 23.40% (n=22), Caucasian 60.64% (n=57), Asian 4.26% (n=4), Hispanic

5.32% (n=5), Multi-racial 5.32% (n=5), and those preferring not to respond 1.06% (n=1). Of the

total participants, 19.2% (n=24) had delayed enrollment in college (i.e., they did not enter

college the same calendar year in which they completed high school). A total of 13.6% (n=17) of

participants attended college part-time (i.e., enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours a semester) for

at least part of the academic year. Of those participants who were employed, 27.2% (n=34)

worked full-time (i.e., 35 hours or more per week) while enrolled in classes, and 21.6% (n=27)

were classified as financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial

aid. Only 8.8% (n=11) had dependents other than a spouse, and 8% (n=10) reported that they

were single parents. Additionally, 1.6% (n=2) did not have a high school diploma but rather

completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate.

A total of 15 participants volunteered to participate in and completed an open-ended questionnaire. Participants were assigned pseudonyms as indicated in the following table (Table 1), which also presents an overview of the demographic descriptors of the 15 participants.

Table 1:

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Race	Children	Status	Work	Re-enrolling
Amanda	18-22	Female	Caucasian	No	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Betty	18-22	Female	Caucasian	No	Full-time	Full-time	Yes
Carl	23-29	Male	Caucasian	No	Full-time	Full-time	No
Dan	40+	Male	Hispanic	No	Full-time	Full-time	Yes
Erica	40+	Female	Caucasian	No	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Freida	18-22	Female	Caucasian	No	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Gene	23-29	Male	Caucasian	No	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Heather	23-29	Female	Caucasian	Yes	Full-time	No	Yes
Iris	18-22	Female	African-American	No	Full-time	Full-time	Yes
Joe	30-39	Male	Caucasian	Yes	Full-time	Full-time	Yes
Karen	18-22	Female	Caucasian	Yes	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Lucy	30-39	Female	African-American	Yes	Full-time	No	Yes
Mike	23-29	Male	Hispanic	No	Part-time	Full-time	Yes
Nancy	18-22	Female	Hispanic	No	Full-time	Full-time	Yes
Opal	18-22	Female	Caucasian	No	Full-time	Full-time	Yes

The descriptive statistics gathered on the participants who completed the questionnaire revealed that 75% (n=10) were female, while 25% (n=5) were male. Seven of the 15 participants were between the ages of 18 and 22, four were ages 23 to 29, two were between 30 and 39, and two were 40+. With respect to ethnicity, ten of the participants self-identified as Caucasian while three identified as Hispanic and two as African-American. The majority of the participants 60% (n=9) were enrolled full-time while 40% (n=6) were enrolled part-time. The majority of the students worked full-time; two students did not work while attending classes. A total of four students were parents, and three of those were single parents. All but one of the students planned to return the next semester.

Research Questions

This study, which used a convergent parallel design of descriptive statistics and open-ended questions, was guided by the following research questions:

1) Is there an observable relationship between the retention rate of non-traditional learners and the behaviors of first-year seminar instructors?

2) Do non-traditional learners believe they are as well supported as traditional students by first-year seminar faculty?

Research Instruments

The combination of a questionnaire and descriptive statistics were used in this study in order to allow for a more nuanced understanding of participant responses and to provide the reader with greater confidence in the results and the conclusions drawn from the study (O'Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2010). This design also reduces weaknesses or bias while improving the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011); Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Descriptive statistics data was generated utilizing a 36-item research instrument found in the literature: "A Measure to Assess Student-Instructor Relationships." This instrument was used with the permission of Dr. Gary Creasy and is attached as Appendix B. This particular research instrument was chosen because it assessed "college student-instructor relationships from the student perspective and was guided by the theoretical principal of central relationship qualities that are deemed significant across most relationships" (Creasey, Jarvis, & Knapcik, 2009, p. 2).

Minor modifications were made to the instrument to suit the context of the study. For example, the item "The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with your instructor" was modified to "The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with the instructor teaching your first-year seminar course." The items that comprised the research instrument offered respondents the opportunity to consider the student-instructor relationship and capture central relationship dimensions, such as Instructor Connectedness and Instructor Anxiety (Creasey, et. al., 2009). Respondents used a bi-polar, 7-point, Likert scale (1 = Disagree Strongly; 7 = Agree Strongly).

Data Collection/ Procedure

The study began mid-November 2017. Kennesaw State University department chairs and other unit heads (gatekeepers) were contacted via email requesting permission to contact the faculty within their departments (Appendix C) regarding the distribution of an Invitation to Participate (Appendix D). Once permission was received, faculty were sent invitations via email requesting they forward a link to participate in the survey (Appendix E) to students enrolled in their classes. Participants were informed that the survey instrument was a self-report questionnaire (Appendix F) that was developed and administered via Qualtrics, a secure online tool, to gather data from study participants. The recruitment email described the voluntary survey

and the amount of time the survey would take. Participants were also informed that the intent of the study was to examine the relationship between the non-traditional first-year student and the faculty member to determine the impact of that relationship on non-traditional student retention in the first year of college. Within the survey, students were also invited to participate in an additional voluntary questionnaire via phone or email. Participants were advised that they could choose to complete the survey without agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview.

A follow-up email was sent to faculty at the end of November and a second one mid-December asking them to remind and encourage students to participate in the survey. Due to a low response rate, the survey was re-distributed in mid-January to capture students enrolled in the first-year seminar during the spring 2018 semester. The survey closed on January 30, 2018.

A total of 94 participants completed the descriptive statistics portion of the survey. Fifteen of those chose to participate in the open-ended questionnaire as a follow-up to the survey and answered the seven questions that appeared on that questionnaire. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and informed that results from this study were anonymous and would be stored on a password-protected desk-top computer. Although the number of participants was low, a small response rate is consistent with previous research studies (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000).

Data Analysis

This exploratory study used a convergent mixed method that was largely qualitative in nature. The decision for a mixed-method study was based on Patton's suggestion that researchers use mixed-methods study because "they need to know and use a variety of methods to be responsive to the nuances of particular empirical questions and the idiosyncrasies of specific

stakeholder needs" (2002, p. 585). In particular, the open-ended questions were used to gather and comprehend the perspectives of the participants without influencing the responses through pre-selected responses (Patton, 2002) and to allow for individuality of responses (Frankel & Wallen, 2000).

The open-ended questions on the questionnaire portion of the study used grounded theory, a systematic approach of emergent logic, to analyze the data. This method utilizes an inductive approach to collect and analyze the data to develop a theory that could possibly explain the re-enrollment behaviors of first-year non-traditional learners. Emergent categories were analyzed via theoretical and deductive reasoning. The decision to use grounded theory was to allow for a systematic analytic strategy that was explicit yet flexible and could be refined as needed. The first step was the collection of data via the questionnaire. Key points were then marked and coded. The codes were grouped by similar concepts, and finally categories were formed as a basis of the theory. The data was coded using a systematic design of open and axial coding. Once the data was gathered, it was segmented and scrutinized into themes and categories by reduction of terms.

The information was then examined using parallel constructs for both types of data. Finally, the data was analyzed separately, and the results were compared side by side for similarities. The number of respondents was not adequate to establish an appropriate measure for each research instrument used (Cresswell, 2014).

