THE EFFECTS OF A COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM FOR HIGH-RISK, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS WITH A FOCUS ON VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Rebecca A. Stasney

May, 2013

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ABSTRACT

Within the large population of non-traditional college students is a small subset of students who are considered to be “high-risk” non-traditional students. These students face unique challenges, yet because their population is so small, their needs are often unaddressed. Such needs include meaningful relationships with faculty, advisors, and counselors, flexibility of student services, relevance in classroom content, financial aid, and study skills (Belcastro and Purslow, 2006, p.6).

This research study examined an innovative program at a community college in Southeast Texas that was designed to help high-risk students meet these needs through an intense six-week program in a cohort setting that reflects an authentic college experience. In this program, students not only are given the opportunity to simply adapt to the college environment, but they also attend a series of courses that serve to review their reading, writing, math, computer, and study skills prior to their first full semester in college. In addition, students also explore careers through visits from department chairs and instructors from across the campus. This research study examined the academic effects of this program on its participants and the results will expand the limited body of literature surrounding this select student population.

Data were collected as part of the professional duties of the researcher as commissioned by the program director and president of the college and was requested for use as archival data for this study. Data included individual student, staff, and instructor interviews, classroom observations, and a survey. The data were reviewed to find out

how the program affected the participants' academic preparation as they entered their first semester in college and to determine which aspects of the program are the most valuable to high-risk students so that future programs may provide similar assistance to this distinctive subset of students.

Five primary themes emerged as the data were analyzed: a) constructing confidence; b) establishing a routine; c) reinforcing skills; d) establishing a system of support; and e) resource knowledge. Within four of the five primary themes, several sub-themes emerged. The first two sub-themes refer to specific types of confidence: a) confidence in mathematics skills; and b) confidence in belonging in college. The next three sub-themes refer to areas of skill reinforcement: a) mathematics; b) reading and writing; and c) study skills. In addition, two sub-themes were discovered in the area of support: a) faculty and staff support; and b) peer support. Finally, the last three sub-themes refer to types of resources that students found to be useful: a) counseling; b) financial aid; and c) careers. Each theme and subtheme was discussed in detail, and evidence from the student interviews and survey was used for support.

To conclude, implications were discussed for each primary theme, and recommendations for the program and for future research were made.

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Personal Reflections

Although I cannot remember all their names, I can remember their faces, and, most importantly, I can remember their stories. I sat in on the closing ceremonies for Project LeeWay one summer, and the guest speaker, a former Project LeeWay student, shared her story with us. She described herself as a child bride. She was married at age 13, and she had her first child just days after her fifteenth birthday. She was physically and verbally abused by her husband. He isolated her, and he took away her childhood, her identity, and her self-worth.

At age 22, she found the courage to leave with her two children. Having dropped out in the sixth grade, she had no education or work experience, and her family turned against her because divorce was not accepted. Soon, she enrolled in a General Educational Development (GED) preparatory course, and because of her rapid progress, her instructor encouraged her to enroll in college courses. To facilitate this process, she brought her to the Special Populations office at the college to see the Project LeeWay director, Clare Fleming. During their conversation, she could not even look the director in the eye. She looked at her lap the whole time and the GED instructor answered the director's questions for her.

She enrolled in Project LeeWay, made it through the program, and later she became an honors student at the college. Since then, she earned a bachelor's degree in accounting, and she is currently working on a master's degree in the same field. She has since remarried and has a daughter, and she continues to remain close with Ms. Fleming, who, in the student's words, "became my second mother."

There are countless examples of individuals who face other difficult circumstances. There was a woman, her husband, and his mother, who fled to Baytown ahead of Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed absolutely everything they owned other than what they could fit in their car. There was also a middle-aged woman who had been struggling with drug addiction for years and a young man with prominent tattoos and a tracking bracelet on his ankle who had recently been released from an extended stay at prison. Project LeeWay students have faced devastating and often debilitating circumstances or situations such as abuse, addiction, and even imprisonment, and many have found a new start through this program.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Study

This study examined the effects of a program for high-risk non-traditional students such as the ones described above at a community college in Southeast Texas. The review of literature outlines non-traditional students' integration and placement into the community college system as well as the characteristics, challenges, and needs of these students. Qualitative data were collected in the form of in-depth interviews with students, faculty, and staff from the program to determine if and how the program is effective in meeting the specific needs of high-risk non-traditional students. Quantitative data were collected in the form of a survey and archival data from the director of the program.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study. Included in this chapter are the following sections: background of the study and the program's development, a description of the need for the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, presentation of research questions, definition of terms, and summary.

Background

The categorization of a student as non-traditional has been primarily based on age, where those considered to be non-traditional are 24 years of age or older (Jinkens, 2009). However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are factors other than age that can also classify a student as non-traditional. For example, students who do not have a high school diploma, who delay enrollment into college, who are financially independent, and who work are also considered to be non-traditional

despite their age (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1).

According to Belcastro and Purslow, non-traditional students make up 73% of the total undergraduate student population (2006, p. 2). Though this population is diverse, many non-traditional students enter college for the same reason: to "enter, advance, or change their job or careers" (p. 8). Technical instruction offered by community colleges is often an attractive option to students such as these since most technical degrees and certificates can be completed in two years or less. Because of this widespread need for technical instruction, many community colleges have the benefit of federal funding in the form of a Perkins Grant, funded by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1984, which helps to provide support for technical and vocational programs. One specific purpose of the Perkins Grant is "to promote the development of services and activities that integrate academic, vocational, and technical instruction" (College of Southern Nevada, 2012). Colleges that are awarded a Perkins Grant can use the funds in a variety of ways, including for career counseling and guidance activities and services for special populations (*Perkins Education Act*, 2002). Following these guidelines, one community college in Southeast Texas has used Perkins funding to provide a service to non-traditional students seeking a technical or vocational career in the form of an extended student orientation program called Project LeeWay. Though the program has been in place since 1992, it has never been formally studied in any capacity. An examination of how the program affects non-traditional students' perception of college, their confidence as college students, and the academic and non-academic benefits of the program were the focus of this study.

Due to their growing numbers on college campuses, non-traditional students have

gained much attention over the last ten years. Since non-traditional students represent such a large population, there are obviously distinctions among them. One small subset of non-traditional students is a population that is considered high-risk or "highly nontraditional" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 3). These students face multiple challenges that often have a direct impact on their ability to enroll and persist in and graduate from college. As a result, this subset of students has specific needs, and through Perkins funding, Project LeeWay was developed to address these needs.

The program takes place twice a year, six weeks before the spring and fall semesters begin. Students apply to participate, and they are hand-selected by the program's director. They experience six weeks of courses, which simulate an authentic academic experience that provides several key benefits to students. First, since most Project LeeWay students are typically the first in their families to attend college, Project LeeWay allows them the chance to become comfortable and familiar with the college environment. Many non-traditional students delay enrollment into college for the simple fact that a college campus is foreign territory for them; they may know that a college exists in their community, but many feel out of place on campus or overwhelmed by the prospect of college (Van Brunt, 2009, p. 1). Project LeeWay students very quickly become familiar with being a college student through various aspects of the program. For example, Project LeeWay students attend the program for a six-week period and are in classes six hours a day. This sudden immersion into the college environment forces them to quickly become familiar with the campus, including the basics of college life such as where to park, where to eat, and the location of the student lounge. Also, the classes that Project LeeWay students attend are intended to make them "feel" like real

college students. These classes are a mixture of academic-based classes, including mathematics and reading/writing and practical skills classes, such as introduction to computers, study skills, career exploration, and surviving transitions ("Quickstart/Lee College Program," 2000).

Need for the Study

High-risk non-traditional students have needs that extend far beyond a "traditional" non-traditional student (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009, p. 246). Moreover, there is often no type of specific support for students that are considered to be high-risk, and thus, with their needs unaddressed, many face a great deal of stress that could impede their learning (Giancola et al, 2009, p. 261). Since much of the research on non-traditional students has not addressed this specific subset of students, it is important to determine what types of support are most helpful for them as they prepare to enter college. This will allow other colleges and universities to develop similar small-scale programs and training to address their needs and set them up for success. This research will also help Project LeeWay to know and to evaluate itself better, which will in turn offer the program opportunities for growth.

Statement of the Problem

For non-traditional students such as the ones described above, a college classroom can be a daunting, unwelcoming environment (Scott & Lewis, 2011, p. 8). Furthermore, a college education can seem unattainable to someone with a wide range of responsibilities or to someone with no other college graduates in the family for reference or support (San Miguel-Bauman, Wang, Wester-DeLeon, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez, & Lindsey, 2004, p. 16). Furthermore, non-traditional students have specific characteristics

that label them as such. These characteristics are discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Much attention has been given to this growing group of students who now are estimated to comprise as much as 73% of the college student population (Belcastro & Purslow, 2006, p 2). However, a small subset of this group includes those students who are considered high-risk non-traditional students. Very little research has been done to determine the needs of this group that must to be met in order for them to successfully navigate through college. This study will perhaps initiate an interest in prioritizing this often-overlooked population of students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how and why Project LeeWay is an effective program. There have been countless informal affirmations of the program's effectiveness by former students over the past 20 years, but no formal study has ever been conducted. In order to get the most detailed view of Project LeeWay students' backgrounds and perspectives of the program, case studies and interviews were conducted for the study. In turn, the study will give these unique students as well as the program a voice and will perhaps create an interest in expanding the program to other campuses.

Research Questions

1. What effect does Project LeeWay have on non-traditional students' academic preparation?
2. What aspects of Project LeeWay do students find to be beneficial as they are enrolled in college courses?

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions are given to offer clarity for certain key terms used in this study:

Community College Student

A student who attends community college courses, generally with the intent of getting an associate's degree or transferring to a four-year university (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. iv)

Faculty

Project LeeWay faculty members are those who teach the courses within the program. All faculty members have at least an associate's degree in their respective fields. The program director and the secretary both teach courses in the program.

General Education Development (GED)

The General Education Development tests are a series of five subject tests, including writing, social studies, science, reading, and mathematics. Upon passing all five tests, a credential is issued that is equivalent to a high school diploma ("2011 Annual Statistical Report," 2011, p. 89). Informally, these tests are often referred to as the General Education Diploma, the General Equivalency Diploma, or the Graduate Equivalency Degree (Pursuing a GED, 2012).

High-Risk/Highly-Nontraditional

A high-risk or highly nontraditional student is one who four or more of the characteristics of a non-traditional student. The more of these characteristics a student has, the more high-risk he or she is said to be (Horn, 1996; U.S.

Department of Education, 2002, p. 3).

Non-Traditional

A non-traditional student is an undergraduate student one who has two or more of the following characteristics: delays enrollment, attends part-time, works full-time while enrolled, is financially independent, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma but may have a GED or equivalent (Horn, 1996).

Perkins Grant

Grant-based funding is provided by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1984 to help develop programs and services for vocational and technical education (Perkins Grant, n.d.)

Project LeeWay

Project LeeWay is a six-week program at a community college in Southeast Texas offered to students seeking a vocational or technical degree or certificate (Lee College, n.d.).

Technical Certificate

A technical certificate typically requires 15 to 59 semester credit hours. Certificates are offered for those students in technical fields, and typically credits earned in a certificate program can be applied to an AAS degree in the same field of study (Academic Studies, n.d; Applied Science Degree and Certificate Plans, n.d.).

Technical Degree

A technical degree typically requires 60 to 66 semester credit hours. The student

must have a grade point average of at least 2.0 and must meet specific degree requirements. Technical degrees are typically Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees (Academic Studies, n.d.; Applied Science Degree and Certificate Plans, n.d.).

Technical or Vocational Career

Technical or vocational careers are focused on specific skills in various trades or vocations in areas such as paralegal, instrumentation, cosmetology, nursing, and welding (The Federal Trade Commission, 2001).

Traditional Student

A traditional student is an undergraduate student who enters college directly out of high school and does not have any of the characteristics of a non-traditional student. Typically, non-traditional students are full-time students, they do not work or work a minimum number of hours, are dependents, and have a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1)

Staff

Project LeeWay staff includes individuals who work for the program but do not teach courses. This includes student aides and secretarial staff.

Summary

High-risk non-traditional students make up a very unique subset of students. Their needs are very specific, and very few research studies have been conducted to determine which types of programs and services are most effective for them. Project LeeWay, funded by a Perkins Grant, offers high-risk non-traditional students an opportunity to quickly adapt to the culture of college and to acquire a framework of

support through program peers, faculty, and staff.

This research study is organized into the following chapters: (2) Review of Related Literature; (3) Research Methods; (4) Results and Discussion; and (5) Summary and Conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature will begin with a broad view of the founding and purpose of the community college and will narrow in focus as the changing face of the community college student is described. Specifically, this chapter begins with a brief history of the conception and mission of the community college. Next is a description of the community college population and the characteristics of non-traditional students. To conclude, there is a detailed account of the specific needs of non-traditional students in the community college setting, and there is a description of various programs already in place to meet these needs.

History of the Community College

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), in 2005, community colleges served over 6.5 million students; clearly, the community college is an attractive option for students looking for an affordable and convenient educational opportunity. Affordability and convenience, in fact, were the two principles from which the notion of community college was gradually developed. In 1894, Reverend J.M. Carroll, the president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, recognized that several of the small Baptist colleges in the area did not have adequate support to meet the needs of the increasing number of students. He suggested that these small colleges should change their curricula to encompass the needs of students in their first two years of college, and, in turn, Baylor would accept the students' transfer hours and allow them to complete the second two years and Bachelor's degree at Baylor University

(Ratcliff, 1994, p. 7). After this transition, these colleges were then referred to as junior colleges and were seen by many as "upper extensions" of high schools (Ratcliff, 1994, p. 7). In fact, the years a student was enrolled in a junior college were often referred to as the thirteenth and fourteenth grades (Clark, 1960, p. 44) and were intended to provide a chance for maturation for young students (Bogart, 1994, p. 61). In 1925, according to the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC), the definition and function of the junior college became more clearly defined. According to Bogue,

> The junior college is an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade. This curriculum may include those courses usually offered in the first two years of the four-year colleges; in which case these courses must be identical, in scope and thoroughness, with corresponding courses of the standard four-year college. The junior college may, and is likely to, develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located. (Bogue, 1950)

Others also recognized the potential of a college that would specifically meet the needs of the community (Hollinshead, 1936; Zook, 1946), and the idea was supported by President Truman in his Commission on Higher Education in 1947 (Gleazer, 1994, p. 18-19). Gradually community colleges absorbed most of what were previously known as junior colleges, developing their own identity and mission.

Mission of the Community College

As Bogart (1994) indicates, "the mission of the community college is the most important element of its being" (p. 62). In the simplest sense, as indicated above, the community college's mission is to meet the educational needs of the community that surrounds it and to increase the accessibility of a college education (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006, p. 1). The community college mission statement has evolved over

the years, and has become much more complex from its inception. Areas of emphasis overlap but vary from college to college. Bogart (1994), for example, indicates three areas of emphasis that all community college mission statements should include: community access to programs and resources, diversity of programs and curricula to meet community needs, and comprehensive programs to meet vocational/transfer needs (p. 71). Moreover, Lorenzo (1994) cites Cohen and Brawer (1989) who divide the mission statement into five educational components: career education, transfer education, general education, remedial education, and community education (p. 113). Similarly, Bogart (1994) divides the community college mission into six areas: governance and leadership, student development, instruction and faculty, curriculum and programs, economic development, and lifelong learning (p. 63). Today, many current community colleges still incorporate Bogart's criteria into their mission statements, but the mission itself has been slightly adjusted as student populations have transformed. Furthermore, Lorenzo (1994) conjectures that in the future, community colleges will need to incorporate customized education, advanced education, and adaptive education into their mission statements in order to meet the changing needs of the students and community (p. 118).

Enrollment in the Community College

Although community colleges are all structured differently and retain a sense of individuality in order to serve the surrounding community, there are certain characteristics that all community colleges share. One characteristic that differentiates community colleges from universities is that community colleges typically have an open-door policy, meaning that enrollment is open to everyone, "removing virtually all obstacles to college" (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006, p. 5). According to the

education code of California in its early stages of junior and community college development, "the principal of any two-year junior college shall admit to the junior college any high school graduate and any other person over 18 years of age who in his judgment is capable of profiting from the instruction offered" (Clark, 1960, p. 44). This open door policy has not changed as current community colleges typically offer similar opportunities for enrollment.

The Community College Student

Over the last forty years, the community college has enrolled a more diverse student population, and has increasingly included low-income, low-achieving students, and part-time students (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006, p. 96). The student population is also an increasingly older population. Currently, according to the NCES, the average community college student is 29 years old (National Center, 2011). Age is only one of a variety of factors that places a student in the category of "non-traditional," but it is perhaps the most obvious indicator. The definition of non-traditional is very broad, however, and its parameters are certainly ambiguous.