All participants were asked if they wished to be contacted to participate in answering a questionnaire; fifteen chose to participate. For the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire portion of the study, the collected data were transcribed and categorized in terms of research questions and emergent themes. A coding method was used to organize interview

data into a limited number of themes and issues around the research questions. Quotations were selected from the responses that illustrated the themes and concepts that had emerged. The responses were measured as they became available from the participants. First, the text provided by participants was segmented. The next step was to identify the raw data (i.e., "data cleaning"). Afterwards, the data was interpreted via "coding" and "clustering." Finally, data representation or "telling the story" interpreted and gave meaning to the data in context. Colors were used to code the data: yellow for positive behaviors on the part of the instructor and blue for instructor behaviors that made the non-traditional learner feel isolated and/or inferior. Orange was used to identify barriers faced by the non-traditional learner. Data coding allowed for developing themes and patterns to be easily culled from the data collected. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire paralleled the descriptive statistics survey. As was anticipated, the sample size for the open-ended questions on the questionnaire was be considerably smaller (n=15) than that for descriptive statistics portion of the study (n=94). The small number of respondents for the open-ended portion of the study was not considered to be a problem. The number of respondents was adequate for each research instrument, given that the intent of the research approaches differed (i.e., the open-ended portion sought to gain an in-depth perspective while the descriptive statistics instrument provided a generalized perspective) (Cresswell, 2014).

The descriptive statistics data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted from the Student Instructor Relationship Scale. The results, reported through descriptive statistics, included the mean, median, and standard deviation. The purpose of the descriptive statistics portion of the study was to provide information about non-traditional first-year student/instructor relationships. For the purpose of this study, the central tendency was measured and reported as the mean, and the standard deviation measured the measure of dispersion.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study was to increase the knowledge of the relationship between first-year seminar instructors and non-traditional first-year students to determine if this relationship impacts retention in the first-year. The study hoped to determine if there was an observable relationship between the retention rate of non-traditional students and the various behaviors of the first-year seminar instructors. In addition, this study examined the perceptions of non-traditional learners regarding the support they received from first-year seminar faculty. Finally, the study was designed to add to the body of knowledge in this area.

This information was collected through a survey designed by Creasey, Jarvis, and Knapcik (2009), "A Measure to Assess Student-Instructor Relationships," and administered via Qualtrics online survey software. Additionally, a follow up questionnaire was utilized to allow students a voice and to gather emerging themes. The results of the analysis are presented in this chapter along with emerging themes that could explain re-enrollment behaviors and illuminate the nature of the instructor-student relationship.

Results

The study was conducted in two parts. The first portion of the study was more quantitative in nature and involved collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from the Student Instructor Relationship Scale (SIRS) using descriptive statistics (Seven-point Likert Scale) in order to provide information about non-traditional first-year student/instructor relationships. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary.

Survey Administered for this Study. The survey (Appendix F), was administered to non-traditional learners, 23 years of age and older, in the fall of 2017. Due to low response rates during that semester, the survey was carried over to the Spring 2018 semester and the age criteria was eliminated, allowing more students with non-traditional status the opportunity to participate. The elimination of the age stipulation of 23 years and older allowed for 57% (n=54) additional non-traditional learners to respond to the survey. All participants were required to be either currently enrolled or to have had previously been enrolled in a first-year seminar course at Kennesaw State University. A total of 94 students agreed to participate in the survey.

It was important to ensure that the participants of the study met the requirements of a non-traditional learner, as established for this study. This was done by analyzing demographic information provided by participants; the findings are reported in Chapter 3, Table 2. Although 57% (n=54) of the respondents were under the age of 22, they qualified as non-traditional learners by meeting other criteria, such as delayed enrollment, part-time student, works full-time, financially independent, having dependents, single parent, and/or not having a high school diploma.

Table 2:

Non-Traditional Learner Criteria

Age	18-22	23-29	30-39	40+	Total
Delayed Enrollment	7	11	6	0	24
Part-time Student	13	1	2	1	17
Works full-time	21	7	5	1	34
Financially Independent	10	8	6	3	27
Has Dependents	1	5	3	2	11
Single Parent	2	4	4	0	10
No High School Diploma	1	1	0	0	2
Total	54	20	14	6	94

All of the survey participants (N=94) were asked if they intended to enroll the next semester. The results from the participants were that 93.62% (n=88) planned on re-enrolling (M = 22, SD = 20.59), while 6.38% (n=6) did not plan to continue their education (M=1.06, SD=0.24). Re-enrollment versus withdrawal was further broken down by age group, as shown in Table 3:

Students Planning to Re-Enroll Versus Those Not Re-Enrolling Next Semester

Re-Enroll Next Semester	Ages 18-22	Ages 23-29	Ages 30-39	Ages 40+	Total
Yes	52	18	12	6	88
No	2	2	2	0	6
Total	54	20	14	6	94

The survey contained quantitative questions designed to gather information regarding the students' connectedness and anxiety regarding the relationship they formed with their first-year seminar faculty member. Table 4 describes survey questions associated with the two subscales—Instructor Connectedness and Instructor Anxiety—identified by the authors of the survey (Creasey et al., 2009). The goal of the survey was to collect information regarding non-traditional learners' connection with, and their anxieties in relation to, their first-year seminar instructor. Participants were also invited to participate in a follow up questionnaire.

Table 4:

Survey Questions Regarding Instructor Connection/Anxieties

Survey Question	Connection	Anxiety
3. The instructor is concerned with the needs of his or her students.	x	
4. I'm afraid that I will lose this instructor's respect.		x
5. I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor.		x
6. It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor.	x	
7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.		x
8. I am nervous around this instructor.		x
17. It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.	x	
21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.	x	
22. I'm scared to show my thoughts around this instructor; I think he or she will think less of me.		x
23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.	x	
25. I'm afraid that if I shared my thoughts with this instructor that he or she would not think very highly of me.		x
29. I could tell this instructor just about anything.	x	
31. I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards.		x
34. I often worry that my instructor doesn't really like me.		x
35. If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor.	x	
36. I know this instructor could make me feel better if I had a problem.	x	

One participant's response was eliminated as this point, as they chose "neither agree nor disagree" for each question. Total responses ranged from 90 to 93 participants for each question. "Survey fatigue" seemed to emerge by the seventh question, and five participants dropped from

the survey at that point. Additionally, three more students only answered sporadically. Ninety-one participants completed the entire survey. After analyzing the data, it was determined that the most appropriate measure for analyzing the results would be measuring the mean and standard deviations.

  Questions Regarding Connectedness: There were eleven questions which focused on connectedness (3, 6, 11, 12, 17, 21, 23, 29, 30, 35, and 36) that examined how well the student connected with the instructor. These questions included "It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor"; "I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor"; "I feel comfortable depending on this instructor"; "It's easy for me to connect with this instructor"; "I could tell this instructor just about anything" (Creasey et al., 2009; questions appear in Table 5). High scores denoted stronger feelings of connectedness while low scores communicated avoidance when building a relationship with the instructor. The findings indicated that although non-traditional learners felt comfortable with their faculty member, they were less likely to share their problems or concerns with the faculty member. The overall mean for connection with the first-year seminar instructors was 5.48; the standard deviation was 1.66.

Table 5:

Non-Traditional Learner Connection with First-Year Seminar Instructor

Connection	*M*	*S D*	*N*
3. The instructor is concerned with the needs of his or her students.	5.48	1.66	92
6. It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor.	4.47	1.93	93
11. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor.	4.80	1.92	92
12. I find it relatively easy to get close to this instructor.	4.60	1.75	91
17. It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.	4.94	1.80	90
21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.	5.02	1.70	90
23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.	3.73	2.04	91
29. I could tell this instructor just about anything.	4.26	1.93	91
30. I feel comfortable depending on this instructor.	4.92	1.84	91
35. If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor	4.49	1.81	91
36. I know this instructor could make me feel better if I had a problem	4.79	1.80	91

Questions Regarding Anxiety: The second subscale, which measured anxiety, consisted of eight questions (4, 5, 7, 8, 22, 25, 31, and 34), which are presented in Table 6. These questions represented student concerns regarding instructor acceptance and included questions such as: "I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor"; "I'm afraid I will lose this instructor's respect"; "I am nervous around this instructor"; "I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards" (Creasey et al., 2009). Lower mean scores suggest that non-traditional learners did not feel anxiety regarding their relationship with their first-year seminar instructor. Results from the analysis of the second subscale indicated that, overall, student anxiety was low

(M=3.01 SD=0.26), which suggests the participants' perception of their first-year seminar

instructor was not anxiety-provoking.

Table 6:

Non-Traditional Learner Anxiety with First-Year Seminar Instructor

Anxiety	M	S D	N
4. I'm afraid that I will lose this instructor's respect.	2.91	1.72	93
5. I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor.	2.85	1.89	93
7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.	2.81	1.91	93
8. I am nervous around this instructor.	2.68	1.81	92
22. I'm scared to show my thoughts around this instructor; I think he or she will think less of me.	2.99	1.89	91
25. I'm afraid that if I shared my thoughts with this instructor that he or she would not think very highly of me.	3.20	2.03	91
31. I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards.	3.48	1.95	91
34. I often worry that my instructor doesn't really like me.	3.19	1.78	91

Questionnaire The purpose of the questionnaire was to give participants the opportunity to

provide more detailed responses. It is important to compare this data with the data collected in

the quantitative portion of the survey. The open-ended questions that framed the qualitative

portion of this study and served as the script for the interview were: (a) Tell me about your

relationship with your professor? (b) How do you feel this relationship enhances or hinders your

learning experiences? (c) How has your first-year seminar instructor been of help to you during

your first-year experience? (d) Were there ever times you felt uncomfortable in the class

setting, and how was this handled by the professor? (e) What positive or negative experiences

with your first-year seminar faculty member have influenced your college experience? (f) How

has your first-year seminar faculty member motivated you? and (g) How does your first-year seminar professor make you feel in class?

Participants   A total of fifteen participants agreed to answer an open-ended questionnaire. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity.

   Participant Amanda. Amanda is a Caucasian female between 18 and 22 years of age who has no children. Amanda is financially independent, works full-time, and attends classes part-time. She is planning to re-enroll next semester. Amanda did not take the traditional path to school and began working prior to enrolling. She felt as though her first-year seminar instructor was concerned with her welfare and believes the instructor would make her feel better by providing her with guidance and reassurance if she needed help or had a problem in the class. Amanda believes the instructor truly cared about her as a student. She feels as though the instructor gave her the confidence she needed to be successful. Amanda believes her first-year seminar instructor pushed her out of her comfort zone and is one reason she is succeeding in college. She said, "Her enthusiasm really motivated me."

   Participant Betty. Betty is a Caucasian female between the ages of 18 and 22; she has no children. Betty is financially independent, works full-time, and attends classes full-time. She did not enroll in college straight out of high school. She is planning to re-enroll in the fall. Betty did not agree nor disagree that her relationship with her first-year seminar instructor helped her acclimate to college. She mentioned that neither she nor her professor made any effort to build a relationship. Betty would like to see a specific first-year seminar for non-traditional learners who all work full-time and attend classes full-time. She feels everyone in that class would have a common relationship. Betty feels as though instructors whose students were all working full-

time may have more compassion and flexibility towards the students. She said, "I do value her insight and perspective on college and navigating the college system."

Participant Carl. Carl is a Caucasian male between 23 and 29 who has no children. Carl does not have a high school diploma but does have a GED. He did not enter college straight from high school. Carl is financially independent and works full-time while attending college full-time. Carl developed a close relationship with his first-year seminar instructor. He said, "From day one I knew he was there for me and I could depend on him when needed and I have to say he was way cooler than I expected." Carl feels that the instructor gave him the confidence he needed to succeed in his first semester of college. Carl believes the instructor was fair with all the students and that he appreciated and respected their opinions. Although Carl had an overall positive experience, he is not planning to enroll in classes next semester. Carl may choose to come back to college later but needs to earn more money at this time and cannot devote the time needed for classes.

Participant Dan. Dan is a Hispanic male over 40. Dan works full-time and attends classes full-time. Dan has dependents but no children. Dan worried about losing the respect of his first-year seminar instructor, and he often found that he doubted himself. For these reasons, Dan did not connect with the instructor. Dan feels as though the instructor respected the students in the class. Dan stated that the classes kept him young, and he enjoyed being one of the older students in the class. Dan said, "The first day of class the professor told the class we could all learn [from] my life experiences. . . That made me feel valuable." Dan mentioned he would not have been prepared when he was younger to handle college life. He plans to re-enroll next semester.

Participant Erica. Erica is a Caucasian female over 40. Erica is financially independent and has no children. Erica works full-time and attends classes part-time. She plans to enroll next semester. Erica believes the instructor connected well with all of the students, but she was not interested in getting close to the instructor. She did not feel nervous around the instructor and believes the instructor cared about all the students in the class without showing favoritism. Erica does not believe she could open-up and tell the professor her thoughts. Erica indicated that it was her preference to keep a distance and a professional relationship with her instructor. Erica said, "I've been out of school so long I sometimes feel like I need more time to get the assignments completed."

Participant Freida. Freida is between 18 and 22 years of age. She is a Caucasian female with no children. She delayed enrollment in college to begin a career. She is financially independent and works full-time while attending classes part-time. Freda intends to re-enroll next semester. Being independent and not relying on others, she noted that she found it a challenge to relinquish her control and depend on her instructor. Freida also indicated she fears having been away from the regimen of classes and studying may hinder her success and is also worried she will not fully understand all that is expected of her. Her worry was that if she did not perform well, the instructor would think less of her and she would lose the instructor's respect. In addition, she feared that sharing her thoughts with the instructor could have made the instructor think less of her, and Frieda did not want to take this risk. It was her choice to keep a barrier up, not the instructor's. Freida believes the instructor was concerned about her success or would have been willing to help her or any of the other students. Freida did indicate, "It's sometimes hard to take the class serious[ly]."

Participant Gene. Gene is a 23 to 29-year-old Caucasian male with no children who delayed enrollment to college. He is a financially independent student who works full-time and attends college part-time. Gene felt as though the instructor was concerned with the welfare of all the students in the class. He found it easy to gain a feeling of connection with the instructor. For these reasons, Gene felt a close connection with the instructor and had no problem sharing his thoughts and beliefs in class. Gene implied that the instructor gave him confidence in himself. Gene stated, "The instructor provided me with a good experience" and "The class was always relaxed and calm, I had a lot of fun."

Participant Heather. Heather is a 23 to 29-year-old Caucasian female who delayed her enrollment in college. Heather does not work and is a single mother. Heather attends classes full-time and intends to re-enroll next semester. Heather stated that her first-year seminar instructor was easy to connect with and made her and the other students feel confident. Heather said she would have had no problem asking for help if she needed it and believes that she would gave gotten the support she needed from the instructor. She said, "I felt like I could ask him anything and he would help me the best he could."