At the most basic level, college students can be divided into two categories: traditional students, those who attend college right out of high school, and non-traditional students, those who have delayed their college education. Each group faces unique challenges (Hermon & Davis, 2004, p. 32). The issue of identity is perhaps what separates these students the most. The younger students, upon entrance into college, are at a critical stage in identity development; they are trying to figure out why they are in college and because of a lack in direction, they can seem to be less serious about their coursework. Older students, however, have had more time and life experience with

which to discover their identity and to set specific goals and are more motivated to learn (Eppler & Harju, 1997, p. 559). In college, they recognize the worth of their education and want to be able to apply what they have learned to their present jobs, or to use it to attain another job or promotion (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 8-9).

Age: Faculty and Student Perception

Faculty and students tend to have a somewhat biased view of a student based on age alone. According to a study by Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1998), 23% of the faculty surveyed at Miami University admitted that they favor older students (p. 25). Specifically, Bishop-Clark and Lynch found that faculty acknowledged that they can relate to the issues that the older students face such as marital, childcare, and financial issues. Furthermore, faculty tend to admire the presence of older students in class because they add depth to the discussions and "challenge" the instructor in class with questions and comments (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1995, p. 755). The faculty surveyed cited maturity concerns with the younger students, who often tend disrupt class and take the class less seriously than the older students (p. 756-757)

Older students appreciate the innovative technology skills of the younger students, but they cite similar concerns to those of the faculty regarding maturity issues in class that disrupt the learning environment. And while the faculty appreciate what the older students add to the class discussions, the younger students view the older students' participation as a distraction to the lecture, often causing it to get off topic. They feel that the older students unnecessarily and continually recall their own personal experiences. Furthermore, the older students are sometimes viewed as intimidating (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1998, p. 25-33).

Benefits of a Mixed-Age Classroom.

There are several benefits to the mixed-age classroom. Elder's study (1967) indicated that younger students are better behaved when they have class with older students. Furthermore, Darkenwald & Novak (1997) found that younger students make better grades in classes that are primarily made of older students as opposed to classes with students their own age. Aside from these academic benefits, there are other advantages to mixed-age interaction in the college classroom. As Dirkx (2002) indicates, the social and communication skills that are learned in this setting will translate into the work environment which will very soon include four different generations simultaneously. With the right type of instilled communication skills, the differences between these generations can be a "creative strength" rather than a source of "stifling stress and unrelenting conflict" (Zemke, Raines & Filipczak, 2000, p. 17).

Other Indicators of Non-Traditional Students.

Age is not the only indicator of a non-traditional student. Ashburn (2007) refers to John Levin, the director of the California Community College Collaborative at UC-Riverside, who warns that defining a non-traditional student by age alone can be misleading. In fact, the majority of students attending community college are considered to be non-traditional in some way, often unrelated to age. Specifically, according to Horn's (1996) study cited by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a non-traditional student is one who has one or more of the following characteristics: delays enrollment, attends part-time, works full-time while enrolled, is financially independent, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma (but may have a GED or equivalent). Interestingly, Horn's study does not

mention age at all except perhaps indirectly, as a student who has delayed enrollment is typically older than the traditional college student.

According to Horn, the more of the above characteristics a student has, the more "nontraditional" he or she is considered to be. If a student only has one characteristic, he or she is "minimally nontraditional," but if a student has four or more, he or she is "highly nontraditional" (Horn, 1996). John S. Levin (Ashburn, 2007) similarly notes determining factors for non-traditional students and insists that "race, income, educational background, employment status, and other socioeconomic characteristics" along with age should be examined, and the more of these characteristics a student has, the higher "risk" he or she is. Similarly, Ashburn (2007) points out, "a 22-year-old single parent who works and attends college full-time is just as much an "adult" and at risk of dropping out, as is a 40-year-old professional attending college part-time."

Given the broad parameters of what constitutes a non-traditional student, it seems reasonable that the majority of community college students are non-traditional in some way. In fact, Philibert, Allen, & Elleven (2008) point out that according to the United States Department of Education, as of 2002, 73% of undergraduates are considered to be non-traditional (p. 582).

Needs of Non-Traditional Students

Despite the somewhat unclear definition of what constitutes "non-traditional," the circumstances these students are challenged by and the needs that they have are slightly different from students who enter college without these obstacles. Because they are an underrepresented and misunderstood population, it is often difficult for colleges to determine what their needs are. Specifically, Belcastro and Purslow (2006) insist that

there are three specific needs of non-traditional college students: relationships, foundational needs, and relevance (p. 3).

Relationships

Traditional college students often have the benefit of being a part of the college "tradition;" in other words, they typically have college-educated parents or siblings they can turn to for advice and support about the culture of college. Non-traditional students, however, often represent a break with tradition and by being the first in their family to go to college, they are "redefining their family history" (Rendon, 1999, p. 3). Additionally, as Boulard (2004) insists, traditional students often have the advantage of preparation. They have parents who can give them insight on how to apply to and succeed in college. For non-traditional, low-income students, the disadvantage "is clearly a result of things that are going on a long time before a student even thinks about going to college" (p. 10). Boulard references Kent Phillipe, a researcher from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), who maintains that this lack of practical knowledge about college is just another impediment to a non-traditional student's success and can make the initial transition into college quite unsettling (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008, p. 571). Even more troubling is when this transition comes with family resistance (Bowl, 2001, p.146; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008, p. 577). As a result, non-traditional students are in great need of relationships that will offer them direction and support in their academic endeavors and provide a sense of belonging within the college community.

Advisors and counselors.

First, Belcastro and Purslow (2006) maintain that non-traditional students need to "negotiate and invest in new relationships with academic peers, faculty, and staff" (p. 4) in order to establish a system of support (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 9; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008, p. 571). Specifically, they need advising that is convenient and relevant, both from an academic advisor and a faculty member in their degree area (Belcastro and Purslow, 2006, p. 6). Counselors need to recognize that many non-traditional students will experience stress related to the possibility of career transition, and counselors and advisors should be prepared to help them manage their anxiety (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 11). Since non-traditional students often "bring along significant psychological or interpersonal baggage acquired after many years of life," this may "cause significant difficulties in academic performance" (Archer, 1991, p. 36). Effective advising is necessary to balance this anxiety and to increase retention.

In addition, Leonard (2002) suggests using "comprehensive interventions" (p. 61) that include relevant counseling on specific issues that non-traditional students face but notes that in the past, intervention strategies have been geared primarily toward traditional students. In order to accomplish this, Archer (1991) insists, the intervention needs to be a compound effort in which faculty, staff, and counselors work collectively to meet the students' needs. Given that counselors often do not have the resources or time to achieve an effective intervention alone, Leonard (2002) calls this "contextual" counseling and insists it must take place both on campus and in the community (p. 62). Some schools, like the University of Florida, have even solicited the help of licensed

therapists in the surrounding community to meet with their students (Clack, 1995) for a single session of counseling.

Faculty.

Rendon (1999) insists intervention can be more simply achieved through validation, which she defines as "faculty, students, friends, parents, and spouses mak[ing] an effort to acknowledge these students and what they [are] trying to achieve" (p. 3). Validation can occur simply through faculty encouragement including acts such as calling students by their names, acknowledging their capability of success, and creating a "safe environment" for learning while also acknowledging "multicultural perspectives" (p. 3). Since many non-traditional students initially feel out of place in the classroom, the safe classroom environment Rendon describes seems to be an essential component for the success of non-traditional students.

Collective campus involvement.

Aside from the relationships and support non-traditional students build with faculty and advisors, they also need a sort of collective guidance and sense of acceptance within the entire college community. Christie et al. (2008) insist that "the entire person, group or even organisation is part of the learning process, and universities can influence a student's learning through an environment that encourages an active learner approach" (p. 567). In other words, for non-traditional students, "learning is viewed as participation in social practice whereby newcomers to a particular community of practice are both absorbing, and being absorbed in, the 'culture of practice'" (p. 568). As a result, the sense of community non-traditional students receive is essential because many are struggling to gain a sense of identity in an entirely unfamiliar setting. Accordingly, non-

traditional students need to experience support from all areas within the college, from the bookstore to the financial aid department (Belcastro & Purslow, 2006, p. 6). Ross-Gordon (2003) emphasizes the importance of these relationships, noting that they can be easily fostered by activities, including "instructional activities and academic program-related activities scheduled around their on-campus time or mediated by technology" (p. 50). By developing these relationships, non-traditional students gain a support system and the guidance that many of them have never had, especially in academics.

Bowl's (2001) case studies of non-traditional students demonstrate this need for guidance. One student, Helen, indicated that although her family understood the importance of education, they could not offer her any assistance in achieving her goals because it was unfamiliar territory for them (p. 148). Another student, Ruth, noted that since her mother was uneducated, she could not relate to her experiences, and as a result, Ruth had nobody to encourage her (p. 150-51). In general, Bowl found that nearly all the participants in her study felt "disadvantaged" because of this common absence of direction (p. 153). Similarly, Lane (2004) chronicles the experiences of minority students who feel socially disadvantaged and feel there is no support system in place for them. One student, Michael, acknowledged that at his campus, "the percentage of minority students staying is a problem due to the fact that they do not have the cultural and social help to adapt to the educational system. Everyone has a desire to go to school, but once they get here, more than half of them drop out because they do not have the support and advice about how to socialize with other people." Clearly, then, for Helen, Michael, and the rest of the students studied, the relationships and support they can gain within their college or university community are essential.

Foundational Needs

Non-traditional students also have foundational needs, Belcastro and Purslow (2006) insist, and these include things like childcare, flexibility of instruction (face-to-face, hybrid, and online), and flexibility of services to students, especially flexibility in the hours of operation to accommodate students' work schedules, etc. (p. 4). These "institutional barriers" (Keith, 2008) may also include opportunities for participation in campus activities (O'Donnell and Tobbell 2007, p. 315), something which non-traditionals are often excluded from, especially when they take classes in the evening. Marion Bowl (2001) describes the REACHOUT program that addresses and meets these foundational needs. In a case study, she describes a woman who could not attend college because there were no childcare facilities available. Through REACHOUT, she was able to take a "flexible access course" from home (p. 146). Although this type of "self-paced learning" (Knightley, 2007, p. 268) offers convenience and flexibility for students with children, full or part-time jobs, or other barriers, some non-traditional students lack the computer skills needed in order to take advantage of these alternate forms of study, thus further excluding them from a chance at a college education (Knightley, 2007, p. 266). In Knightley's study of adult learners and their online experiences (2007), the indication was that a significant number of these non-traditional students did not have a clear understanding of what it meant to be an online learner. Knightley notes that "seventeen students (21%) did not have an understanding of what online learning is, and three students (4%) thought it was no different to traditional forms of learning" (p. 275). This is perhaps one explanation for why some educators argue that the online format is simply not appropriate for the non-traditional student in general.

On the other hand, it is possible that, given the proper amount of computer skills to successfully navigate an online course, non-traditional students may find comfort in the anonymity of an online environment. Since they can often feel out of place in a college environment, the online platform could allow them to seamlessly blend with traditional students in online discussions and collaborative projects. Furthermore, the autonomy an online environment provides often aligns with the lifestyle of the non-traditional student; As Ross-Gordon (2003) notes, "The adult learner is responsible for making personal decisions in day-to-day life, in many cases decisions that also affect others. Similarly, adults are assumed to prefer self-direction" (p. 43).

Relevance

According to Belcastro and Purslow (2006), most non-traditional students enter college because they "need to enter, advance, or change their job or careers" (p. 8). Also, because of changes in the economy and technology and due to "increasing expectations" in the workplace, many adults are returning to college in order to keep their jobs (Kasworm, 2003, p. 4). The material they encounter in college should have real-world application and relevance to their careers (Leathwood, 2003, p. 611) so that they can "actively integrate their college education into their career development" (Chao and Good, 2004, p. 9). Kasworm (2003) notes that 85% of adult students indicate that "career reasons are their key college enrollment goal" (p. 5), and Jovita Ross-Gordon (2003) also cites several studies (Bishop-Clark and Lynch, 1992; Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon, 1993; Migletti and Strange, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 1991; Ross-Gordon and Brown-Haywood, 2000) that also indicate this need for relevance and "immediate application" (p. 49). As Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1998) indicate, however, sometimes

non-traditional students have an "excessive" attitude when it comes to this real-world application; furthermore, others have unreasonable expectations when it comes to college in general (Laing, Chao & Robinson, 2005, p.169).

Financial Aid

Financial concerns are often an additional and considerable barrier to enrollment for non-traditional students. According to Boulard (2004), a student's finances are "the single most important factor determining both college access and completion" (p. 10). As Ashburn (2007) notes, since this population of students is often left out of discussions concerning higher-education, they are often not accurately represented, especially when it comes to federally funded financial aid programs, which are often intended for full-time students who have recently graduated from college. In fact, according to the 2004 National Study of Continuing Education, nearly one-third of the non-traditional students surveyed said they were not even told of any possibility of financial aid upon enrollment (Ashburn, 2007). In 2004, Senator Hillary Clinton recognized this trend and called for the Non-Traditional Student Success Act, also known as the Clinton-Graham Initiative (Lane, 2004). The bill would help spread the word to non-traditional students about their financial aid options, and it would also increase the amount a student could receive from a Pell grant from $4,050 to $11,600. Furthermore, it would monetarily reward schools that offer flexibility of services (class format and time, childcare, etc.) and offer more counseling opportunities to non-traditional students. For many non-traditional students, paying on an already stretched budget is nearly impossible, and for students in desperate financial situations, paying college tuition is viewed the same as theft from their own

children (Tugend, 1999). Clearly, financial aid practices clearly need to be set in place to continue to support the needs of non-traditional students.

Study Skills

Aside from relationships, relevance, and foundational needs, both traditional and non-traditional college students can benefit from basic study skills. But one significant difference between traditional and non-traditional students is that many non-traditional students need help to bridge the gap between the completion of high school and enrollment into college. For traditional students, this transition is often seamless. As Bamber & Tett (2000) insist, "Adults who have moved in and out of formal learning contexts throughout their lives, and who experience little discontinuity in the assumptions and expectations about learning operating across these various situations, can feel a sense of integration upon entry and in their overall experience of subsequent comparable learning environments" (p. 59). But for non-traditional students, this interruption in their education can sometimes cause insecurity, especially in the content areas. Jovita Ross-Gordon (2003) cites several studies (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Lynch & Bishop-Clark, 1994; MacDonald & Stratta, 1998; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000) that consistently found that for those students who have been out of school for an extended period of time, upon returning to college, they feel an "initial lack of confidence," especially as compared to those students who enter college right after high school (p. 48). Specifically, MacDonald and Stratta (1998) note that nontraditional students, specifically those that have experienced a gap in their learning timeline feel a sense of inferiority to those students who have not experienced this gap, and similarly, Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) find academic self-confidence among nontraditional students is significantly

challenged when they compare themselves to younger students. A course in study skills could help eliminate these challenges and obstacles.

The area of study skills can be divided into two broad categories: academic skills and life success skills. The area of traditional academic skills has historically included note-taking, time-management, active reading (annotating), test-taking anxiety, studying techniques/memory, and critical thinking, whereas the area of life success skills includes topics such as learning styles, managing stress, personal wellness, career exploration, goal-setting, communication skills, and diversity awareness. In the past, some colleges and universities have offered a course that focuses on only one of these two areas, while today, many offer a course that is a hybrid of sorts, combining traditional study skills with topics such as personal wellness and managing student loans and money. According to Koehler and Burke (1996), both are essential for success in college because "the basic competencies of reading critically, writing and speaking clearly and computation are essential, but of equal importance are knowing how to learn and the social/emotional competencies of personal management, group effectiveness, and influence" (p. 5).

Approaches to study skills courses.

Formats.

The frameworks and approaches to meeting study skills needs vary. There is some debate as to which skills to incorporate into the curriculum, and colleges and universities also have varied the approaches in how the course is structured. At some colleges, the course is a one-credit transferrable course that meets 50-55 minutes one day a week. At others, it is a three-credit course that meets three hours per week. For most colleges and universities, the course is offered as a "stand-alone" class, also termed by

Bennet, Dunne, and Carre (2000) as the "bolt-on" approach to study skills. But some argue that study skills cannot be learned in isolation and need to be inclusive and enforced through subject content in standard college courses such as history, English, government, etc., also known as the "built-in" approach. The bolt-on approach also can be seen as limited primarily due to the fact that at many institutions, the course is not required, and typically, the only students who sign up and attend the course are not those who need it, but self-starters who want to "enhance their performance further" (Wingate, 2006, p. 458). This exclusive approach is separated from subject content, and it "suggests that there is a difference between studying successfully and learning" (p. 459). Even though most would likely agree that the built-in approach makes academic sense, there is an overall resistance to it at colleges and universities, mainly, Wingate notes, because incorporating these skills into courses would require additional planning and professional development on the part of the instructor, and it would also necessitate a firm commitment from the institution itself (p. 459).

Study skills is largely offered as a face-to-face course, but depending on the institution, it can be offered in alternative forms, such as hybrid or DL (online). Also, in some instances, the course is purely offered as an elective, but some colleges are beginning to require the course for students enrolled in two or more developmental courses. Moreover, at some colleges, the course is required for all first-time, full-time students but not for part-time students. This is viewed as problematic by some since part-time students are typically exposed to fewer resources and have less support than their full-time counterparts, and such a course could help fill in that gap (O'Gara, Mechur-Karp, & Hughes, 2009).

Despite the diversity in the formats of the course, and despite the prevalancy of these courses at community colleges there has not been a great deal of research on the effectiveness of the course in general nor of each specific format (Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno, 2007, p. 1). Several studies, however, seem to focus on the deficits of such courses. For example, In a 2004 study, Dembo and Seli concluded that a significant number of students did not benefit from academic assistance programs. They cite three primary reasons for the failure of such courses. First, students do not enroll in study skills courses unless required to do so, and at many colleges, enrollment is not mandatory. Second, students who are in these courses do not always attend class regularly, and third, students who do attend class regularly do not typically change their study skills or studying behaviors (p. 2). Dembo and Seli (2004) found that out of 169 students who completed a college study skills course, 29% noted that they did not change their study behavior. Of this 29% who did not change their behavior, 67% noted that they did not want to change their study behavior. Similarly, Yuksel (2006) found that in interviewing 41 university students, the research revealed a common theme of resistance and ineffectiveness (html).

On the other hand, in an examination of data taken collected from Florida community colleges by the Florida Department of Education, Zeidenberg et.al. (2007) found a positive relationship between student success courses and academic persistence. However, due to the inconsistencies in the way each student success course was taught, this positive correlation warrants additional research to determine the reasons for the course's effectiveness (p. 6). O'Gara, Karp, Mechur, and Hughes (2009) also studied the effect of a student success course on community college students, and the data indicated

that participants found the class beneficial in the areas of college resources and academic support (html).

Content-specific study skills.

As colleges and universities continue to explore new approaches and platforms for effective study skills courses, textbook publishers and editors are also developing innovative texts that address content needs. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, some study skills books began to make a deliberate attempt to foster the needs of specific areas of concentration, such as taking notes in a science classroom or studying for a test in an anatomy and physiology course. Today, there are textbooks exclusively devoted to these content areas. Pearson, for example, currently has a series of discipline-specific study skills textbooks available in the areas of nursing, liberal arts, engineering, business, and science. Each textbook has an overview of what to expect in each program, study habits that are most effective for that subject area, and a component on career exploration (Pearson Higher Ed, 2010).

There is also a range of character of non-content-specific student success textbooks. One of Pearson Prentice Hall's (PPH) newest textbooks on study skills is *Study and Critical Thinking Skills in College* (2010) by Kathleen T. McWhorter, and the focus is on "metacognition, critical thinking, and learning styles" (Pearson Higher Ed, 2010). Another text from PPH is titled *Cornerstone: Creating Success through Positive Change* (2010), and this text focuses on "success through discovery, goal-setting and determination" (Pearson Higher Education, 2010). Finally, Academic *Transformation: The Road To Success* (2004) is a text that focuses on diversity and uses relatable, student-written accounts to apply study skills methods. (Pearson Higher Education, 2010).

Alternate/extended forms of study skills/student success courses.

For many students, even specialized texts do not meet their immediate needs. Some colleges and universities have developed long-term programs, extended orientations, or initiatives to help students transition into college. Many have advocated the significance of advising and student services in correlation with study skills courses to aid in academic and career planning. As an extension of this component, others take it a step further and assign success coaches for their students (Farrell, 2007, p. 45-46). For example, at Our Lady of the Lake University, a grant from AT&T allowed the university to provide all first-year and transfer students a personal-success coach who "motivate[s] and counsel[s] students" who often need "more than positive reinforcement and time-management tips" (p. 45). The coaches go beyond academic study skills and also give students advice on personal and financial issues (p. 45), and through weekly meetings, these typically-low-income students are encouraged to set and maintain goals (p. 45). For nontraditional students, this type of support is essential in their transition into a higher education setting.

Another program that builds confidence and connections is the Lothian Apprenticeship Scheme Trust (LAST). This program, based in the United Kingdom, was set up in 1995 and was designed to help non-traditional, economically disadvantaged, disabled, and minority individuals attain a BA in Community Education (Bamber and Tett, 2000, p. 58). Similarly, the Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) Bridge Program is described as a "transition experience" (Lutes, 2004, p. 39) for nontraditional students. This program not only refreshes study skills, but it also incorporates workplace skills that students can use in their current positions.

Communities of Practice (CoP) also help non-traditional students as they make the transition into college. One CoP, entitled "An Introduction to University Study for Mature Students" (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007), was designed for adult students to refresh their study skills and to prepare them for the academic environment of college. Topics addressed included study groups, classroom dialogue, and independent study techniques (p. 317). Participants in this program admitted that one of the most significant benefits of the program was the sense of belonging that they experienced. Many non-traditional students, according to Bamber and Tett (2000), feel they are out of place at college and experience anxiety while trying to establish their identity as college students. Through this program, the students were able to integrate themselves into the college setting, and they began to actually feel like they were college students (p. 12). For many, this gave them an empowering sense of identity and pride (p. 13).

In addition, the Academy for High Performance (AHP) works with non-traditional students in a cohort setting, offering students a great deal of flexibility in class format and hours on campus (Leger, 2005, p. 641). This flexibility is essential for the students, who are typically full-time working adults (p. 641). Students attending The Academy will refresh their "soft skills" in the areas of problem solving, communication, flexibility, team work, and critical thinking (p. 641). The Academy has a completion rate of 58% (p. 642) with Leger indicating that support from administration is essential for the success of the program.

Leonard (2002) describes other options to help with the transition, including a one-day workshop for female non-traditional students at Oregon State University, and a community health center based on campus to assist with student interventions (p. 63).

Other colleges have implemented programs that occur over multiple weeks before the semester even begins. At Lee College in Baytown, Texas, a program known as Project LeeWay begins approximately six weeks before the semester begins. Students who qualify for the program attend refresher courses on reading/writing, mathematics, study skills, and computers, and there is also a component on career exploration. Project LeeWay essentially captures all the components of a basic study skills course, but goes far beyond skill development. In essence, it is an extended student orientation that allows the participants to become familiar not only with the physical components of the college (location of the library, student services building, gym, etc.), but they also build connections among each other and with the program instructors.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter reviewed the evolution of the community college as well as the changing face of the community college student. The literature shows how the community college population is increasingly composed of non-traditional students of different degrees. These students have unique needs that must be met in order for them to be successful. Aside from establishing relationships with faculty and students, non-traditional students also have foundational needs that must be addressed; furthermore, since many non-traditional students have delayed college enrollment, the acquisition of study skills is necessary upon entering college. Study skills courses have evolved from basic courses that teach students the fundamentals of studying to expanded student success orientations that target specific populations of non-traditional students. High-risk non-traditional students make up one of these specific populations with explicit needs. Effective programs for this unique group of students

must be carefully constructed in order to address overcome the obstacles that they will encounter as they enter and advance into college.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of Project LeeWay on first-year non-traditional college students. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What effect does Project LeeWay have on non-traditional students' academic preparation?
2. What aspects of Project LeeWay do students find to be beneficial as they are enrolled in college courses?

This chapter describes the methodology that was used in the study, and it is divided into four subsections. First, I will describe my research design, including the rationale for choosing qualitative research and the advantages and disadvantages of this method of research. Next, I will describe my procedures, including participant selection, pre-study procedures, and data collection. Third, I will describe my proposed method of data analysis and any anticipated issues with validity, as well as the limitations of the study. Finally, I will describe my role in the study as both researcher and participant-observer.

The data collected for this study were archival data that were collected as a part of an independent research study commissioned by the college that supports this program. The program had never been previously evaluated, so the college was interested in examining its effectiveness. The research was conducted under the supervision of the Project LeeWay director, and both the president of the supporting college and the

program director gave written permission for the study (Appendices A & B).

Program Details

Program Site

Project LeeWay is a program at a small community college in Southeast Texas. The college has an average semester enrollment of 6,000 students and is located near a large petrochemical district. The college offers many degree and certificate programs to accommodate the needs of the community, including process technology, welding, and pipefitting, and it also offers basic academic courses and Associate degrees.

Since the Perkins Grant focuses on technical and vocational education, all courses within Project LeeWay were held in the building where most technical classes are normally in session. All classes took place in two different classrooms within the same building.

Program Development

Project LeeWay was originally a counseling program for non-traditional students where the original grant writer and staff members worked with students throughout the school year on a case-by-case basis. Typically these students were low-income, displaced homemakers, and single mothers. It became difficult to keep track of all the students given their hectic schedules and demanding responsibilities. An attempt was made to offer classes to them during the semester, but because of their existing school schedules, it was unmanageable. By the third year of the program, it developed into a six-program that preceded each long semester.

Student Placement

Before each new Project LeeWay cycle, several two-hour orientation sessions are

offered to give students information regarding the program to determine if it fits their needs. The first hour is purely informational, outlining the qualifications to participate in the program. First, applicants must be eligible for a Pell Grant, which is a needs-based grant where the amount is dependent upon a number of factors, including enrollment status, the expected cost of attendance, and the student's expected family contribution (*Federal Pell Grant Program*, 2012). Also, they must have a GED or a high school diploma, and since the program is funded through a Perkins Grant, they must be interested in a technical or vocational degree or certificate. During the second hour, students actually start the application process. This involves each student filling out the Project LeeWay application, making an appointment to apply for financial aid, taking a reading placement test, and registering at the admissions office. Project LeeWay staff members help students with this process and call them to remind them about the appointments.

Once all the paperwork is complete, prospective students make an appointment for an hour long appointment with the Project LeeWay director. The director goes over all the completed paperwork and helps each student to make sure the program is a good fit for their needs. Ultimately, the director of the program makes the final decision as to which students are able to enter the program. Those students who are chosen to participate must sign an Enrollment Agreement form, which details the rules regarding attendance, self-reliance, and post-program meetings (Appendix C). The preferred class size is 20-24 students, but there have been up to 30 students in a Project LeeWay cycle.

Student Assessment

Students must take an Accuplacer reading placement test before entering the

program. Within the program, students are occasionally tested depending on the course and the instructor. In the mathematics course, for example, the instructor may want to give students weekly tests to determine progress and comprehension, but these grades are typically unrecorded. Other courses may similarly give quizzes and tests to simulate a genuine college experience.

Near the end of the program, as students prepare for registration for their first semester in college, they take the Accuplacer placement test in reading, writing, and mathematics to determine their placement in college courses. Since many students have been out of school for an extended period of time, Project LeeWay courses help to refresh and rebuild their basic skills.

Program Instructors

Program instructors are recruited by the program director. All instructors have at least an associate's degree in their respective fields. Some are former K-12 teachers, and some are adjunct faculty at the college. The director carefully screens each instructor to ensure he or she is a good fit for the student population. The director also typically teaches the Surviving Transitions course, and the director's secretary often teaches the Introduction to Computers course.

Curriculum of the Program

The structure and curriculum of the program has evolved over the years. Currently, there are a total of six courses within the program, and these include both academic based courses and practical skills courses: Mathematics, Reading/Writing, Surviving Transitions, Study Skills, Career Exploration, and Introduction to Computers. In the academic-based classes, students use real textbooks and are given homework

assignments and tests to simulate a real college course. This not only helps students understand what it is like to regularly attend classes, but it also helps them develop basic skills such as note-taking and time-management.. In the practical skills classes, students get remediation in several areas that meet their specific needs as high-risk non-traditional students.

Mathematics.

The mathematics class focuses on basic mathematics skills and is typically structured like a developmental college mathematics course. The skills range from basic computations to more advanced algebraic concepts. There are lectures, homework assignments, and occasional tests. For students with advanced mathematics skills, they are allowed to work ahead of the class. Each student attends mathematics class every class day.

Reading/Writing.

The reading/writing class covers basic reading comprehension and composition. Students often read short works and learn basic grammar and essay concepts. Depending on how the instructor structures the course, students may complete an essay and multiple reflective journal assignments. Each student attends reading and writing three times a week.

Surviving Transitions.

Surviving Transitions is a practical skills course that helps students with planning and problem solving. Typical topics in this course include but are not limited to accepting personal responsibility, defining success, making wise choices, understanding individual strengths and weaknesses, mastering self-management, interdependence,

emotional intelligence, life-long learning, college etiquette, parenting, and budgeting. Each student attends the surviving transitions course twice a week.

Career Exploration.

For the career exploration course, students are exposed to various technical and vocational careers. Instructors and leads from various departments give informational presentations on their respective fields. For example, an instructor in the nursing program may give a presentation on what to expect in nursing courses, and she might also differentiate between RN and LVN. Furthermore, she may take students on a tour of the nursing facilities on campus and answer questions about the program itself. Throughout the Project LeeWay cycle, students are exposed to as many as 15-18 different programs and vocations. By the end of Project LeeWay when students are ready to register, they have a much better idea of what each degree entails. Each student attends the career exploration every class day.

Study Skills.

The study skills course covers basic topics such as time management, note-taking, test-taking anxiety, communication, goal-setting, memory, studying, diversity, critical thinking, and personal wellness. Students may, for example, learn how to study using flash cards and acronyms. They may also learn techniques to annotate a text and become an active reader. Each student attends the study skills course twice a week.

Introduction to Computers.

The introduction to computers course is a basic computer course. Students mainly work to learn the basics of Microsoft Word, including document preparation (changing font, margins, spacing, etc.) and basic incorporation of pictures and graphics.

Students also are guided through the college's registration program, MyLC, which they use to check financial aid status and register and pay for classes. The final project in the computer course is typically a group project. One Project LeeWay cycle, for example, created a collective cookbook, showcasing their favorite recipes. At the closing ceremonies for that cycle, each student received a printed copy of the cookbook. Each student attends the introduction to computers course once a week.

Attendance

Attendance is taken in each class each day. Students may be dismissed from the program if they have more than one unexcused absence. Also, many students use Project LeeWay-funded daycare, and their access to it is dependent upon on their attendance.

Program Schedule

Each class day begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. Each class is one hour and fifteen minutes long with a 15 minute break between each class, but students do not attend all classes every day. There are two classes that students attend four days a week: mathematics and career exploration. Students attend reading/writing three days a week, surviving transitions and study skills twice a week, and introduction to computers once a week (Appendix D).

To make the mathematics and reading/writing classes more manageable and student-centered, students are divided into two groups (Group A and Group B). While Group A is in mathematics class, Group B is in reading/writing class. When that class is over, Group A goes to reading/writing and Group B goes to mathematics. The same set up occurs on Thursdays with mathematics and introduction to computers.

Preliminary Steps

Before any data were collected, several preliminary steps were completed. First, the president of the college where the program takes place wrote a letter of consent giving permission to study Project LeeWay (Appendix A). Furthermore, the program director also granted her approval (Appendix B) and agreed to serve as a mentor and research director to the researcher. In addition, the research materials, including the interview questions and survey items, were peer reviewed to ensure the language and content were appropriate.

Research Design

According to quantitative purists such as Nagel (1986), research should be unattached, uninvolved, and free from bias in order to achieve the most accurate and reliable data. Conversely, advocates of qualitative research call for data characterized by idealism, relativism, and purism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). According to Guba (1990), qualitative data provides rich, detailed descriptions, whereas quantitative data produces a form of data that can be characterized as detached and passive. According to Kelle (2006), since any one method has inherent advantages and disadvantages, a mixed methods research design can be used to "compensate for their mutual and overlapping weaknesses" (p. 293). Given the scope of this study, qualitative methods of data collection were used to yield the most useful data since these methods tend to focus on the experiences of individual human subjects (Sandelowski, 2003); however, because funding for colleges and their programs is data-driven, I also included quantitative data to further support the success of Project LeeWay. Therefore, a mixed methods design, with a strong emphasis on qualitative research was used for this study.

According to Chao & Good (2004), to comprehensively understand nontraditional students, it is important to examine their personal experiences directly (p. 5).To effectively capture the unique stories and perspectives of the Project LeeWay students, the researcher conducted five case studies. According to Thomas (2011), a case study can be likened to Michel Foucault's "polyhedron of intelligibility," which allows for multiple views and provides a "rounded, richer, more balanced picture of [the] subject" (p. 4). In order to explain the difference between a case study and other types of research, Gerring (2007), uses the building of houses to illustrate:

> There are two ways to learn how to build a house. One might study the construction of many houses—perhaps a large subdivision or even hundreds of thousands of houses. Or one might study the construction of a particular house…The second [study] is a within-case or case study method. While both are concerned with the same general subject—the building of houses—they follow different paths to this goal. (p. 1)

Case studies, then, allowed me to personally engage with each student in order to study the complexities and individuality of each student, a task that would not be possible in a large-scale or purely quantitative study.