Participant Iris. Iris is an 18 to 22-year-old African American female. She works full-time and attends school full-time. Iris plans to re-enroll next semester. Iris did not feel she could depend on her first-year seminar instructor. She wishes the instructor had been more concerned with all the students in the class. She worried about her interactions with the instructor and did not feel any connection, nor did she want to open-up to the instructor about her feelings. She felt nervous around the instructor and did not want to share her thoughts with the instructor. Iris believes the instructor showed favoritism to specific students. She noted that she felt uncomfortable with the instructor. Iris said, "I got put off when the instructor mispronounced

my name three classes in a row. Then a couple classmates did the same thing." She continued, "I never called them by their names after that."

Participant Joe. Joe is a Caucasian male and a single parent who is financially independent and works full-time while attending classes full-time. Joe delayed enrollment in college after high school; he plans to re-enroll next semester. Joe did not worry about losing the respect of his instructor but wishes the instructor had been concerned with the needs of all the students. Joe noted that he didn't always know how to read the instructors moods. Joe reflected, "I wish there had been more consistency with the atmosphere of the class." Although Joe stated he could share his concerns with the instructor, he simply did not want to get that close to the instructor.

Participant Karen. Karen is a Caucasian female between the ages of 18 and 22 with children. She works full-time and is financially independent and has dependents. Karen delayed her enrollment to college and is enrolled as a part-time student. Karen did not believe she could depend on her instructor and did not feel as though the instructor was concerned with the needs of all the students. She stated that she was nervous around the instructor and that the instructor made her doubt herself. Karen indicated that the instructor was moody and favored certain students. Karen said, "I have heard all the instructors are different" and "I wouldn't advise anyone to take this class from this instructor." Karen also said, "I need someone [who] acknowledges I have young children at home and I am doing the best I can to improve myself." Karen plans to re-enroll next semester.

Participant Lucy. Lucy is an African American female between the ages of 30 and 39 who has children. Lucy does not work and attends school full-time. Lucy is not concerned with the instructor or her interactions with the instructor. Lucy plans to re-enroll next semester. Lucy

felt the course was a "complete waste of time." Lucy remembered the instructor teaching a class on how to study; she thought, "if you don't know how to study what are you doing here?" She continued by stating that she "didn't have time for these trifling assignments."

Participant Mike. Mike is a 23 to 29-year-old Hispanic financially independent male with no children. Mike delayed attending college to work full-time, and he attends classes part-time. Mike did not feel as though he could depend on his first-year seminar instructor and wishes she had been more concerned with the welfare of all the students. Mike said, "I [kept] to myself as much as I [could], I am quiet and listen. I [did] not want to lose the respect of my instructor. I [got] nervous because I [was] afraid I might say the wrong thing and look stupid." Mike felt as though it was hard to predict the instructor's moods. He also felt as though the instructor showed favoritism in class. Mike stated, "If I had a choice I would not have enrolled for the class."

Participant Nancy. Nancy is an 18 to 23-year-old Hispanic female with no children. She is financially independent, works full-time, and attends classes full-time. Nancy plans to re-enroll next semester. Nancy did not feel as though she could depend on the first-year seminar instructor and did not feel as though the instructor cared about his or her students. Although she stated that the instructor made her doubt herself, she did not feel nervous around him or her. She said, "I felt out of place from day one. Classmates were having fun joking and I was there to study. I didn't feel connected with the class at all." Nancy did not believe the instructor connected with all the students. For these reasons, Nancy chose to distance herself from the instructor.

Participant Opal. Opal is a Caucasian female aged 18 to 22. Opal had a GED rather than a high school diploma. She has no children and is financially independent, works full-

time, and attends classes full-time. Opal plans to re-enroll next semester. Opal was not concerned with her first-year seminar instructor or the impression they may have had of her. Opal remembers, "Going to class was a chore" and "I was home-schooled, and this is nothing like what I expected." She continued, "I sometimes felt invisible, I sat by myself and even though people said hi, I never felt a connection some students seemed to have felt."

Participant Responses: The participants' responses to the open-ended questions were quite varied, covering a tremendous range of perspectives:

Question One: Tell me about your relationship with your professor? Responses to this question included: "I avoid my professor," "I try to just blend in and not be noticed," "He sees me across the field and is yelling hey to me and checking on how it's going," "I cannot say enough good about him," and "I would never have opened up to her had she not been or seemed approachable."

Question Two: How do you feel this relationship enhances or hinders your learning experiences? In response to Question Two, participants, stated: "I really do not want a relationship with my professor," "Honestly, I would prefer to stay under the radar," "The instructor listed to us and payed attention to our needs and concerns," "Almost every class the instructor was there early and stayed late if anyone needed additional help or just wanted to talk," and "The class was a little less formal than I expected, I personally need that formal setting."

Question Three: How has your first-year seminar instructor been of help to you during your first-year experience? Participants replied to Question Three with the following statements: "The professor created an environment where many students felt welcome and it was very social," "My first-year instructor was no help to me," "The instructor was available and made

sure the students were aware her door was always open if they needed her even if by email," "The instructor is very accommodating and accessible." and "He told me to call if I need anything and he can try and help me out."

Question Four: *Were there ever times you felt uncomfortable in the class setting, and how was this handled by the professor?* In response to this question, participants stated: "As we entered the class the first day we were made to feel welcome and that we really mattered," "The professor just ignored the situation," "I really felt like they thought the whole thing was funny. I felt like I was back in High School," and "I was really impressed the first class the instructor learned my first name out of all those students and I barely said anything in class."

Question Five: *What positive or negative experiences with your first-year seminar faculty member have influenced your college experience?* Participants replied to Question Five with the following statements: "When I talk to the instructor I never feel stupid, she makes sure when she answers me she never puts me down," "Each class the instructor makes sure we feel welcomed and that we are important," and "The instructor was real cool, I knew we would get along from day one."

Question Six: *How has your first-year seminar faculty member motivated you?* Responses to this questions included the following: "Self-pity wasn't allowed, my instructor took an interest in me and was very encouraging and I took the class last semester and still stay in touch," "It made me feel special and important," "She respected my experiences and allowed me to share them with the younger students," "I couldn't believe he stayed after class to help explain a few things to several of us," and "She makes us feel important and like she really cares about us."

Question Seven: How does your first-year seminar professor make you feel in class? In their responses to Question Seven, participants wrote the following: "When I said I had kids he did too, and one was about the same age, I really felt like he could understand me," "Funny, I never really believed him, but it was important he tried bonding," "It made me feel special and important," "I really think he cares," and "He really took an interest in me and made me feel like I mattered."

Emergent Themes

The first step in identifying emergent themes was to note the re-occurring words that the non-traditional learners used to describe their relationship with their first-year seminar instructor. These words included *caring, accommodating, helpful, devoted, warm, supportive, comforting, attentive, friendly, knowledgeable, inspiring*, and *compassionate*. Additionally, words such as *invasive, intrusive, pushy, aggressive,* and *overwhelming* were also used. These responses from questionnaire showed several emergent themes. Examples can be seen in the participants' responses. The relationships seemed to be either very positive and helpful, or the students chose to avoiding building a relationship. Common responses included answers such as "I feel close to my professor," "He is cooler than I expected," "I try not to get too close," "I avoid my professor," "She is my teacher and that is that," "He understands me," and "It's all good." The response that stood out the most was "I work full-time, I have kids, I am here for classes and honestly I don't have time for a relationship besides teacher/student. That is all I want."