Data Collection

In each case study, the researcher employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods over one Project LeeWay summer cycle. During this cycle, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview of each of the five case study students at the end of Project LeeWay. Also, three of the five students were interviewed at the end of their first semester in college following his or her exit from the program. Of

the two remaining students, one dropped out of the study, and the other joined the military, so they were not available for comments. Each in-depth interview was conducted at the Lee College campus, and each interview lasted approximately an hour. These interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. The researcher also interviewed all Project LeeWay faculty, including the director of the program, the secretary, and all staff assistants. Next, the researcher observed each Project LeeWay twice course in its entirety (one hour and fifteen minutes) to get a comprehensive view of the structure of the program and the interaction among the students, faculty, and staff. In addition, a survey was given to all participating Project LeeWay students, including four of the five case study students. This survey was developed in cooperation with the Project LeeWay director, and its purpose was gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Finally, the researcher asked the Project LeeWay director to provide any additional data regarding enrollment in and completion of the program. The data that were provided were for the last three years (2010-2012) and included the number of students who enrolled into and completed a full Project LeeWay cycle, the number of students who enrolled into college in the semester following their Project LeeWay cycle, and the number of students who successfully completed their first semester after Project LeeWay with at least a 2.0 grade point average (Appendix E). As a whole, this data represents a snapshot of the longevity of the program and shows the long-term effects of Project LeeWay.

Sampling and Selection of Participants

Project LeeWay typically has a largely female population, with many cycles

having anywhere from 0-2 male students. According to the director of the program, the average age of a Project LeeWay student is approximately 30 years old. In order to get a range of students for the case studies, the researcher used maximum variation sampling, a type of sampling that "involves purposefully picking a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest…including nationalities, professional backgrounds, cultures, work experience, and the like" (Purposeful Sampling, 2012). With this in mind, the researcher attempted to choose the case study students such that a variety of ages and ethnicities are represented. The researcher also attempted to choose both male and female students if possible.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The director of the program suggested that we ask all students in the program to write a paragraph of intent. Here we asked them to state whether or not they were interested in being a part of the study and why they would be good candidates for the study. The students got approximately 15 minutes to write this paragraph, and most were under a page long (handwritten). This paragraph gave us some insight into the background of each student. At the beginning of this Project LeeWay cycle, 17 students were enrolled in the program. Of these students, 6 were not interested in being a part of the study. Three of these students stated they did not want to participate as a case study candidate because they had too many prior responsibilities and obligations. The remaining three students did not give reasons for not wanting to participate.

Overall, out of the remaining 11 students, 5 case study students were selected among the initial Project LeeWay population of 17 students. In addition, four faculty members and two staff members were interviewed.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in the case studies. In a semi-structured interview, each subject is asked similar questions, but not necessarily identical questions. This allows the interviewer to decide when the interview has "satisfied the research objectives" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 29). The reason for using semi-structured interviews is to allow for some flexibility in the interview process. Each case study subject was unique, and a formal, structured interview may eliminate the chance to gain significant insight into each subject.

Ten open-ended questions were used for each case study interview. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), open-ended questions "allow people to respond in their own words and capture people's own ideas about how things work" (p. 34). The open-ended question is clearly essential for studying Project LeeWay students in that the researcher was looking for individual perspective and insight into the program. Just like the unstructured nature of the interview itself, usage of open-ended questions will allow for flexibility and range in responses. The questions were developed and edited with the help of the program director who has been coordinating the program for 15 years.

The first case study interview (Appendix F) occurred at the end of the program, and the second interview (Appendix G) occurred at the end of the students' first semester in college. The first interview focused on what the students' perceived gains of the program, and the second interview focused on the students' applied gains of the program as they complete their first semester in college.

For the faculty and director interviews (Appendices H and I respectively), the

researcher conducted a structured interview using pre-prepared questions. Each faculty and staff member was only interviewed once unless circumstances required additional interviews.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. They were later transcribed by the interviewer and typed into a Microsoft Word document. Each interview was conducted in a secure, private location on the college campus. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning the case study students a pseudonym (Student A, Student B, etc.).

Observations

The researcher observed each of the six Project LeeWay classes once in their entirety to examine each instructor's teaching style and to gain insight into the specific course content. Since the researcher was a participant observer, recorded observations were minimal, and a formal observation protocol was not used.

Survey

The final survey (Appendix J) was developed through a multistep, peer reviewed process. First, the initial survey items were recorded in list format (Appendix K) and peer reviewed. The main purpose of the peer review was to check for misleading or "double-barrel" questions, vague wording, appropriate language, and completeness and to develop the pilot survey (Appendix L). The results indicated that most of the issues with the survey were due to word choice. For example, one item in the list asked about the extent to which Project LeeWay instructors were knowledgeable in their respective content areas. A concern was raised as to whether students would understand what "content" referred to. In turn, the recommendation was to eliminate this term in the

corresponding revised survey item:

Original Listed Question:
Project LeeWay instructors were knowledgeable in their content areas.

Corresponding Pilot Survey Item 13:
Project LeeWay instructors were knowledgeable.

Another issue raised in the peer review was the occurrence of a double-barrel question. This occurs when a survey item asks the respondent to rank two items at once. For example, whereas one question in the first peer review asked students to rank Project LeeWay staff and instructors, in the revised survey, it was split apart into two questions:

Original Listed Question:
Project LeeWay instructors and staff were supportive.

Corresponding Pilot Survey Item 2:
Project LeeWay staff members were available for help when I needed them.

Corresponding Pilot Survey Item 12:
Project LeeWay instructors were available for help when I needed them.

Also, notice that the language was changed in the revised Items 2 and 12 to further clarify what "supportive" entailed.

After the two peer reviews were complete, the pilot survey was then reviewed through a cognitive interview process (Appendix M) with former Project LeeWay students and the director of the program since a complete group of Project LeeWay students was not available to fully pilot the survey. The cognitive interviews served to increase the reliability of the survey and to ensure the content and format were easy to understand for the typical Project LeeWay student population. Since Project LeeWay was not currently in session, four former students were recommended by the director to participate in the interviews, and of these, two responded to participate.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' permission. During the interviews, concurrent probing was used to keep the participant on track and to gain specific insight into each question. The initial probing questions were as follows:

1. Can you repeat the question in your own words?
2. What does (key term) mean to you?
3. How sure are you of your answer?
4. How hard was this question to answer?

As the interviews progressed, I found that the first question was not yielding any significant results, as the students tended to nearly repeat the original survey item again. Also, since several survey items did not contain any sort of key term that may be considered ambiguous, this question was only included where key terms were present. The third and fourth questions, however, were asked for every item on the survey. Overall, the survey was reviewed with two cognitive interviews. Language proved to be the most problematic issue with the survey, with the terms "skills" and "success" as the most ambiguous, and these terms were more clearly defined on the revised survey.

In creating the final survey (Appendix J), the data gathered during the peer reviews and the cognitive interviews were reviewed, and final edits reflected the feedback given. In addition, the Project LeeWay director also provided guidance on the survey items to ensure the language was appropriate and to ensure her own questions regarding the program were included in the final version. This final version of the survey was administered on the last day of Project LeeWay instruction.

Other Data

The researcher also asked the Project LeeWay director for any archival data she had collected from the program including completion and success rates.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Data

Bernard and Ryan (2010) offer a five step qualitative data analysis process, which "involves five complex tasks: (1) discovering themes and subthemes; (2) describing the core and peripheral elements of themes; (3) building hierarchies of themes or codebooks; (4) applying themes . . . and (5) linking themes into theoretical models" (p. 54). To begin the data analysis process, the researcher will look for recurring patterns or themes and mark each occurrence during and after the data collection process. Themes or codes can be found by looking for repetition, categories, and metaphors (p. 57). Once located, these items can be designated electronically using the "Reviewing" tool in Microsoft Word or using a highlighting system, electronic or otherwise (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 225). To sort the themes within the data, the "cutting and sorting" technique can be used. This involves literally cutting the quote from which the theme came from and pasting it on an index card that references where the quote came from. This will allow me to physically sort the themes or codes into corresponding piles (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 63-4).

Quantitative Data

First, the researcher will organize the data by collecting all the surveys and examining each one for completeness. Because of the small sample size, the data will be entered into an Excel spreadsheet by hand. Several types of calculations will be performed to analyze the data. First, each item on the survey will be checked for frequency and percentage of response for each level in the Likert scale. Descriptives, including mean and standard deviation will be determined in order to note the extent of satisfaction with regard to each survey item. After the data have been analyzed, the

researcher will discuss the meaning of the findings in detail in a narrative format and will also examine the limitations of the data.

Validity

Since case studies are intensive in their structure, only five case studies were conducted. The advantage of this small number is that each student was followed carefully, and a large quantity of data was collected. There are, however, disadvantages of using a small sample of students. First, since the five students were selected based on their willingness to participate (through volunteering) and through the recommendations of the program director, it is possible that the make-up of this pool is not fully representative of the typical Project LeeWay student. Also, these high-risk students are each facing unique circumstances, so no two students are alike. And even though the researcher will chose a range of students, there will still be a very small sample of this exclusive population.

However, Thomas (2011) notes that the notion of sampling is a very different concept when applied to case studies as opposed to other types of research. Thomas insists that "the point of a case study is not to find a portion that shows the quality of the whole. You are looking at your selection . . . without any expectation that it represents a wider population" (p. 62). In other words, although the researcher purposefully selected five students with a range of characteristics, it should not be expected that these five students will represent the entire Project LeeWay or non-traditional student population.

Furthermore, issues with internal validity may be viewed as problematic. One concern that may be addressed is the question of how it can be concluded as to what extent Project LeeWay had an effect on these students. Outside events, for example, may

affect the results since the student population in Project LeeWay is often unstable due to various issues such as living arrangements, family obligations, psychological factors, addictions, and financial concerns.

Thomas (2011) argues that because of the unique nature of the case study research method, reliability and validity do not apply in the same ways they do to other types of research. There are several reasons for this. First, case studies typically involve a small number of "cases," and sometimes only one case is used, so obviously we cannot assume that we will get the same results when different cases are used (p. 63). Also, Thomas notes that because there is no probability sample, "the idea of validity is less meaningful" (p. 63). Because of this, it is more important to focus on the quality of the research rather than to try to force reliability and validity upon this type of interpretive research. In order to maintain the quality of the case study, Thomas suggests focusing on five key areas in the process of the research study: the clarity of the writing, the problem or question being addressed, the methods used, the account of the research process, and the formulation of the main claims (p. 66-7).

Researcher Role

In order to gain the trust of the case study students, the researcher took a participant observer role in the study. Unlike a detached observer, a participant observer conducts his or her research by being actively involved with the participants in the study (Murchison, 2010, p. 4). For this study, the researcher was not only a researcher but also a guest lecturer, so there was first-hand interaction with all the students in the program. This not only allowed the researcher to build rapport with the case study students, but it also allowed observation of the program through a unique perspective.

Furthermore, I had previously taught for Project LeeWay in two separate cycles several years ago. In this role, I taught many of the classes, including study skills, reading/writing, and introduction to computers. This gave me several advantages in studying the program. First, it allowed me to be comfortable with the students, as Project LeeWay enrolls a very unique population. Also, my experience with the program provided familiarity with the history of the program as well as the program schedule, curriculum, and staff.

However, such familiarity also presents the potential for bias in the study. Because I have witnessed the success of the program, I clearly had a favorable view of it before research began. However, as a researcher, it is my responsibility to collect and analyze the data and present an authentic representation of the program despite my personal views, experiences, and affiliations with the program.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This research project explored the effects and benefits of Project LeeWay on first-year non-traditional college students. Specifically, the following research questions were posed:

1. What effect does Project LeeWay have on non-traditional students' academic preparation?
2. What aspects of Project LeeWay do students find to be beneficial as they are enrolled in college courses?

During one summer cycle of Project LeeWay, five case studies were conducted, and data was gathered primarily through interviews. First, the LeeWay director was interviewed to gather insight into the establishment and history of the program and to discover its founding principles. Furthermore, the director elaborated on the evolution of the program, its pedagogical practices, and its overall statement of intent or philosophy. Next, each LeeWay instructor was interviewed to determine his or her specific course objectives, teaching methods, and curriculum. In addition, and perhaps most significantly, five LeeWay students were interviewed at the end of the six-week program cycle, with particular emphasis on their background, educational interests, and expectations related to the program. Next, three of the five students were available for an interview at the end of their first semester in college. Finally, the entire Project LeeWay group was observed both inside and outside the classroom to determine how students interact with one another and how they respond to instruction, and all students present on

the last day of the program (15 students) were given a survey (Appendix J).

What follows is a report of the content of the interviews, observations, and survey, as well as an overview of the emergent themes and sub-themes found within.

Program Evolution

The program was originally developed through a Perkins competitive grant for single parents and displaced homemakers by Sally Griffith, the Special Populations director at the time. However, in its first two years, it was more of an on-going mentoring program where Ms. Griffith and Ms. Fleming, her administrative assistant, worked with low-income students during the entire semester on a case-by-case basis. They found that it was difficult keeping track of the students because of scheduling issues, so together, they derived a more comprehensive program that would allow students a similar sort of mentoring before the semester began. Ms. Fleming, who later became the Special Populations and Project LeeWay director, described how program evolved into what it is today:

> At that time, we were working with students during the school year. We never created a class for them preceding the semester. And so my job was primarily to case-manage these students who were all low-income and single parents, displaced home-makers. And it was tough keeping track of them because we were trying to offer classes to them during the school day what would not already conflict with the classes they were enrolled in, which is pretty difficult to do, because they had different majors and different class schedules, and so it was really an unmanageable thing, and so after that, my first year, her [Sally Griffith's] second year, she had

> pretty much moved out of it by then, she was just supervising, and we sat down and talked about it…and we kind of worked out the details together. And so we went through a major change the next year, the third year in which we had a five-week LeeWay program preceding the fall semester, and then again preceding spring semester. Eventually we added another week, making it six weeks in length.

The program developed into a six-week program, where attend classes four days a week. All classes are 75 minutes in length; however, some classes meet as many as four times a week while others only meet once a week (Appendix D).

Program Objectives

According to the director, the objectives for the program are to help students attain a degree that will lead to employment in a technical career and in the process, to help them navigate the logistics of college:

> The objectives to assist low-income adults with …selecting viable technical careers that will help them support themselves and their families. And a subheading is to help them enroll in college and assist with everything involved with that: applying for financial aid, registering, learning the expectations, and succeeding, problem solving.

Project LeeWay is funded by a Perkin's Grant and focuses on technical and vocational certificates and degrees, many of which can be completed in two years or less, thus putting the program participants into the workforce quickly. To facilitate this process, Project LeeWay curriculum helps students navigate the logistics of college.

Program Enrollment and Completion

In examining enrollment data for the last three years (Table 1), student enrollment in the program has varied, with the lowest enrollment of 9 students in Fall 2012 and the highest enrollment of 24 in Summer 2010. In the summer that this research study took place, 20 students were enrolled in Project LeeWay, and of these, 16 students finished the program for a completion rate of 80%. Of these 16 students, 15, or 94% of the students enrolled into college the following semester, and of the 15 who were enrolled, 12 or 80% successfully completed their first semester in college with a 2.0 or higher grade point average.

Table 1

Project LeeWay Enrollment and Completion Data, 2010-2012

	FA 2012	SU 2012	FA 2011	SU 2011	FA 2010	SU 2010
Enrolled in Project LeeWay	9	14	11	20	16	24
Completed Project LeeWay	9	14	11	16	16	23
Enrolled in college in semester after LeeWay	8	14	11	15	16	23
2.0 or higher in first semester after LeeWay	N/A	11	9	12	13	18

Program Instructors and Pedagogy

Project LeeWay is comprised of a series of courses, which includes mathematics, reading/writing, study skills, computers, Surviving Transitions, and Career Exploration. All instructional materials, including textbooks for mathematics and study skills, are provided free of charge to students through Perkins Grant funding. Project LeeWay instructors often change with each term based on scheduling and availability. The Project

LeeWay director personally interviews and hires each instructor to ensure he or she is a good fit for the student population, and the director teaches the Surviving Transitions course. In this study, each course instructor, including the director, was interviewed to determine his or her education and teaching experience, curriculum, teaching methods, and course objectives.

Program Director

The current Project LeeWay director, Ms. Fleming, has a Bachelor's degree in psychology as well as a teaching certification for grades K-8 from the state of Washington. She also has done additional graduate coursework in counseling. Her employment history includes several experiences with adult learners and non-profit organizations. For example, as a job placement specialist, she worked with adults with disabilities and helped them find employment. This often involved on-the-job training where she would have to learn how to do the job and then teach others how to do it. Then, she would work with these adult learners every day until they learned how to do the job on their own. In another instance, she was a case manager for a non-profit agency, where she would help place adults on welfare into appropriate technical programs at community colleges. These educational and employment experiences clearly prepared the director for her current position within the Project LeeWay program.

Mathematics

The mathematics instructor, Paul, has a bachelor's degree in mathematics and is currently pursuing dual master's degrees in finance and accounting. He has mathematics tutoring experience, and he has also been a supplementary instructor and a student instructor. In addition, he has experience teaching developmental college mathematics

courses, including Basic College Mathematics, Intermediate Algebra, and Pre-Algebra.

Paul likes to refer to his Project LeeWay mathematics class as "mathematics boot camp." His goal is to give students a head start before the semester starts to prepare them for specific mathematics content, and he also wants to prepare them for the rigorous pace of college courses in general:

> I tried to push everyone as hard and as fast I as I can and try to push them to learn as much as possible to be prepared for college, and also as I teach, I also try to, I guess try to prepare them mentally for what they can expect, especially in the hard science classes, things like mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, things like that, classes where you should expect to hit the ground running basically the first day of class, where you're not going to be let out early, you are expected to learn everything; it's a very iterative process; you have to keep up or you're not going to do well. So I push them pretty hard…

In this way, then, Paul's teaching philosophy extends beyond teaching the content in the textbook; he also wants to mentally prepare them for the rigor of college life.

Project LeeWay students go to Paul's mathematics class four days a week, and the class itself is 75 minutes in length. Project LeeWay provides each student with a developmental mathematics textbook for this course. Paul notes that his course is very structured. The first part of the class is dedicated to questions about the previous night's homework, and then, he shows a few slides from the previous day's Power Point presentation to review the material. Next, he will start on new material, also delivered through the Power Point presentation and supplemented through a verbal lecture and

through Paul working through problems step-by step on the whiteboard. Then, he will give the students a practice problem to try on their own or in pairs or groups. He repeats this process with each new concept, which helps keep the class organized. In the most recent Project LeeWay cycle, Paul also gave them three exams to test their knowledge of the material and to allow them to practice their test-taking skills, but he notes that he regrets losing those three days of instruction.

Reading and Writing

The reading and writing instructor, JoAn, has a master's degree in English. She was an elementary school teacher for 22 years, with experience in second through fifth grade. She is also a published author of adolescent fiction.

Her course, she insists, is not a course on the mechanics of English language. She does not focus on grammar concepts or a lot of structured composition; rather, her goal is to get the students to enjoy reading and writing and to give them a sense of confidence:

> I really didn't teach English. I didn't attempt to teach the grammar or the commas or all of that. I taught the reading and the writing, so I assumed that these people didn't read or didn't like to read and did not write and never wrote much of anything, so in class the first day, I asked how many of you like to read, how many of you like to write? My goal for this six weeks is that you'll just love to read, and you'll just love to write, so I'm not sure I reached it with all of them but a lot of them did say they did better and they understood better.

Students attend reading and writing three times a week, and the course is 75 minutes in length. Although there is no textbook for this course, JoAn's Project LeeWay

course is centered around a short, fifteen-chapter novel, *Yankee Girl*, that she wrote and published, and Project LeeWay provides this novel to the students through Perkins Grant funding. They average a chapter each day, and they discuss the story and basic comprehension elements. She also incorporates many informal writing or journal assignments since, as she notes, they have a much harder time with the writing than the reading. These journal assignments are not graded, but she does ask them at times to read their journals aloud to the class. In addition, at one point in the Project LeeWay term, she took them to the college Writing Center to learn about the tutoring and computer lab services that are available.

Introduction to Computers

The computer course is taught by the Project LeeWay director's administrative assistant, Brenda. She has five years of experience in teaching this course for the Project LeeWay program, and she also has three certificates in Office Technology, including Office Assistant, Administrative Assistant, and Administrative Specialist. In addition, she is in the process of working on her associate's degree in Office Technology.

Students attend Introduction to Computers once a week, and the class is 75 minutes long. Brenda's primary goal for the computer course is to get the students familiar with MyLC, which is the platform that students use to register, check their grades, apply for and manage their financial aid, and pay for classes. She also guides them through the Lee College website to show them how to find calendars, directories, and other relevant information. In addition, students learn the basics of Microsoft Word so they will be comfortable in navigating it when they have to use it to type and format papers in their college courses.

Students typically work individually on assignments for this course. The computer skills among the students vary; many of the younger students are technically savvy, but occasionally several of the older students will completely lack any sort of computer knowledge, so sometimes it is necessary for Brenda to work with students individually. Each class day, Brenda will have the students log in to MyLC to get them in the habit of locating and utilizing the platform within the Lee College website since they will be required to use it for many different processes as students. Then, Brenda will give a short lesson, and students will use the rest of their class time to work individually creating a business letter, flyer, or other assigned work.

As part of the final project for this course, the students create a recipe book, where each student contributes a favorite or family recipe. Students will type the recipe into a Microsoft Word document, and using what they learned in the course, they will add graphics and other designs to it. Brenda will then compile all the recipes into a booklet, and it is distributed at the end-of-semester awards and covered dish luncheon as a memoir of sorts.

Surviving Transitions

The Surviving Transitions course is taught by the Project LeeWay director. Ms. Fleming has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a teaching certification. In addition, she has graduate hours in counseling and experience in working with low-income adults and adults with disabilities.

Students attend Surviving Transitions twice a week, and the class is 75 minutes long. The main goal of this course, according to Ms. Fleming, is to teach the students problem-solving and planning skills. As she notes, many Project LeeWay students are

accustomed only to short-term planning and short-term solutions for daily survival. Surviving Transitions teaches them long-term and strategic planning. As Ms. Fleming articulates, one of the most important objectives of this Project LeeWay component is, "to teach people that they can plan for emergencies, and that we do have options, we always have an option. The population that I work with in this program is not generally accustomed to understanding anything but emergencies. They don't know they can plan ahead. It's a foreign thought. If your child is sick, of course you miss school. So the overall goal is teaching adults how to problem solve so they can succeed in school and in life."

Additional topics in this class include self-management, emotional intelligence, defining success, critical thinking, self-assessment, interdependence, the power of choice, goal-setting, parenting, budgeting, and college etiquette. In class, Ms. Fleming will present an informal lecture to the students on a given topic, and she typically will have them complete some sort of personal assessment to follow-up on the lecture.

Career Exploration

Career Exploration does not have a specific instructor or textbook associated with it; rather, it is facilitated by the Project LeeWay director. This course is more of an informational seminar on technical careers since Project LeeWay is supported though a Perkins Grant, which is intended to promote technical instruction and careers. Students attend this course four days a week, and each class is 75 minutes long . Instructors and department/program chairs from the college come to the Project LeeWay classroom to discuss different degree and certificate programs offered at the college. For example, on one class day, the chair of the nursing department may visit to explain the prerequisites

for getting into the nursing program, and she may also explain the difference between an Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) and a Registered Nurse (RN) and the types of jobs that are available to students with these degrees. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions and to directly engage with the chairperson. On another class day, the chair of the Criminal Justice Department may visit to describe the opportunities available in that area. Other classroom visits might include chairs representing other departments, such as Paralegal Studies, Computer Maintenance Technology, Cosmetology, Electrical Technology, Industrial and Analytical Instrumentation, Medical Transcription, Pipefitting Technology, and Welding. By the end of the Project LeeWay term, students will be able to make an informed decision as to which degree plan they intend to pursue, and this will help them with long-term planning of classes, childcare, and employment.

Study Skills

The study skills instructor for this cycle was not available for interview. Students attend this 75 minute component of the course twice a week. Basic study skills are discussed and developed, and these include test-taking, note-taking, learning styles, time management, goal-setting, memory, reading and studying, effective communication, and critical thinking. Like the mathematics course, Project LeeWay provides students with a textbook for this course. Students complete exercises from the textbook to practice these study skills, and supplemental handouts and other materials are often incorporated.

Observations

Due to scheduling issues, classroom observation was limited to one visit for each Project LeeWay component or course, for a total of five observations. Because the researcher was a participant observer, minimal observations were recorded, but the

experience allowed the researcher to have an authentic understanding of how each course was structured and functioned. Observation data was integrated into the descriptions of each course in the preceding section. In addition, one orientation session was observed prior to the start of the program.

Orientation Session

The first classroom observation was the orientation session that took place approximately five weeks before the beginning of the Project LeeWay term. Since case study participants had not been established, a general observation rather than an observation aimed at any particular student or group was conducted to determine the overall attitude and behavior of the students who participated. Seven students attended this session, representing a range of ages. Six of the students were female, and one student was male. Overall, students were quiet and had very little interaction with one another. Clearly, the students who were younger, and appeared to have recently exited high school, were more comfortable in the classroom than the older students. This was obvious through the younger students' willingness to ask questions during the session.

Outside the Classroom

Informally, students were minimally observed outside the classroom. This included observing students in the classroom, in the hallways between classes, and outside during lunch. Most students seemed to pair or group up according to shared traits. For example, two of the younger male students were often seen together and naturally bonded together within the largely female student population. Also grouped together were several young female students, all of whom had young children.

Student Voices

Each of the five case study students was interviewed at the end of the summer Project LeeWay cycle using a semi-structured interview. In addition, three of the five case study students were interviewed at the end of their first semester in college, also using a semi-structured interview. All interviews were taped with the students' permission and transcribed onto a Word document. What follows is an overview of each student's background and insight into the program.

Eric

Eric, a young Hispanic male, is a recent high-school graduate. At first glance, he looks like the typical "traditional" college student. However, after uncovering Eric's story, this is clearly not the case. Eric began by indicating that he was born into a very low income family, and one of the first words he used to describe himself was "orphan." He and his family were homeless for much of their early childhood, and as children, they slept in the car parked at the local community center. In addition, his father was an alcoholic and frequently physically and emotionally abused Eric and his two sisters. In Eric's own words,

> I came from a really, really low-income family. Growing up, I remember my dad telling me the first few months that I was alive I was barely born, and he would tell me that we would sleep in the car. We would park here by the community center. Growing up, my father was always an alcoholic. He was a really abusive father towards me and my mom. I have two younger sisters. They saw less of the abuse just because they were girls and me being the oldest and the only male, I got a lot more of it

> than they did. That was my life for the first seven years.

Then when Eric was seven years old, his mother was killed in a car accident. Eric, his father, and his two sisters were also in the car. Eric broke his collarbone, and his sisters and father all suffered minor injuries. After the accident, Eric's father began drinking more, and the abuse escalated. Eric dealt with the abuse the best he could for several years in order to displace his father's anger away from his two younger sisters. Then, when Eric turned thirteen, his father died. Eric recalls finding his father dead that morning:

> When I first turned 13, my father, he died April 15. I found him at 11:30 in the morning. It was a Sunday, I believe. I found him, and just by luck a friend happened to come by that day because I didn't know what to do. He came just around the time I found him, and we called the police.

Now that both parents had passed away, Eric and his sisters found themselves split apart by Child Protective Services (CPS). They had limited contact for approximately a year and a half, and once they were reunited by a family member, they found themselves estranged from one another.

> And me and my sisters were split. We spent about a summer and a year away from each other. They were at a place in Sugarland, and that was the only thing I heard, and then I was moving throughout different places, different foster houses, never being able to contact them, so we lost touch for a long time. And finally apparently, somebody, a family knew about us, and they wanted to take us in for a while, as long as they could, and I finally saw my sisters, and that was a while; we were able to stay there for

> about a year and a half as well. Once we all got back together, it wasn't much of a happy place because we didn't know each other very well anymore.

So, in addition to losing his parents, Eric and his siblings were also lost to one another due to their separation. Eric eventually moved back to his hometown after being displaced by CPS. Specifically, he indicated that he "ran away from [CPS]" because he "didn't like their rules." He has recently gotten into contact with one of his half-sisters as well as his two younger sisters, and he is now living with his friend, Robert, and Robert's mom, Diana.

Despite his largely displaced childhood, Eric successfully graduated from high school in 2011. However, while he was growing up, education was not prioritized in his family. When Eric was a child, he would often miss school because his father would take him with him to work. Eric's dad was a handyman, so he would find odd jobs around town, and often, he would take Eric along to help. As Eric remembers, "my dad never saw school as being an important thing, and as soon as I was able to walk and lift certain things, he would take me to work with him, and the only reason I went to school was because if I didn't, the police would come after him and charge him." Once Eric started going to school more regularly, he found school to be a good distraction for him:

> I've always seen school as an escape from everything. School was the one place where I was ever able to be a kid. A place where I could just zone out, relax, because the only other time was at night, that wasn't very much either; I was so tired from working with my dad that I'd fall straight asleep.

Eric was enrolled in Pre-AP classes in high school, but since he still did not have much stable support, he found himself moving around quite a bit, and this disrupted his schooling. Nevertheless, he still managed to graduate in 2011.

He heard about the Project LeeWay program through a friend's mother who had been through the program herself. She referred Eric to the program because she felt like it would give him a framework for support. As he reflected back on his experience in the program, Eric found that it really bolstered his confidence and gave him this support he needed. He said that by being around other potential college freshman, it helped him realize that he was not that different from everyone else, and his skills were where they needed to be. He also liked the support he received from his classmates and instructors, and in particular, he recalled his experiences with his mathematics instructor, Paul. Eric recalled how Paul took the time to help him explore topics that were not in the book:

> And it's about the little things about how he used this math that he would come up with, and I would ask him some questions on some things that he wouldn't cover because everyone else was in the lower math, and we'd get on the Internet and research the answers and come up with all these crazy, ridiculous things; it's pretty funny.

In addition to gaining this system of support, Eric indicated that one of the most helpful aspects of the program was the career exploration component. This helped him to gain insight into all the different career options he had.

Eric was unavailable for a follow-up interview because he entered into the military shortly after the program.

Michael

Michael, a Caucasian male in his mid-forties, dropped out of school when he was sixteen. He was living in an orphanage at the time and was forced to leave, so he had to drop out of school and join the workforce at a very young age. Since then, he has had a number of jobs, including working in the oil fields and driving an eighteen-wheeler. A few months prior to the beginning of Project LeeWay, Michael completed his GED, and through his GED preparation course, he learned about Project LeeWay. His hope was that the program would help him to learn better study habits since, he notes, he always had poor study habits, and it had been so long since he had to study.

Of all the courses in the program, he indicated that the mathematics preparation was the most helpful for him. In his words, "Just, I've been out of school for so long, and not using it every day, after a while you forget it, and if you don't use it, you lose it, so that was one of my biggest concerns was trying to pick up on it and get back to where I was at before." Similarly, Michael indicated that the study skills component helped him to "refresh [his] brain" and get back in the mode of studying. In this component, Michael also learned that he was a visual learner, which will help to guide his learning as he begins taking college courses next semester. In this way, then, Michael's participation in the program allowed him to restore his skills and discover things about himself prior to fully entering back into college.

Like Eric, Michael indicated the mathematics component of Project LeeWay was very helpful, and he wished that part of Project LeeWay could be extended beyond the assigned 75 minutes. He noted that Paul, the mathematics instructor, was "very adamant about helping" and is "very good at what he's doing." This review helped him to

advance his skills so that he was well-prepared for his mathematics class in his first semester where he noted that the first eight weeks were easy since they were a review of what he had learned/reviewed in Project LeeWay.

As for the reading and writing component of Project LeeWay, Michael described his instructor as "very knowledgeable" but wished the workload was more rigorous to prepare him to take the reading and writing placement test:

> The English and reading part of it, it's not, they give you a book and tell you you're going to talk about it, but then the session's over with and then it's over with. Why not discuss it as it goes, you know, give a little bit more to it, and I guess I'm being critical of it, but this is what I was imagining. I just came out of taking GED, and I'm thinking well, I need a little bit more aggressive study before I go take placement testing. I've been told this is an aggressive class, and this is what I need to do, and it has kind of let me down as far as that is concerned

Michael noted that he wanted more a more aggressive pace in the reading and writing class because he was uneasy about his skill level in this area. Unlike the Project LeeWay students who were recently in high school, Michael had not had any English instruction in many years, and he was hoping to have a chance to get caught up. He described in particular his expectations for this component of the program:

> Actually more assignments. Like papers, reading small articles, essay writing, to build your confidence in being able to do writing assignments, because that is uh, and maybe even some English, like sentence structure, grammar stuff, because that, maybe not for the younger generation, but for

> my age, I look at it, I've been out of school for a long time, and I wasn't that great of an English student when I was there, and now is a critical time for me to actually be getting help because it is a process of actually making complete sentences and stuff like that.

In a similar way, Michael described the value of the practicality of the study skills component of Project LeeWay, insisting that he learned how to break the habits he developed from being out of school for so long:

> ….like the older generation, you really get in routine as far as the things you do, you get up in your age, and you have to break that cycle, whereas if you're younger, you're used to going out and hanging with your buds and stuff, that would be easier to cut back on, but older people are used to having the TV on, sitting down and watching tv, eat dinner, hey, I'm not messing with that tonight. I'm guilty of it (laugh) just as much as the next person, and I have listened to other older students in the class, they don't have time for it and I know that's what it is, it's breaking their routine up

In this way, then, Michael notes that Project LeeWay has the ability to help bridge the gap when it comes to both skills and study habits, especially for students who have been out of school for an extended period of time.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a young Hispanic woman. She has five kids, ranging from seven months to nine years old. She seems to have very little help from her family or husband with her children. Jennifer mentioned that her father lives about 400 miles away, near the Texas-Mexico border, and her mother does not offer any support. Jennifer said her

mother's attitude is, "You had [kids], so you deal with them." Jennifer mentioned this apathy from her mother has been a common pattern for much of her life. When she was a child, her mother was minimally involved with her education: "I couldn't go her for any type of help. She was never in the teacher's conference. She was never around. She wouldn't help for parties or anything like that. So it was just me. It was kind of sad." Jennifer also noted that her mother's lack of education made her own education very difficult, especially when combined with other family issues:

> Ever since I can remember, I've always had problems. My mother didn't go to school. (phone rings) She was born in Mexico. She did get her residency card. But she never went to school so she didn't know how to read or write so it was very hard for me going to school, elementary, middle, everything because I couldn't, I didn't have anyone to help me. It was always just me and then I, but then I've been through some bad situations, um, family problems that also affected me, even though I'm grown now it still does affect me, I feel like I have my self-esteem low, it's been hard, but I'm still trying to hang on in there and try to accomplish my goal.