By comparison, the descriptive statistics analysis for the statement *It's easy for me to connect with this instructor* showed the following results: 4.44% (n=4) strongly disagreed, 8.89% (n=8) disagreed, and 8.89% (n=8) slightly disagree. A total of 13 students 14.44% neither agreed nor disagreed (see Table 7). The majority of the students surveyed felt it was easy to

connect with the instructor; 17.78% (n=16) slightly agreed and 20% (n=18) agreed while 25.56% (n=23) strongly agreed. The students were asked if they felt they could discuss their problems and concerns with the instructor; the majority of the respondents indicated that they felt they could. Only 3.33% (n=3) disagreed and strongly felt they could not discuss their problems and concerns with the instructor, while 24.44% (n=22) agreed they could discuss problems with the professor.

Table: 7

Non-traditional learner perception of relationship with First-Year Seminar Instructor

	SD	D	Sd	NAD	Sa	A	SA
It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.	4.44%	8.89%	8.89%	14.44%	17.78%	20.00%	25.56%
	(4)	(8)	(8)	(13)	(16)	(18)	(23)
I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.	19.78%	15.38%	12.09%	15.78%	12.09%	13.19%	12.09%
	(18)	(14)	(11)	(14)	(11)	(12)	(11)
I could tell this instructor just about anything.	13.19%	6.59%	12.09%	25.27%	12.09%	13.19%	17.58%
	(12)	(6)	(11)	(14)	(11)	(12)	(16)
I feel comfortable depending on this instructor.	8.79%	5.49%	5.49%	15.28%	15.38%	26.57%	20.68%
	(8)	(5)	(5)	(14)	(14)	(26)	(19)
If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor.	5.49%	7.69%	7.69%	16.48%	10.99%	27.47%	24.18%
	(5)	(7)	(7)	(15)	(10)	(25)	(22)
This instructor makes me doubt myself.	37.68%	21.51%	4.30%	9.68%	17.20%	5.38%	4.30%
	(35)	(20)	(4)	(9)	(16)	(5)	(4)
I am nervous around this instructor.	39.13%	19.57%	7.61%	13.04%	11.96%	5.43%	3.26%
	(36)	(18)	(7)	(12)	(11)	(5)	(3)

When participants were asked, *How do you feel this relationship enhances or hinders your learning experiences?* (see Table 8), the responses included: "My professor has helped me so much," "She is very enthusiastic and that helps," "He pushes me more than I like to be

pushed, I am more private than he likes," "This relationship has shown me I can be a successful student," and "I don't know if I like being pushed as much as she pushes." The responses to this question were again split. The non-traditional learners felt the relationship they had with their first-year seminar faculty member both hindered and enhanced their learning experience. That said, the degree to which these participants judged their relationship with their first-year seminar faculty member to have influenced their learning experience did not affect their decision to re-enroll. This could be indicative of a learner who is intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated. That is, if students are truly intrinsically motivated, they are more influenced by their own internal drive to succeed and less dependent upon external factors (such as their relationship with the faculty member) to motivate them. Students were asked if this instructor made them doubt themselves, and the majority of the respondents – 37.63% (n=35) – strongly disagreed, while 21.51% (n=20) disagreed. Only 4.30% (n=4) strongly agreed and 5.38% (n=5) agreed.

Table: 8

Relationship between faculty and non-traditional enhances or hinder learning experience

	SD	D	Sd	NAD	Sa	A	SA
This instructor makes me doubt myself.	37.68%	21.51%	4.30%	9.68%	17.20%	5.38%	4.30%
	(35)	(20)	(4)	(9)	(16)	(5)	(4)

Responses to the question regarding how the students interactions with the first-year seminar instructor influenced the students overall first-year experience included: "I learned all about the syllabus and how to use it to benefit me," "We are told why we are doing certain tasks not just told to do them," "I think I can do this now that I know what I am doing," "I have got nothing from this class," "This class was a waste of my time," and "The instructor helped me get the additional help I needed in math." These statements demonstrate that the first-year seminar

instructor helped several of the students by providing support that in turn boosted the non-traditional learner's confidence. Additionally, the respondents believed that the instructor provided support to help them address the academic challenges they faced during their first year of college.

Although many respondents made comments that indicated a positive experience with the first-year seminar instructor, some comments revealed that there were times when students felt uncomfortable in class; overall these instances were handled professionally by the instructor. One student noted a problem that was not addressed by an instructor, and this experience left her feeling uncomfortable. Responses included: **"**I hate talking in class she respects my space and doesn't force me to interact," "On the first day I was a hesitant going back to school after so long. Mr. ---reassured us we were all in this together, he was very calming, and I appreciated that," and "I was uncomfortable when Mr. --- couldn't pronounce my name right. Then everyone called me by the wrong name. It just became a big joke." These responses influenced the student's college experience, as noted by the participants: the first day," "Ms.---- always made me believe in myself," "Sometimes I feel like the teacher is ignoring me," and "I hate it when the professor allows certain students to dominate the class."

Overall, the students felt motivated by the first-year seminar faculty. This is evident from many of their responses, including: "She is very positive and tells me I can do this," "I want a better life for my kids, he reminds me of why I am here," "He does not motivate me at all," "---explains why doing certain things is important and how and why I will use the information later," "We get a lot of feedback on the work we do," and "We set goals together." It is important to remember that non-traditional learners typically have busy lives and value their time; therefore, in class, they want to be engaged in information that is meaningful for them. In order

to motivate a non-traditional learner. information must be relevant; the non-traditional learner is "not very inclined to learn something they are not interested in, or in which they cannot see the meaning and importance" (Rubenson, 2011, p. 49).

Participants stated that the first-year seminar faculty influenced the way they felt in class: "Sometimes I feel stupid and like what am I doing here," "When I am unclear of things he takes extra time to explain, that makes me feel good," "I feel invisible. I try to not stand out," "I feel important and that I can really do this," "I felt welcome from the first day, actually a little more comfortable than I expected," "I never know if I am doing what I am supposed to do," and "I feel good when I know I have done the classwork the way it was supposed to be done, I doubt myself less and less each class." Table 9 presents the survey responses that address this same issue.

Table: 9

How does your first-year seminar professor make you feel in class?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.	37.68%	21.51%	4.30%	9.68%	17.20%	5.38%	4.30%
	(35)	(20)	(4)	(9)	(16)	(5)	(4)
8. I am nervous around this instructor.	39.13%	19.57%	7.61%	13.04%	11.96%	5.43%	3.26%
	(36)	(18)	(7)	(12)	(11)	(5)	(3)
21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.	3.33%	6.67%	11.11%	13.13%	17.78%	24.44%	23.33%
	(3)	(6)	(10)	(12)	(16)	(22)	(21)

The descriptive statistic analysis revealed a pattern. A comparison of the responses to three specific statements *This instructor makes me doubt myself, I am nervous around this instructor, and I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor* showed that the

majority 63.49% (n=59) of the participants did not feel as though the faculty member made them doubt themselves, while 26.88% (n=25) did doubt themselves in class.

The majority of students – 66.31% (n=61) – were not nervous around the first-year seminar instructor, but 20.65% (n=19) indicated they were nervous around the instructor. As far as feeling comfortable in class, 65.55% (n=59) of respondents felt comfortable, and 21.11% (n=19) did not feel comfortable. Responses from the participants included: "I've been out of school for a long time, but when I get confused Mr. xxx is there to support me" and "I feel overwhelmed, but I get a lot of support in class."

Overall the first-year seminar instructors were most often perceived as being supportive towards non-traditional learners. The participants in the study felt the instructors were concerned for their learning and success and were approachable. It became apparent that non-traditional first-year learners were the ones who decided if they wanted a relationship with their first-year seminar instructors and to what extent they wanted that relationship to develop.

Additionally, many participants commented on the course work as valuable, while others saw it as "juvenile, degrading, and belittling." Although many of the students felt the first-year seminar course had merits, other students were not always willing to invest the time and energy needed for the course. Most of the participants felt they could better use their time in different classes. This is not unreasonable taking into consideration the age ranges of non-traditional learners and the obstacles and barriers they bring with them to higher education.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Enrollment of non-traditional learners continues to increase, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013). Currently, there is limited research that examines non-traditional students and it is important to understand that strategies related to traditional learners may not be appropriate or effective for non-traditional learners (Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2011; Tweedell, 2005). Given the lack of research on non-traditional students, post-secondary institutions have been unable to make informed decisions regarding first-year programs or other strategies that might increase the academic success, progression, and graduation rate of this population. Consequently, this study was conducted in order to help expand the body of research on non-traditional students.

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between the non-traditional student and the first-year seminar instructor to determine whether this relationship influenced the retention rate of non-traditional learners. Although the results did not support the hypothesis that there is an observable relationship between the intent to re-enroll and the perception of the quality of that relationship, the results still add to the body of knowledge in the area and can serve as the foundation for future research. The research also found gaps in the literature, which must be addressed in order to meet the needs of non-traditional learners. Wyatt (2011) notes that, to make changes, student voices and insights must be heard. Therefore, this study sought to give voice to non-traditional students and to document their insights.

Discussion of Results

This study revealed that non-traditional learners at Kennesaw State University generally have positive relationships with their first-year seminar instructors. However, the study also

revealed that a portion of non-traditional learners do not wish to have a relationship with their instructor. It is important to remember the non-traditional learner and the traditional learner have different expectations and educational goals which can vary their approach and transition to college (Fusch, 2012). Additionally, non-traditional learners have different obstacles and barriers that influence their college experience. It is impossible for faculty to address all the needs of each student. However, overall, the survey indicated that the faculty teaching the first-year seminar course at Kennesaw State University were meeting most of the students' needs and expectations.

The results from the survey administered as part of this study indicated that the older the students were (40+), the more they desired a relationship with the faculty member. Similarly, the youngest students in this study (18-23) desired a closeness with their professor. By contrast, the students between the ages of 24 and 29 preferred to distance themselves from their instructor. The 30- to 39-year-old age group was mixed in their responses. When comparing race, the study found that Hispanic participants, regardless of age, did not desire close connections with their instructors. This was the only racial group for which there was a distinct relationship between race and preference regarding connectedness with the faculty member. Although further research would be necessary to determine the cause of this, it is possible that cultural factors are influencing this preference. Additionally, single parents desired more interaction with the faculty than did students without children. Non-traditional learners who worked attributed their lack of a close relationship with their instructor to the fact that they had less time to develop that relationship; several of these students indicated that they would have sought out this relationship if they had more time to do so.

Limitations

There were limitations identified in this study that may have affected the findings. Once significant limitation is that the results are specific to students currently enrolled at one university. Consequently, the findings from this study may not be relevant to an institution with a different student demographic than that of Kennesaw State University. This is an important consideration because "each institution is unique, for that reason it is difficult to generalize regarding study findings beyond a single institution" (Crawley, 2012, p. 180). The decision to study only students at Kennesaw State University was made because of convenience and time constraints. Additionally, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to all institutions of higher education – even those similar to Kennesaw State University – because the content and delivery of the first-year seminar will differ from one institution to the next.

Another important limitation involves the methodology. For this study, a survey that used a Likert scale was administered as well as a questionnaire composed of open-ended questions. It was important to gather both descriptive data and information from the questionnaire for a comparison to ensure the validity of the participants' responses. This also helped to overcome any problems concerning drop-outs and incomplete surveys. As with all surveys, the attitude of the student while taking the survey may have played a part in their answers. Students often bring their emotions to the survey. If students had a less than positive experience or an extremely positive experience, they may have completed the entire survey with this bias in mind, leading to overly positive or overly negative responses. Some participants skipped several questions, which could indicate either a misunderstanding of the question due to wording or a diminished sense of the survey's importance. Additionally, while the Likert scale

can be advantageous allowing for accurate responses, it also allows for lack of preciseness in responses; that is, some questions may have been better suited for binary answers.

Another limitation of this study was defining the term "non-traditional learner." This term can be confusing, given that the term is used broadly to serve as a catch-all for students who do not fit the mold of the traditional college student. For example, drawing from many widely accepted definitions, non-traditional students can be adult learners (over 23) but not all non-traditional students *are* adult learners; rather, students younger than 23 are often categorized as non-traditional if they are veterans, single parents, full-time employees, or financially independent. A more effective way to research and address the needs of non-traditional students might be to eliminate the term altogether and rather categorize and research these students based on other categorizations, such as the need for assistance with childcare, flexibility in class times to accommodate work schedules, and so forth.

Under ideal circumstances, a longitudinal study following students thought their first-year of study would have been ideal. However, given time constraints, respondents were asked to indicate their plans to re-enroll for the subsequent semester. Thus, another limitation of this study was that it was of insufficient duration to determine whether the respondents followed through with enrollment. Additionally, the study did not control for variables such as failing grades or financial concerns that might have affected re-enrollment plans and were totally unrelated to the student's experience with the first-year seminar instructor.

Another limitation concerns the pool of potential participants. In the case of this study, policy did not allow the researcher direct access to student email addresses. Therefore, gatekeepers (such as unit heads or first-year seminar faculty) were asked to assist in recruiting

participants for this study. In consequence, the participant pool was limited by the ability and/or willingness of the gatekeepers to assist the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

Non-traditional learners have been and continue to be a growing presence on college campuses, and they are the fastest growing educational demographic. Given that these students represent such a large portion of the student body, more must be done to reduce the number of non-traditional learners who do not persist and graduate from college. To address the low rate of persistence and graduation among non-traditional students, research needs to be conducted to determine how to meet the needs of this large population.

The first recommendation would be to examine whether a first-year seminar class specific to Kennesaw State University might influence the retention rate of non-traditional students. Currently, the first-year seminar (or a learning community) is required for students with fewer than 15 semester hours and must be fulfilled within the first semester of enrollment. The course is voluntary for students with 16-29 hours, and students with 30 or more credit hours are not eligible for enrollment in the course. Although non-traditional students often enter KSU without the requirement to take a first-year seminar, such classes are largely found to positively influence student retention from the first to second year of college. With such high attrition rates among non-traditional learners, it would be worthwhile to explore whether such a course might be beneficial for all non-traditional learners, regardless of the number of credit hours they have accrued upon entry to Kennesaw State University. Future studies could address whether the course could have a test-out option using an on-line aptitude test. Another area for future research is the exploration of whether making the course mandatory for non-traditional learners who were placed on academic probation could prove to be a valuable intervention.