In many ways, Jennifer has been on her own since she was a child. She had very little support from her mother as a child and as an adult, and she also does not seem to have support from her husband. When she first heard about Project LeeWay, Jennifer learned that the program helped with childcare, which was something that she desperately needed since she was essentially on her own with no familial support. Jennifer noted, "I wanted the daycare. I don't have any family members here. I'm by myself, and it's hard.

I don't have anyone to say, hey, can you pick up the kids for just a little bit, they're with me all the time, and I mean it's my fault because I didn't take care of myself or whatever…" In this way, then, just by providing childcare, Jennifer was afforded a sense of support that she has never found elsewhere.

In addition to support, Jennifer found that the study skills component helped her to get "as super-organized as possible." She said that in this class, they spent time discussing various learning strategies and different types of learners. Also, she mentioned that she learned about resources available in the library. She was particularly interested in the technology available to students in the library, most notably the visual thesaurus. Jennifer was excited about the prospect of improving her vocabulary:

> So we learned a lot of new like technology stuff that they have like the visual thesaurus, which I didn't know anything about and that's something that I need because my vocabulary isn't how I want it. I wish I could use more intelligent words instead of the same words over and over, and the one that they showed us, it was really nice, it was, I mean it had all these words…

Jennifer also mentioned how the mathematics component had given her the confidence to ask questions in class. As a child, and even in high school, Jennifer recalled her lack of confidence in herself that made it hard for her to ask questions in class: "I don't think I was smart it was always hard for me to ask questions. I was always kind of timid, and I was like, 'Oh I hope someone else asks that question.'" However, after just a few weeks in the program, Jennifer began to find a significant sense of confidence, especially in her mathematics class:

> I really like math, and he'll ask, "does anyone know this answer?" and I'll start saying it, and it's really good, and I feel like I'm losing that…., and I'll start asking questions, where before I would not ask questions, and it was bad because that's how it was, and then when I would go to take the test I wouldn't know because I wouldn't ask the question.

Overall, despite the skills and confidence she gained from Project LeeWay, Jennifer still noted the difficulties of being a single mom as she navigated her first semester. Despite the support she received while in the program, she nevertheless still felt largely unsupported and was forced to drop one of her courses her first semester.

Anna

Anna is a young Caucasian female. She has two sons, a four-year-old, and a six-year-old. Her older son has cerebral palsy, and his needs for care are significant. Anna noted the challenges that come with raising a child with special needs:

> He can't walk and he doesn't talk, if you can understand what he's saying without all the vowels, then you can understand what he says, but, he's, since we just got here, he's starting his therapy on Tuesday, he'll see a physical therapist, occupational therapist, plus whatever he'll get in school, so I'm hoping that's going to help out a lot, but he's very smart, very, very smart. It did not affect him mentally at all, just physically.

Anna's six-year-old has been living with her mother for the last five years, so this is the first time he has been living with her on a daily basis, which presents new challenges for Anna every day.

Looking back at her education as a child, Anna says that she did well in high

school until her association with the wrong people caused her grades and attendance to slip. She began hanging out with a girl (who would later become her stepsister) who was doing drugs, and eventually, Anna starting doing drugs too. Anna recalled how quickly school became a low priority:

> I was the type of person, I was very quiet, and my step-sister, which we weren't step-sisters then, but we started hanging out, and she was doing things, and of course I wanted to fit in, so I started hanging out with them but they were doing drugs and stuff like that, and I was like I'm not going to do anything like that, you know, and finally like one night we went out, and I was like okay, I'll do it, but it wasn't like it was peer pressure, it was like I did it because I wanted to do it. So that led to that, and it just went on, and school became nothing to me.

Anna's aunt is a Project LeeWay alum, so Anna learned about the program through her. Anna noted that she hoped to refresh her skills since she had not been in a classroom setting for so long. In particular, she noted how beneficial the mathematics component was because it helped her to begin to remember all that she learned in high school. In addition, she said that the instruction on study skills has particularly helped her develop time management and organizational skills, which are important now that she has both of her sons living with her. Now, Anna insists, everything is very carefully planned out on a daily basis: "…because like now I used to not be on a schedule, and now I'm on a schedule when I get home, get up in the morning, get dressed, we're out the door, get home, clean up, cook dinner, they eat, bed, or bath and bed, and I do my work, and it's like that Monday through Friday, and even Saturday and Sunday." Anna noted

that starting this schedule in Project LeeWay before the semester began significantly helped her kids to adjust to her being back to school.

Other than time management, Anna also noted that she used "study buddies" and flashcards in her first semester, both of which are skills that were reviewed in Project LeeWay. Apart from academics, she also said that she learned a lot about college resources, such as how to apply for and manage her financial aid. Also, she learned about various contacts on campus, such as where to find a counselor and what services the counselors offer.

Overall, Anna said that the program gave students like her a boost, providing you the confidence to be a college student. She also noted the sense of support she obtained from the program as a whole and from the director, Clare, who, she noted, would "bend over backwards for you."

Carmen

Carmen is a young Hispanic female who has been out of school for nine years. She is currently pregnant and recently divorced. She was working a dead-end janitorial job when her sister encouraged her to get back into school. Growing up, Carmen recalled really enjoying school, and she was even in advanced classes in junior high. However, in high school, she started to get into trouble, which caused her to drop out when she was fifteen years old. Carmen started working soon after she dropped out, but then she saw that without a high school diploma or GED, she was not eligible for the simplest of jobs. She wanted to return to school to pursue a GED and begin college, but she said that her husband at the time was very jealous and did not support her education. According to Carmen, he was a very controlling man:

Researcher: What prevented you from entering college sooner?

Carmen: My jealous ex-husband.

Researcher: Was he afraid you would…?

Carmen: He was afraid I would find someone else. Always he was….he was Hispanic, so the machismo, and all that came into play.

Researcher: Did he tell you you couldn't?

Carmen: Yeah, and since he was older, it was like, I was kind of like scared of him.

After her divorce, Carmen had the freedom to go back to school. Both her sister and mother are former Project LeeWay students, and they encouraged her to consider enrolling in the program. Carmen noted that the primary benefit of the program for her was that it was a great way to refresh her skills and to "get back into the mood of things" since she had been out of school for nine years. As far as academics are concerned, Carmen said that the mathematics component had been very helpful, especially since they were assigned homework daily just like a real college course. Also, she said the reading and writing component was helpful just because she had not written anything for so long.

In addition to academics, Carmen noted that she found out about many of the college's resources, such as counseling and GED services. Carmen was even able to use what she learned to help answer her cousin's questions about GED resources at the college. Also, she learned about different types of careers in the Career Exploration component of Project LeeWay, which helped her to determine that she was more suited toward a technical-based career, like Industrial or Analytical Instrumentation, than a

medical-based career, like nursing.

Overall, Carmen insisted that Project LeeWay has provided her with the confidence that she lost when she dropped out of high school:

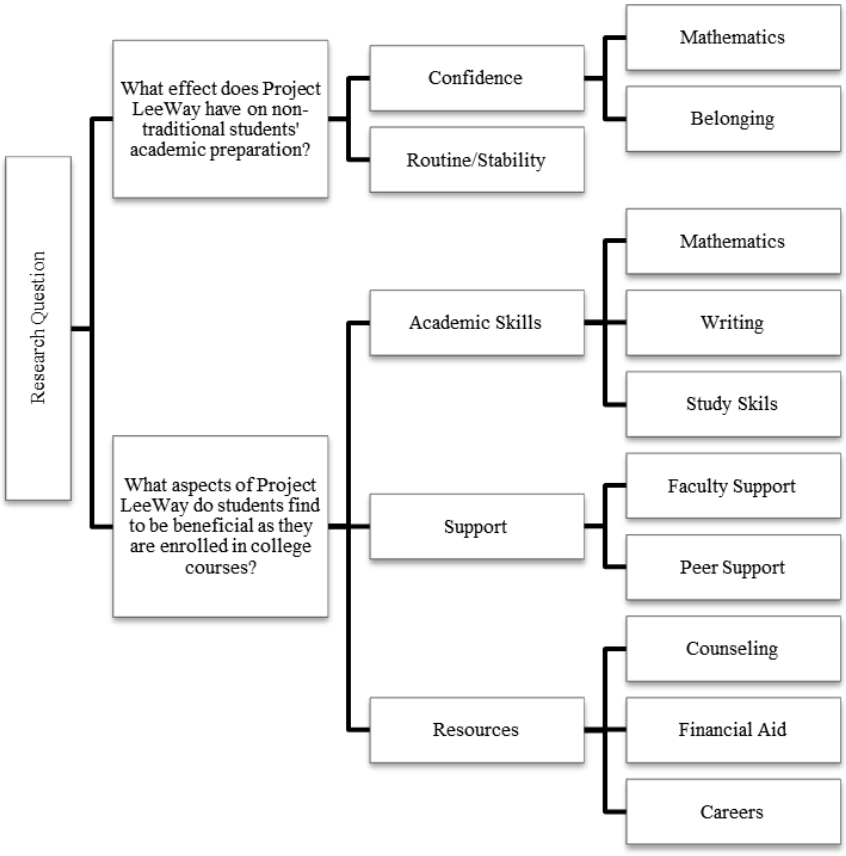
> I wasn't confident to begin with. I wasn't confident because I felt like I was stupid because I dropped out of high school. I felt like I wasn't going to be able to go into college, and I figured if I dropped out of high school, I'd end up dropping out of college, so this has brought more confidence about what to expect.

Emergent Themes

An examination of the interview data revealed several recurring themes and subthemes. Figure 1 provides a visual summarization of these themes.

Figure 1

Themes and Sub-Themes



In an examination of the transcribed student interviews, five primary themes emerged. Of these themes, several sub-themes surfaced, which identified specific aspects of the program that had the most significant effects and benefits for the students who were interviewed.

To help answer the research questions, data were gathered in several forms. First, several in-depth interviews were conducted. The Project LeeWay director was interviewed to get an overview of the program, including its history, learning philosophy, objectives, and curriculum. In addition, all available instructors were interviewed to determine how each course was structured and what type of material was covered. Finally, five students were interviewed to establish their background and their experiences in Project LeeWay. Furthermore, the survey items were matched with the corresponding themes, and the mean, standard deviation, and percentage of the two highest levels of response ("Somewhat" and "Extremely") were calculated (Appendix N). This survey data was integrated into the discussion of the themes whenever appropriate, and connections to other research studies were established. The themes were sorted using the "cutting and sorting" technique, where quotes from the interviews are cut and pasted onto index cards for easy sorting into themes and subthemes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 63-4).

Research Question One

The first research question related to the effectiveness of Project LeeWay on students' academic skills and preparation. Through the data, two primary themes emerged that were directly associated with this research question: confidence and routine/stability. The survey data clearly supported the theme of confidence. Of the 15

students surveyed, 93% responded that Project LeeWay gave them confidence as college students, and 100% responded that Project LeeWay prepared them to be successful college students. Furthermore, only 27% responded that they would have been successful without Project LeeWay; notably, however, this survey item (Item 8) had the highest standard deviation, indicating the widest range of answers in the survey.

Confidence.

In the interview data, the students cited that the program made them confident in two specific ways: through the acquisition of mathematics skills and by providing a sense of belonging. First, several students insisted that the program gave them confidence because they were able to refresh their skills, especially their mathematics skills. For these students, mathematics appeared to be the most significant area of weakness. Michael, for example, was the oldest of the students who were studied. Although he did review mathematics when he took his GED preparation course, he had not had any formal mathematics instruction for more than 20 years, and, as Michael noted, "if you don't use it, you lose it." Michael found the mathematics component of Project LeeWay so helpful that he wished it would have lasted longer than the scheduled 75 minute period. He also noted that when he took his first developmental mathematics course in the fall semester after Project LeeWay, the first eight weeks of the semester were very easy because he had the benefit of a thorough review. This allowed Michael to enter his mathematics course with confidence to gradually ease into the content.

Jennifer noted that a different type of confidence emerged from the mathematics component in Project LeeWay. For her, it helped her be more confident in asking and answering questions in class. It was not clear if she felt more comfortable in class

because she felt more confident in her mathematics skills or because the mathematics instructor and his teaching style/classroom management, etc. made her feel confident. Nevertheless, she noted that she felt she was losing some of her insecurities through all that she gained in the mathematics component.

Finally, of the five students who were interviewed, Eric had the most advanced mathematics skills entering the program. He noted how the mathematics instructor would allow him to explore more advanced topics on his own, and this gave Eric confidence in himself and his ability to work independently.

Another area of confidence was that of belonging to a group or belonging within the college environment. For several students, Project LeeWay made them feel more confident as college students because the experience allowed them to see that there were other students who had similarly delayed their enrollment into college for various reasons. This helped the students to feel a sense of belonging and eliminated their anxiety of alienation as entering non-traditional college freshman. For example, Eric, a self-identified orphan, noted that when he met other students in Project LeeWay, he realized he was not that different from everyone else: "I see how other people are also entering into college, and I compared them to myself, and I see that I'm not too far off from where I need to be, and I'm doing pretty good." Even though Eric was the youngest of the five students interviewed, and even though he had just graduated high school, he nevertheless thought of himself as different because of the difficulties and instability he had been subjected to his entire life.

Unlike Eric, Carmen admitted that she had been out of school for nine years, and she first gained confidence from Project LeeWay before she even attended the first

orientation session. This is because her sister and mother were both Project LeeWay alumni. She noted that her sister got pregnant at a very young age (as did Carmen), and despite all her hardships and responsibilities, Carmen's sister made it through Project LeeWay and attended college while also raising two kids. Carmen describes how her sister's experience in Project LeeWay gave her the confidence to come back to school:

> Well I've been out of school for nine years, I decided to come back. My sister was the one that motivated me; she's like a pusher. She made me quit my job, and she said go to school, it's better for you. And in the long run it is because I didn't want to be cleaning all my life. I was working in janitorial; it was like a dead end job; it had good benefits, though. But so yeah, and my sister, to see her come back, I mean she got pregnant very young like me, and to see her come back and actually being able to do it with having two kids, it was kind of inspiring to me.

In this way, by observing her sister's success despite her hardships, Carmen felt a renewed sense of confidence in her own abilities to be successful in college.

In addition, Anna also noted how her classmates in Project LeeWay made her confident in this sense of belonging in college. She said that despite each student's unique background, all the students in the program were in it for the same fundamental reasons. In this way, Anna seemed to feel even more of a sense of belonging as she compared herself to others in the program. Overall, the survey indicated that 87% of students felt that Project LeeWay helped to reduce their anxiety about being in college. Although the survey item did not mention a specific variety of anxiety (fear of belonging, weak academic skills, financial concerns, etc.), it is likely that this reduced anxiety is

related to the students' overall sense of confidence upon completing the program. According to Christie et al. (2008), this sense of belonging is an essential type of relationship that non-traditional students need in order to feel accepted into the college environment (p. 567). They need to be fully "absorbed" into the culture of college (p. 568), and Project LeeWay can help facilitate this process by first introducing them to other students with similar characteristics.

Routine and stability.

Another theme was that of the establishment of some sort of steady routine or sense of stability. Many of the students who were interviewed had been out of school for several years and were not used to going to classes on a daily basis. Project LeeWay's rigorous and steady schedule of classes helped them to get in the habit of being in class and staying on track. Also, some of the students who were interviewed had been displaced several times due to various personal situations, and this often required them to frequently move. Eric, for example, moved around quite a bit as a child, and did not attend school regularly because he would often go to work with his father. As a high school student, he also frequently moved due to a lack of stable support. Being in Project LeeWay was a change of pace for Eric because it required stability and routine. It should also be noted that although Eric completed Project LeeWay, he was not available for a follow-up interview because he ended up joining the military prior to finishing his first full semester in college. Perhaps the routine that he established in Project LeeWay attracted him to the military, where many practices and procedures are also very structured and habitual.

Anna also elaborated on how Project LeeWay helped her establish a routine,

which was essential since both of her two children were now living with her. Anna insisted that she and her boys now maintained a consistent schedule from morning until evening, five days a week: "…I used to not be on a schedule, and now I'm on a schedule when I get home, get up in the morning, get dressed, we're out the door, get home, clean up, cook dinner, they eat, bed, or bath and bed, and I do my work, and it's like that Monday through Friday, and even Saturday and Sunday." The six weeks in Project LeeWay helped Anna establish this schedule well before the fall semester began, which helped her and her boys to more easily transition into a new routine. This stability, Anna insisted, even helped to improve the behavior of her sons.