An additional recommendation for future study is to investigate whether the terminology "non-traditional learner" should be eliminated. Non-traditional learners no longer fit the definition of the non-traditional students as described in earlier studies, including those by the National Center for Educational Statistics. An examination of how students with specific needs might be classified in meaningful ways could lead to an identification of specific supports and interventions designed to meet their specific needs. Examples of this include distance learners (those taking exclusively online courses), adult learners (age 23 and older), veterans, and transfer students. Currently, the term "non-traditional learner" is an umbrella that covers all of these categories of students as well as a vast array of others. Grouping such a wide variety of students under the single category of "non-traditional learner" does not allow universities to provide targeted services to ensure the success of a highly diverse student body.

Conclusion

This study reinforced the need for continued research to help identify strategies to increase the retention of non-traditional learners. The findings of this study suggest that the first-year seminar instructors did not directly influence the retention rates of the non-traditional learners. This is an important finding, and it can serve as the springboard for future studies to determine those factors that might influence the retention decisions of non-traditional learners.

This study found that there are areas that need to be investigated regarding non-traditional learners, including the need to address the terminology used to classify these students. The study also recognizes that there are additional barriers and obstacles the non-traditional learner faces when entering college. These barriers and obstacles must be addressed in order to promote the retention of these students. Additionally, continual research in these areas are important in order to identify why non-traditional learners are not successful in completing their degrees. Unless institutions of higher education identify the reasons for the low retention rate

among non-traditional students and take steps to address those factors, the retention rate of non-traditional learners is not likely to increase.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

10/11/2017

Christel Grider

RE: Your followup submission of 10/11/2017, Study #18-117: THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL

LEARNER/FACULTY MEMBER RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION

Dear Ms. Grider,

Your application for the new study listed above has been administratively reviewed. This study qualifies as

exempt from continuing review under DHHS (OHRP) Title 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) - educational tests,

surveys, interviews, public observations. The consent procedures described in your application are in

effect. You are free to conduct your study.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted

above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials.

Please note that all proposed revisions to an exempt study require submission of a Progress Report and

IRB review prior to implementation to ensure that the study continues to fall within an exempted category

of research. A copy of revised documents with a description of planned changes should be submitted to

irb@kennesaw.edu for review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for keeping the board informed of your activities. Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at

(470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.

KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

APPENDIX B

Permission To Use Survey

From: Illinois State University <glcrease@ilstu.edu>

To: Christel Grider <rhchristel@aol.com>

Sent: Tue, Sep 19, 2017 9:17 am

Subject: Re: A Measure to Assess Student-Instructor Relationships

Hi there, you have my permission to use the measure. Good luck with your research.....

Sent from my iPad

APPENDIX C

Permission to Contact Faculty

Date _____

Chair, Department of _____

 RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Dr._____:

My name is Christel Grider and I am a First-Year and Transition Studies student here at Kennesaw State University. I am working on my Master's Thesis under the direction of Dr. Ruth Goldfine, Dr. Hillary Steiner, and Dr. Richard Mosholder. My thesis is to determine the influence of the non-traditional learner/faculty member relationship on first-year college retention.

I am writing you today to request permission to contact department faculty and ask them to distribute an email invitation to participate to their students via D2L. The email invitation would provide students a link to Qualtrics for the online portion of the survey. Student would complete the survey anonymously. If the participant chooses they can proceed with a follow-up questionnaire of seven questions. The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your department or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study would be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns. My contact email is: cgrider1@students.kennesaw.edu.

Sincerely,

Christel Grider

Christel Grider

The study is IRB approved and entitled Study #18-117: THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNER/FACULTY MEMBER RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION

APPENDIX D

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Christel Grider of Kennesaw State University.

Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Researcher's Contact Information: Christel Grider, 678-697-3146, cgrider1@students.kennesaw.edu

Title of Research Study: THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNER/FACULTY MEMBER RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of the non-traditional first-year student/faculty member relationship on student retention in the first year of college. It is anticipated that a positive correlation will be found between a supportive relationship and student retention.

Explanation of Procedures

Participants will be asked to complete an online survey and will be invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Participants may choose to complete the survey without agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Time Required

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The optional follow-up interview will take about 30 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks anticipated because of taking part in this study.

Benefits

The benefit of gathering information regarding the non-traditional student/faculty relationship is to determine whether the relationship has an impact on student retention, and, if so, to identify strategies for enhancing these relationships in ways that lead to increased retention.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participation.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be anonymous. Data gathered via the online survey will be presented in

aggregate. Information gathered through follow-up interviews will be stripped of any identifiers to ensure

anonymity when the results of the study are disseminated. All responses collected will be electronically stored on

a password-protected desk-top computer.

Link to Survey:

https://kennesaw.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0IjNEGTOIGMiPzv

APPENDIX E

Faculty Letter

My name is Christel Grider and I am a First-Year and Transition Studies student here at Kennesaw State University. I am working on my Master's Thesis under the direction of Dr. Goldfine, Dr. Steiner, and Dr.Mosholder. My thesis is to determine the influence of the non-traditional learner/faculty member relationship on first-year college retention.

Dr. _____ has given me permission to contact you.

Your participation would simply involve distributing an invitation to participate to your students this semester via D2L. (YOUR PARTICIPATION IN DISTRIBUTING THIS SURVEY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY.)

The email invitation would provide students a link to Qualtrics for the online portion of the survey. Student would complete the survey anonymously. If the participant chooses they can proceed with a follow-up questionnaire of seven questions. The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your department or the individual participants

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes time. The results of survey will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous.

The survey link to Qualtrics is:

https://kennesaw.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0IjNEGTOIGMiPzv

The study is IRB approved and entitled Study #18-117: THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-

TRADITIONAL LEARNER/FACULTY MEMBER RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR

COLLEGE RETENTION

 I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns. My contact email is:

cgrider1@students.kennesaw.edu. Thank You in advance for your help

 Sincerely,

Christel Grider

Survey Questions

Please check all that apply to your current situation:

___Delayed enrollment in college (did not enter college the same calendar year of high school completion)

___Attend college part-time (less than 12 credit hours a semester) for at least part of the academic year

___Work full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled

___Considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid

___Have dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but may also be caregivers of sick or elderly family members)

___Am a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents)

___Do not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school)

Age: __18-22__23-29__30-39___40+___

Sex: __Male   ___Female

Race: __ African American __American Indian/Alaskan Native__ Caucasian__ African__ Asian

__Pacific Islander__ Hispanic__ Multi-racial__ I prefer not to respond (check only one)

Do you work? __Part time __Full time ___n/a

Do you have children? ___yes ___no

Do you plan to enroll in classes next semester?   ___yes ___no

How many credit hours are you enrolled in this semester?   __1-6 __7-12 __13+___n/a

Student Instructor-Relationship Scale (SIRS)

The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with the instructor teaching your first-year seminar course.

Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it, with 1 indicating that you most strongly disagree and 7 that you most strongly agree.

                    1   2   3   4   5   6   7

            Strongly Disagree   Neutral/Mixed   Strongly Agree

1. I wish this instructor were more concerned with the welfare of students.

2. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on this instructor.

3. The instructor is concerned with the needs of his or her students.

4. I'm afraid that I will lose this instructor's respect.

5. I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor.

6. It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor.

7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.

8. I am nervous around this instructor.

9. I find that the instructor does not connect well with students.

10. The instructor seems to only appreciate certain students.

11. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor.