Similarly, Michael found that he needed to learn to break his old routine and establish a new one. Since he had been out in the workforce for so long, Michael found himself in a comfortable routine, and Project LeeWay gave him practical tips to help him get into a more academically-based routine. Michael noted that as part of "the older generation, you really get in routine as far as the things you do; you get up in your age, and you have to break that cycle…older people are used to having the TV on, sitting down and watching TV, eat dinner…" Project LeeWay helped Michael to recognize that he would have to discontinue this familiar routine in order to be successful in college.

Research Question Two

The second research question related to determining which aspects of Project LeeWay were most beneficial as students enrolled in college courses. Through the student interviews, three primary themes emerged that were directly associated with this research question: academic skills, support, and resources. Survey data was integrated into the discussion of the themes whenever appropriate.

Academic skills.

First, the students felt strongly that the mathematics, reading/writing, and study skills courses helped to bring their skills up to a more confident level. According to Ross-Gordon (2003), non-traditional students, especially those who have been out of school for several years, can regain their academic confidence through basic skills development. Specifically, all five students who were interviewed felt very strongly about the value of the mathematics instruction, noting the swift pace of the course was beneficial because they were able to cover a great deal of material in preparation for their first semester of mathematics in college, and in the survey, 94% of the students agreed that Project LeeWay helped refresh their math skills. For example, Michael noted how well-prepared and confident he was in his first developmental mathematics class because of the skills he learned in Project LeeWay. Jennifer, Carmen, and Anna insisted that the mathematics instruction was a good refresher of what they learned in high school, and Eric commented on his ability to work independently in this class and explore more advanced topics.

Next, several students noted the importance of the writing review since many had not had any sort of academic writing instruction in several years, with 87% of the students surveyed indicating that Project LeeWay helped refresh their English skills. For instance, even though Eric just graduated high school, he insisted that his writing improved significantly as a result of the reading and writing instruction he received in Project LeeWay. In addition, both Eric and Anna described how the reading and writing instructor's passion for reading and writing had a lasting impact on them. In Anna's words, "[our reading instructor] is very, very, very, what would you call it…what's the

word...sentimental about her reading…she wants you to READ! No matter what it is, she wants you to read. She said no matter if you pick up and you read a book and you read the first 25 pages, put it down and find another one." Michael also seemed to appreciate the reading and writing instructor's abilities and passion in her content area, but he noted a desire for a more academically-aligned reading and writing review in Project LeeWay. Michael suggested that for older students like him, he would have liked the reading and writing component to be more like the mathematics component, which simulated a real transitional mathematics course in college. By completing more relevant coursework, he felt he would have been more academically prepared. Michael specifically described some of the content he felt would have been useful:

> Like papers, reading small articles, essay writing, to build your confidence in being able to do writing assignments, because that is uh, and maybe even some English, like sentence structure, grammar stuff, because that, maybe not for the younger generation, but for my age, I look at it, I've been out of school for a long time, and I wasn't that great of an English student when I was there, and now is a critical time for me to actually be getting help because it is a process of actually making complete sentences and stuff like that.

Finally, all five students insisted they learned new and beneficial study skills, with students pointing to time management, organization, learning styles, and memorization/study techniques as the most significant gains in this area. The acquisition of these skills, according to MacDonald and Stratta (1998), can help to bridge the learning gap and improve the self-confidence of non-traditional students entering into

college. As noted above in the discussion of the first research question, Anna recalled how being in the six-week program helped her and her children create and maintain a routine prior to beginning her first full semester in college. These time management skills helped with the transition into college, and Anna's children were fully adapted to a new schedule by the time the fall semester began. Jennifer expressed organizational skills as a benefit of the program, noting that her primary motivation for entering the program was so that she "could get as super-organized as possible." Both Jennifer and Michael noted how the review of learning styles helped them to figure out how they learned and studied. Furthermore, the use of flashcards was mentioned by Anna, Eric, Carmen, and Michael, with Anna noting that of all the study skills, this technique was what helped her the most in her first semester in college. Finally, Eric admitted that he entered the program not knowing how to study; as a child, as soon as he was able to lift objects, Eric was taken to work with his father, so school and after-school studying were certainly not emphasized. Overall, the survey yielded similarly positive results as related to the study skills component of the program. Notably, 100% of students agreed that Project LeeWay helped them learn how to study. Furthermore, 94% agreed that study groups would be a helpful way to study in their first semester in college, and 100% agreed that using a study buddy would be a helpful way to study their first semester in college.

Support.

Next, the theme of support was evidenced in the student interviews and classroom observations and in the survey, where Project LeeWay students not only felt staff support through the instruction and advice given to them by their instructors and the staff, but

they also felt the support of their classmates through indirect association inside and direct outside of class. According to Boulard (2004), unlike traditional students, who often have parents, siblings, or other family members to turn to for reference when applying to and attending college, non-traditional students often enter college with a lack of practical knowledge of college practices and procedures (p.10). Similarly, Bowl's (2001) case studies demonstrate this need for support to remediate the perceived disadvantages non-traditional students feel; several of the students Bowl studied noted that since they came from uneducated families, they did not have anyone to turn to for advice, assistance, or support (pp. 148-151). Notably, Jennifer commented that she recognized this lack of support at a very young age because her mother never attended school. Nancy recalls feeling alone and wholly unsupported: "My mother didn't go to school. She was born in Mexico. She did get her residency card. But she never went to school so she didn't know how to read or write, so it was very hard for me going to school, elementary, middle, everything because I couldn't, I just didn't have anyone to help me. It was always just me." Because of situations such as this, it is important that non-traditional students establish a system of support through various types of relationships on campus.

According to the interview and survey data, in the area of staff and instructor support, 100% of students agreed that Project LeeWay staff members were available for help when needed, and 100% agreed that Project LeeWay instructors were available for help when needed. Michael, for example, felt the mathematics instructor was "very adamant about helping," and Carmen similarly noted that the math instructor "tries as much as he can to help you out." Likewise, Eric mentioned that the math instructor was supportive of his advanced math skills, and he recalled how the math instructor would

work with him one-on-one in researching complex math topics on the Internet. Jennifer noted that overall, the faculty and staff have "all been very helpful," and Anna commented on the support of the program director, insisting that she would "bend over backwards for you." This program support did not end with the program cycle; as part of their agreement for the program, students were required to meet with the LeeWay director once a week for the first semester they are enrolled in college. Anna mentioned that this meeting was really just a "little check-in" to make sure they were staying on track, and Michael commented that sometimes he would talk to the director about the specific classes he was taking at the time.

In the area of student support, the survey indicated that students felt positively about the support given to them by their peers in the program. Specifically, 93% of students indicated that they felt support from their classmates while in the program, and similarly, 93% acknowledged that they plan to stay in contact with their Project LeeWay peers in the future. Jennifer, for example, noted that several of her Project LeeWay classmates plan to go into the nursing program, and to help each other, they are making arrangements so that they can all register for the same classes. Jennifer commented that it will be helpful to have the support of her Project LeeWay classmates when she studies because she will not have to do it alone: "They're very nice. They're very helpful…like we're all trying to …like for all of us in nursing, we're all trying to get the same classes, to try to study together and make study groups…before, I wouldn't have done that because I was always by myself."

Similarly, Eric commented that what interested him the most about Project LeeWay was the opportunity for support, especially since he did not have a stable home

life. Eric noted how his Project LeeWay classmates supported each other in the program, each in his or her own way: “Some are quiet, some stay back, some give you the little football coach push and push you down just so you can prove to them that you can get back up, and there are some that just sit back and support you.” In addition, Eric found support through the realization that he was not alone with regard to age, background, and skill level; this indirectly gave him a sense of support and belonging. Eric commented that when he compared himself to other students in the program, he saw that he was not that different: “I see how other people are also entering into college, and I compared myself to them, and I see that I’m not too far off from where I need to be, and I’m doing pretty good.”

Furthermore, as evidenced in the classroom observation, students developed friendships which extended from inside the classroom to outside the classroom, where students socially interacted and supported one another. Students seemed to naturally group themselves together through their commonalities. For example, several of the younger women with children supported each other, and the two young men in the program were often found together. Accordingly, in the survey, 100% of the students indicated that they made new friends through Project LeeWay, and these friendships, like the ones described above, could offer support in future semesters.

Resources.

Finally, students pointed to resource knowledge as an advantage of the program. Specifically, students were appreciative of the counseling services they learned about, and according to Belcastro and Purslow (2006), these services, and specifically, a relationship with a college counselor or advisor, are essential for non-traditional students’

success (p. 6). Many non-traditional students experience stress and anxiety upon entering college due to the unfamiliarity and uncertainty related to this transition, and counselors can help non-traditional students address their concerns and manage their emotions (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 11). In the student interviews, Carmen felt confident enough in her knowledge of counseling services that she was able to direct a relative to the appropriate counseling office, and Michael noted that Project LeeWay helped him to understand that counseling services were available to him as a student whenever he needed them, which was something he had not known before the program. Michael also mentioned that Project LeeWay made him aware of the college's Educational Opportunity Center (EOC). This office is a counseling resource for adults interested in returning to college, and its staff provides one-on-one assistance in several areas, such as financial aid, GED programs, and basic college enrollment procedures (Lee College, n.d., Educational Opportunity Center). According to Chao and Good (2004) these counseling services are essential as non-traditional students manage the anxiety that often accompanies this transition into college (p. 11).

In addition to counseling services, Eric and Anna both mentioned the benefits of learning about financial aid services within the college. Boulard (2004) found that finances are "the single most important factor determining both college access and completion" (p. 10), and according to Ashburn (2007), many non-traditional students are not aware of financial aid options upon enrollment into college. Project LeeWay helps to inform students of financial aid resources, contacts, and options and guides students through the often-complicated financial aid process.

Another resource that students noted was related to careers. According to Belcastro and Purslow (2006), many non-traditional students enter college because they "need to enter, advance, or change their job or careers" (p. 8), and Kasworm (2003) notes that 85% of adult students enter college with "career reasons" as their primary college goal (p. 5). Since Project LeeWay is funded by a Perkins Grant, which supports technical and vocational careers, it was designed to specifically highlight technical and vocational degrees, many of which can be earned in two years or less, allowing students to enter the workforce fairly quickly. In the interviews, several students described the benefit of learning about several of these career fields through the Career Exploration component, and in the survey, 100% of the students agreed that Project LeeWay helped them learn about careers they had not previously considered. Eric said that the career exploration component was the most helpful part of Project LeeWay because it helped him to "see different careers, different options [he] had." Eric mentioned that before Project LeeWay, he did not know what kind of career was right for him, and he considered going into the army so that his path would be chosen for him. Carmen mentioned that she learned a lot about the different medical careers the college offered. Anna noted that she entered Project LeeWay with an interest in cosmetology, but after a visit from the campus Fieldbus Center director, she realized she had a talent for Instrumentation. Anna recalled when she made this realization:

> I came in for cosmetology, and Jessica, who works in the Fieldbus Center, she asked me, she's like, "Do you like messing with gadgets?" and I was like, "Yeah, I like taking my cell phone apart and putting them back together, and messing with my microwave and DVD player," and she was

> like, "Well you should think about instrumentation," and I was like, "What's instrumentation?" and she explained it to me and I was like, "I'll think about it," and so I didn't make my choice right then. I've been thinking about it and between when I first talked to her, and I decided to go ahead and do it.

Clearly, this opportunity for career exploration helped students choose majors and plan their courses for several semesters.

Conclusions

This chapter reported the content of the interviews, observations, and survey and provided an overview of the emergent themes and subthemes found within the data. In addition, it provided connections to the needs of non-traditional as outlined in the literature review and as primarily outlined by Belcastro and Purslow (2006). The next chapter will discuss the conclusions drawn from these themes as well as the significance of the findings of the study, especially regarding implications for future studies surrounding program content for high-risk, non-traditional students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter serves several purposes; first, it provides an overview of the study and a summary of emergent themes in the data; next, it presents the conclusions drawn from these themes; third, it discusses implications for similar programs geared toward non-traditional students; fourth, it examines the limitations in the study; and finally, it recommends several areas of future research as related to the study.

Overview of the Study

According to Belcastro and Purslow, non-traditional students make up 73% of the total undergraduate student population (2006, p. 2). Horn (1996) identifies non-traditional students as those who have two or more of the following characteristics: delays enrollment, attends part-time, works full-time while enrolled, is financially independent, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, or does not have a high school diploma but may have a GED or equivalent. If a student has four or more of these characteristics, he or she is said to be a "high-risk" non-traditional student. Given that high-risk non-traditional students are a relatively small student population, very little research has been done to determine what their needs as they transition into college. Furthermore, few programs exist to support them in this transition.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of one such program at a community college in Southeast Texas and to consider its impact on high-risk non-traditional students, including how it affects the students' preparedness as they enroll in their first semester in college. To determine this, students, instructors, and staff were

interviewed regarding their experiences in Project LeeWay. In addition, all students present on the last day of the program (15 students total) were given a survey. All the data were treated as archival data since the data were collected as part of the researcher's professional duties outside of the research study. From this data, several common themes emerged to help respond to the research questions that guided the study. The research questions were as follows:

1. What effect does Project LeeWay have on non-traditional students' academic preparation?
2. What aspects of Project LeeWay do students find to be beneficial as they are enrolled in college courses?

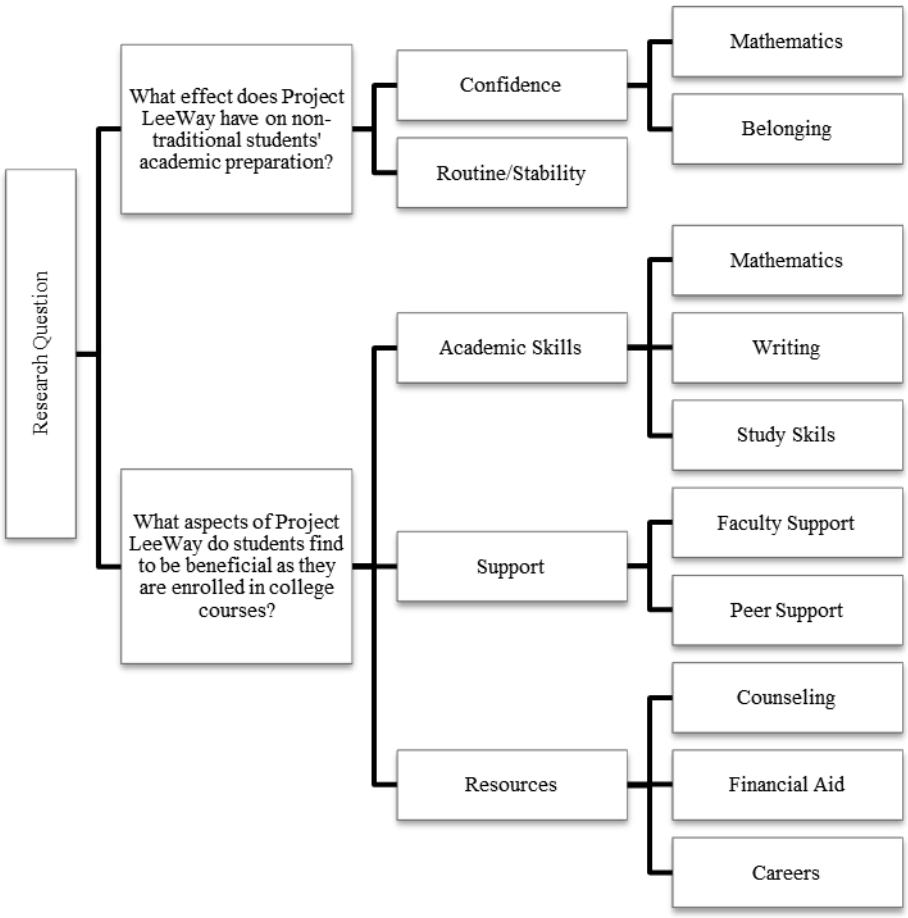
This study will help to determine what non-traditional students need to be academically and emotionally prepared for their entrance into higher education. Not only will the study contribute to the limited body of research on high-risk, non-traditional students, but it will also help to shape new and existing programs centered on the needs of non-traditional students as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Discussion of Themes

Several themes emerged in examining the data. These themes were evidenced through the student interviews and through the small-scale survey. In addition to the primary themes, several sub-themes also emerged (Figure 1):

Figure 1

Themes and Sub-Themes



The results of this study will not only help to shape and establish other college preparatory programs for non-traditional students, but it will also help Project LeeWay staff and instructors to edit the program in order for it to yield the most effective experience for its participants.

Constructing Confidence

Of the 15 students surveyed, 93 % agreed that Project LeeWay gave them confidence in being a college student. This is also evidenced in the student interviews, which revealed two types of confidence: academic confidence, specifically in

mathematics, and self-confidence, specifically in belonging in the college learning environment.