12. I find it relatively easy to get close to this instructor.

13. Sometimes this instructor's mood is unpredictable.

14. This instructor shows favoritism to some students.

15. This instructor seems uncomfortable interacting with students.

16. I prefer not to show this instructor how I truly think or feel.

17. It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.

18. I get uncomfortable when instructors try to get too friendly with students.

19. I rarely worry about losing this instructor's respect.

20. It makes me mad that this instructor does not seem to pay attention to the needs of his or her students.

21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.

22. I'm scared to show my thoughts around this instructor; I think he or she will think less of me.

23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.

24. I don't feel comfortable "opening up" to this instructor.

25. I'm afraid that if I shared my thoughts with this instructor that he or she would not think very highly of me.

26. I do not often worry about losing the respect of this instructor.

27. I find it easy to depend on this instructor for help.

28. If I were to get into trouble in this class, I do not think this instructor would be very motivated to help me.

29. I could tell this instructor just about anything.

30. I feel comfortable depending on this instructor.

31. I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards.

32. I worry that this instructor does not really care for his or her students.

33. I prefer not to get too close to instructors.

34. I often worry that my instructor doesn't really like me.

35. If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor.

36. I know this instructor could make me feel better if I had a problem.

37. Providing a separate first-year seminar for non-traditional learner would increase the non-traditional learner's student satisfaction and retention.

38. Providing a separate first-year seminar for non-traditional learners would provide the non-traditional learner a better sense of belonging to the college environment.

APPENDIX G

Questionnaire:

Follow up email survey

Recently you participated in a survey on Qualtrics,

IRB-Study #18-117 THE INFLUENCE OF THE NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNER/FACULTY

MEMBER RELATIONSHIP ON FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RETENTION.

At that time, you indicated you would participate by answering a few additional questions. First,

I would like to thank you for participating in the online survey and additionally for volunteering

to participate in the qualitative portion of the survey. I just want to remind you that everything

you say is confidential. That means that I will not talk about anything you mention with your

instructors. Remember, you are not required to answer every question. When I write my paper

about this study, I might quote you, but I you will be assigned an alphabetic letter versus your

name to ensure your identity is anonymous.

Reply to Cgrider1@students.kennesaw.edu

Questionnaire:

1. Tell me about your relationship with your professor.

2. How do you feel this relationship enhances or hinders your learning experiences?

3. How has your first-year seminar instructor enhanced or helped your First-Year
   experience?

4. Were there ever times you felt uncomfortable in the class setting and how was this
   handled by the professor?

5. What positive or negative experiences with your first-year seminar faculty

member have influenced your college experience?

6. How has your first-year seminar faculty member motivated you?

7. How does your first-year seminar professor make you feel in class?

Survey Results

Questions	Re-Enroll	Mean	SD	Variance	Count
1. I wish this instructor were more concerned with the welfare of students	Yes	3.36	1.86	3.46	88
	No	3.80	2.04	4.16	5
2. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on this instructor.	Yes	3.22	2.02	4.08	88
	No	4.40	2.15	4.64	5
3. The instructor is concerned with the needs of his or her students.	Yes	5.53	1.63	2.66	87
	No	4.60	1.96	3.84	5
4. I'm afraid that I will lose this instructor's respect.	Yes	2.83	1.65	2.73	88
	No	4.40	2.15	4.64	5
5. I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor.	Yes	2.76	1.85	3.41	88
	No	4.40	1.96	3.84	5
6. It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor.	Yes	4.52	1.92	3.70	88
	No	3.60	1.74	3.04	5
7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.	Yes	2.70	1.85	3.44	88
	No	4.60	1.96	3.84	5
8. I am nervous around this instructor.	Yes	2.57	1.74	3.03	87
	No	4.60	1.96	3.84	5
9. I find that the instructor does not connect well with students.	Yes	2.57	1.76	3.11	86
	No	3.80	1.60	2.56	5
10. The instructor seems to only appreciate certain students	Yes	2.86	1.82	3.33	86
	No	4.60	1.96	3.84	5
11. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor.	Yes	4.89	1.93	3.73	87
	No	3.40	1.96	3.84	5
12. I find it relatively easy to get close to this instructor.	Yes	4.67	1.91	3.65	87

	No	3.40	1.62	2.64	5
13. Sometimes this instructor's mood is unpredictable	Yes	2.63	1.74	3.04	87
	No	3.20	1.83	3.36	5
14. This instructor shows favoritism to some students.	Yes	2.97	1.95	3.80	87
	No	4.40	1.74	3.04	5
15. This instructor seems uncomfortable interacting with students.	Yes	2.28	1.51	2.27	87
	No	3.00	1.67	2.80	5
16. I prefer not to show this instructor how I truly think or feel.	Yes	3.17	1.95	3.82	87
	No	5.00	2.19	4.80	5
17. It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.	Yes	5.04	1.75	3.07	87
	No	3.40	1.85	3.44	5
18. I get uncomfortable when instructors try to get too friendly with students	Yes	3.00	1.63	2.65	86
	No	5.00	1.26	1.60	5
19. I rarely worry about losing this instructor's respect	Yes	4.36	1.80	3.25	86
	No	3.40	0.49	.024	5
20. It makes me mad that this instructor does not seem to pay attention to the needs of his or her students.	Yes	2.81	1.91	3.66	86
	No	4.20	1.17	1.36	5
21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.	Yes	5.13	1.64	2.70	85
	No	3.20	1.60	2.56	5
22. I'm scared to show my thoughts around this instructor; I think he or she will think less of me.	Yes	2.90	1.86	3.47	86
	No	4.60	1.62	2.64	5
23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.	Yes	3.80	2.06	4.23	86
	No	2.40	1.20	1.44	5
24.I don't feel comfortable "opening up" to this instructor.	Yes	3.53	2.12	4.48	86
	No	5.25	2.05	4.19	4

Item	Response				
25. I'm afraid that if I shared my thoughts with this instructor that he or she would not think very highly of me.	Yes	3.12	2.02	4.08	86
	No	4.60	1.62	2.64	5
26. I do not often worry about losing the respect of this instructor.	Yes	4.78	1.76	3.10	86
	No	4.00	1.41	2.00	5
27. I find it easy to depend on this instructor for help	Yes	5.05	1.81	3.28	86
	No	3.60	1.36	1.84	5
28. If I were to get into trouble in this class, I do not think this instructor would be very motivated to help me.	Yes	2.98	1.89	3.56	86
	No	3.00	1.67	2.80	5
29. I could tell this instructor just about anything.	Yes	4.34	1.92	3.69	86
	No	3.00	1.67	2.80	5
30. I feel comfortable depending on this instructor.	Yes	5.03	1.79	3.20	86
	No	3.00	1.67	2.80	5
31. I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards.	Yes	3.40	1.93	3.73	86
	No	5.00	1.67	2.80	5
32. I worry that this instructor does not really care for his or her students.	Yes	2.83	1.89	3.56	86
	No	3.80	2.40	5.76	5
33. I prefer not to get too close to instructors	Yes	3.72	1.72	2.97	86
	No	5.20	1.83	3.36	5
34. I often worry that my instructor doesn't really like me.	Yes	3.12	1.77	3.13	86
	No	4.40	1.62	2.64	5
35. If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor	Yes	5.08	1.78	3.17	86
	No	3.40	1.62	2.64	5
36. I know this instructor could make me feel better if I had a problem	Yes	4.87	1.78	3.16	86
	No	3.40	1.62	2.69	5