Math.

The first identified sub-theme of confidence was specifically confidence related to mathematics skills and instruction. Most students found the mathematics instruction particularly helpful in boosting their academic confidence, with 94% of students agreeing that Project LeeWay helped to refresh their mathematics skills. Michael noted how in his first semester of developmental mathematics after Project LeeWay, he was nearly a half-semester ahead of the rest of his class because of the instruction he received in Project LeeWay. He also expressed an interest in extending this component longer than the standard 75-minute block, and he appreciated how the instructor recreated an authentic college math course in Project LeeWay. Similarly, as noted above, Jennifer found her voice through the confidence she gained in her mathematics course, and no longer feared asking questions. Also, Eric's one-on-one work with the math instructor on more advanced math topics reinforced his confidence in his natural abilities.

Because there was so much student commentary on the mathematics component, this suggests mathematics is a significant area of concern for non-traditional students, especially for those who had delayed entrance into college. Students seemed to appreciate the structure of the mathematics component, especially the fast pace of course, which allowed students to cover a large quantity of material in the six-week Project LeeWay cycle.

Implications.

The data suggests that students would benefit from expanding the mathematics

component of Project LeeWay. For example, the program director could consider extending the mathematics component of Project LeeWay beyond the scheduled 75 minutes, but this, however, would likely require cutting into the allotted time of existing content areas. Another consideration could be to place mathematics at the end of each day instead of in the morning. This would allow students to work with the instructor after class (if he or she is available) to get further ahead. In addition, since none of the students commented on the utility of the computer course, that time slot could be used as an additional mathematics session on Thursdays, and the computer course could possibly be integrated into the reading and writing course since some of the content is naturally aligned. Finally, since students seemed to respond to the rigor and the authenticity of the course in replicating an actual developmental mathematics course, perhaps other Project LeeWay courses should be similarly structured.

Belonging.

The second identified sub-theme of confidence was related to the self-confidence of establishing a sense of belonging in the college environment. In the survey, 87% of students agreed that Project LeeWay helped them to lessen their anxiety about being in college. This anxiety was reduced in a number or ways. Eric, for example, felt more comfortable entering college as he learned that his academic skills were aligned with other students in the group. Jennifer also noted how the program gave her academic confidence. She noted that in high school, she was always afraid to ask questions in class, but now she has lost that fear through the confidence she gained in her Project LeeWay mathematics course where she not only asked questions in class, but she also contributed answers during the lecture. Similarly, Carmen noted her lack of academic

confidence, which was primarily due to her having dropped out of high school. This shame and embarrassment significantly affected her confidence and made her feel as though she would similarly drop out of college, but Project LeeWay helped her to know what to expect in college so that any uncertainty about her potential as a college student was minimized, and her experience helped her to recognize that there are others like her and that a college degree and stable job could be a part of her future. Like Jennifer, Project LeeWay also gave her confidence of voice. Carmen recalled how in the reading/writing component of Project LeeWay, students were asked to read their journal assignments aloud to the class. Although she was hesitant at first, Carmen noted how this helped her overcome her shyness and become more confident speaking in class.

Confidence seemed to be established through association with other students in the program. Having an opportunity to interact learn with students with similar backgrounds prior to the beginning of the semester seemed to remove some of the intimidation students associated with college.

Implications.

Small-scale, cost-effective versions of this program could be established on other campuses to give potential students the opportunity to interact with other students and with faculty to help alleviate some of the anxiety associated with entering college.

Establishing a Routine

Another theme that was evidenced in the data was the establishment of a routine and stability. According to the director of Project LeeWay, many students who enter the program do not have much experience with stability. Many students, for various reasons, have been forced to move frequently and focus solely on daily survival. Project LeeWay

was designed, Clare insists, to help students establish a steady routine since students come to class nearly seven hours a day, four days a week for six weeks. Several participants noted the benefit of the stability that the program offered them.

Eric, for example, had an extremely unstable childhood. He moved around a lot with his parents as a child, and after the deaths of his parents, he transitioned through several foster households and was separated from his siblings. When he got to Project LeeWay, he found himself in a stable, scheduled environment.

For students who had been out of school for extended periods of time, establishing this routine was one of the most valued skills they learned in Project LeeWay. Michael, the oldest of the five participants, noted how Project LeeWay helped him break old habits and develop a new routine that is more academically appropriate, something that was very important to him since he had been out of school for nearly 30 years. In a similar way, Carmen, who had been out of school for nine years, noted the program was a great way for her to "get back in the mood of things."

For single mothers with children, establishing a stable routine is essential in order to manage and balance family life and academics. Anna noted how Project LeeWay helped her and her sons establish this much-needed routine. Anna's mother had been caring for her two sons for a few years prior to Anna entering Project LeeWay, so as a single mother now solely responsible for her two children, one with special needs, Anna used what she learned in Project LeeWay to carefully manage her time and plan each day so that she was able to balance her home life and her academic life. She noted having the six-week experience in Project LeeWay helped make the transition into college easier for her children because the routine had already been established. Similarly, Jennifer

mentioned that she wanted to use what she used in Project LeeWay to become as organized as possible, a necessity for a single mother with five children and little support.

Even after Project LeeWay ended, all students maintained a sense of routine by continuing to visit the program director once a week during their first semester in college as part of their original Project LeeWay agreement.

According to Horn (1996), one of the primary characteristics of a non-traditional student is that he or she has delayed enrollment into college. The students in this study clearly benefitted from having an opportunity to establish a routine prior to entering college. This allowed the students and their families, if applicable, to slowly transition into a new schedule.

Implications.

Even for traditional college students, transitioning into the first year of college can be unsettling. Perhaps all new college students, both traditional and non-traditional could benefit from having an opportunity to adjust to a new schedule through various short-term programs on campus prior to the beginning of the semester. For traditional college students, this would help to regulate the autonomy and flexibility of college, which is in stark transition to the rigidity of high school, and for non-traditional students, it would help to establish a new routine, which would especially help students with children since multiple schedules would have to be maintained.

Reinforcing Skills

Several students pointed to the significance of the refresh of academic skills in the areas of mathematics, reading/writing, and study skills. In the survey, 67% agreed that Project LeeWay helped them feel better about their academic abilities. The participant

interviews reflect the survey results, with most students feeling strongly about mathematics and study skills and less strongly about reading and writing.

Mathematics.

The mathematics component was described as the most rigorous among the study participants, and 94% of the students agreed that it helped to refresh their math skills. This was the only course that had actual exams and homework, and the pace was the most rapid. Based on the student and instructor descriptions and the classroom observation, this component of Project LeeWay was most closely aligned with an actual developmental college mathematics course, so perhaps students felt as if they were getting an authentic college experience in this course.

Study skills.

The study skills component was also highly ranked among the study participants. The survey indicated that they will continue to use several study techniques they learned about in this course. For example, 100% agreed that using study buddies would be beneficial next semester, and similarly, 94% agreed that using study groups would be helpful. All students who were interviewed noted the practicality of what they learned in the study skills course, citing time management, flashcards, planning and organizing, and learning styles.

Reading and writing.

The reading/writing component was less highly ranked and cited, with 87% of students surveyed agreeing that their English skills were refreshed. Michael had hoped that the reading and writing component would be more rigorous, in-depth, and "aggressive." He noted that there was no grammar review and very little review of

structured writing. However, students appreciated the passion of the instructor, who is a published author of young adult fiction. Anna noted that the instructor simply wanted to instill in the students a love of reading and writing instead of focusing on specific academic content. This teaching practice was helpful for Eric, who noted that his writing improved a lot simply through repetition of practice.

Implications.

The data suggests that students value refreshing their content skills. The reading and writing component was perceived as being the least rigorous and the least aligned to what students thought a developmental English course should be. Perhaps the students were not aware of the instructor's teaching philosophy in teaching, which allowed students the freedom to explore the content without any sort of formal structure.

Establishing a System of Support

The informal observations of the students, especially outside of class, suggest that students were able to identify with one another and establish support systems. Young single mothers tended to group together, as did the two younger male students in the group. This also likely contributed to the students' sense of belonging in a college environment.

Instructors and staff also contributed to establishing support. Eric noted how his mathematics instructor took the time to work with him one-on-one since his mathematics skills were advanced beyond his classmates. Michael noted that he learned about the counseling services that were available and appreciated knowing counselors were there for support if needed. Jennifer insisted the childcare helped provide her support since she had no assistance from her husband or family. By having steady, dependable childcare,

Jennifer felt supported emotionally and academically. For all students, the program director remains a consistent source of support. As mentioned above, Project LeeWay students are contractually obligated to meet with the director once a week every week for their first semester in college. Although, as Anna described, this meeting is typically informal and brief, it gives students a sense of consistency and sponsorship throughout their first semester, continuing the system of support that was first established in Project LeeWay.

Implications.

This cohort-based, fast-track setting proved to be effective in establishing relationships of support. College courses in general could also benefit by building courses that mimic this same structure. A cohort, such as the one in Project LeeWay, allows students repetitious exposure to instructors and students, increasing the opportunity to build relationships. Also, since students were required to meet with the Leeway director once a week during their first semester in college, students had a peer coach of sorts, much like the success coaches Farrell (2007) describes at Our Lady of the Lake University (p. 45-46). Perhaps all first-year non-traditional students would benefit from a faculty mentor who could help support them as they make the transition into college.

Resource Knowledge

Of the 15 students surveyed, 100% agreed that Project LeeWay helped to inform them of potential careers that they had not previously considered. By the end of the program, all five case study participants had established a definite major, degree plan, and career path. Anna, for example, learned what Instrumentation was and found that it

was very much aligned with her interests. Although Anna decided to change her major from Instrumentation to cosmetology, she nevertheless used what she learned in Project LeeWay to make this alternative plan. Carmen also noted how the Career Exploration component was helpful in planning her future, and she used this knowledge to eliminate medical-based careers, such as nursing, and to pursue technical-based careers, like Instrumentation and Computer Maintenance. Students also reported that they learned about counseling services. Carmen used this knowledge to refer a relative to counseling on campus, and Michael noted the utility of the campus Educational Resource Center. In addition, students were appreciative of financial aid resources. Boulard (2004) insists that finances can greatly impede upon a student's access to college and knowledge of and accessibility to this resource is essential.

Implications.

The data suggests that of the three types of resources cited by students in the interviews, career knowledge seemed to be the most utilized and valued resource. For both traditional and non-traditional students, career exploration in various formats could be similarly integrated within the existing curriculum. Since a Career Exploration component was built into the Project LeeWay schedule, students were continuously exposed to a number of career options, and this allowed students to slowly consider which field best suited their interests. Perhaps an elective course could be created to focus specifically on careers; as a credit course, this would provide students an incentive to fully explore career options.

Program Recommendations

Currently, very little is currently being done to longitudinally track Project LeeWay students. By keeping formal, continuous data on the participants, Project LeeWay staff would be able to more comprehensively examine the long-term effects of the program. Consequently, if this data suggests Project LeeWay produces significant long-term effects, it is possible the program would be eligible for more funding, and this could help to extend or enhance the existing program structure.

Finally, although Project LeeWay instructors and staff are specifically chosen by the program's director, it is possible that they have only limited experience with the needs of non-traditional students. Perhaps opportunities for instructor professional development before each Project LeeWay cycle would greatly benefit both instructors and program participants.

Limitations

The limitations in this study included time, sample size, limited student population, researcher bias, and variability of instructors.

First, the primary obstacle was time. The in-depth interviews in general were time-consuming and had to be scheduled at the students' convenience. Because of hectic and often unstable schedules, this was a difficult task, especially since we needed at least an hour for each interview, so the pace of some of the interviews was rushed a bit. In addition, the amount of time the students and program could be observed was limited because the researcher's residence is about fifty miles from the campus. Scheduling the post-interviews was especially difficult, as this was done after the program had ended, and in fact, two of the five case study students were unavailable for post-interviews; one

student dropped out of the program before it ended, and another student joined the military.

Another difficulty that was encountered was sample size. Because of the need for in-depth interviews, the starting sample size in this study was intentionally small, but with two students unavailable for post-interviews, this further limited the sample size. Clearly, a larger sample size would have certainly yielded more data and would have perhaps been more representative of the non-traditional population.

Furthermore, because Project LeeWay is a unique program, the population that was studied was very limited; and although the students represented a range with regard to gender and age, they were obviously not a comprehensive representation of high risk non-traditional students.

Moreover, since qualitative research is subjective in essence, there is the possibility of bias on the part of the researcher, especially since the researcher had previously taught for the program and had witnessed the successes of the program.

Finally, while the benefits of Project LeeWay appear to be both skill-based and confidence-based, many students specifically indicated that the mathematics and study skills components of Project LeeWay significantly benefitted them as they completed courses in their first semester of college. However, Project LeeWay instructors often rotate each time the program is offered based on their own schedules and availability, so it is not certain if the students who were studied were more affected by these particular instructors' teaching styles and delivery or the simple exposure to content.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to gain insight into the long-term effects of Project LeeWay, formal longitudinal studies of the case study students would be useful. Also, in order to obtain a more comprehensive range of student perspectives, more students in the program need to be interviewed and tracked.

Project LeeWay is funded through a Perkin's Grant, and funds are limited for each Project LeeWay term. Although the study suggests that the current structure of six weeks is effective, perhaps a pilot study could be conducted to determine whether a shorter cycle would be equally as effective. This might allow more cycles to be offered each year while still allowing the program to stay within the grant's allotted budget.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM COLLEGE PRESIDENT

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM COLLEGE PRESIDENT

LEE COLLEGE

August 2, 2010

Ms Rebecca Stasney
12500 Barker Cypress # 22104
Cypress, TX 77429

Dear Ms Stasney:

You have requested a letter supporting your study of the Project Leeway at Lee College. We understand that the study will include case studies of a small number of students. Clare Fleming, Project Leeway's Director, has worked with you on this study and it has her support.

I am pleased to offer mine as well. Project Leeway assists many students, primarily females, to further their education. Much can be learned from our students' experiences of potential value to others.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Murphy, Ed. D
President

Cc: Rosemary Coffman, Clare Fleming

Michael T. Murphy, Ed.D., President *Phone: 281-425-6300* *Fax: 281-425-6555* *E-Mail: mmurphy@lee.edu*

P.O. Box 818 • Baytown, Texas 77522-0818 • 281-427-5611

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM PROGRAM DIRECTOR

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Special Populations Office

Phone 281-425-6559
Fax 281-425-6877

April 24, 2013

To whom it may concern:

For her dissertation, Ms. Rebecca Stasney Malter has requested this information in writing:

> As Director of Special Populations and also Project LeeWay, I have supervised Ms. Malter's study. She has my permission to use Project Leeway data for her study and the data will be de-identified.

I have enjoyed working with her and am looking forward to her final report.

Sincerely,

Clare Fleming

Clare Fleming
Special Populations/Perkins Director
281 425 6559
cfleming@lee.edu

APPENDIX C

ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT FORM

APPENDIX C

ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT FORM

PROJECT LEEWAY
ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT

1. _____ I am a human being with potential.
   _____ Whether I choose to agree or disagree, I will respect my instructors and classmates.
   _____ I am here to learn to put into practice good choices.
   _____ I am responsible for my actions.

2. _____ I agree to arrive **on time** to all Quickstart classes.

3. _____ I will try to schedule all appointments between Oct. 26th and Dec. 3rd, on Fridays or after class on Monday through Thursday.

4. _____ If I must miss a class due to illness, I will phone in to 281-425-6559 each day that I am to be absent before 8:00 am.

5. _____ I realize I am subject to dismissal in Project Leeway if I have more than one unexcused absence.

6. _____ I will use a pay phone or cell phone if I must make a call during a break time. Only in the case of an emergency will I ask to use an office phone.

7. _____ I am here to learn. I am here to succeed. I agree to take a total of 18 credit hours at Lee College in the next two semesters.

8. _____ Because the childcare cannot keep children who are ill, I will arrange for someone to watch my children if they are ill, so that I won't have to miss classes.

9. _____ When the first semester starts, I will arrange to meet weekly with either the special populations director, or her designee, to assess my progress and problem solve if necessary.

10. _____ I agree to **ask for help** when I need it.

11. _____ I agree to talk it over with the director first if for some reason I must drop out of classes.

_____ _____
Student signature Date

_____ _____
Director signature Date

APPENDIX D

PROJECT LEEWAY SCHEDULE

APPENDIX D

PROJECT LEEWAY SCHEDULE

PROJECT LEEWAY
QUICKSTART

NAME_____

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
July	4	5	6	7
8:30 am - 9:45 am		Introduction TV1-115	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group B
10:00 am - 11:15 am			Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group A
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm		Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm		Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115
	11	12	13	14
8:30 am - 9:45 am	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group B
10:00 am - 11:15 am	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group A
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115
	18	19	20	21
8:30 am - 9:45 am	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group B
10:00 am - 11:15 am	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group A
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115
	25	26	27	28
8:30 am - 9:45 am	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group B
10:00 am - 11:15 am	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group A
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115
Aug	1	2	3	4
8:30 am - 9:45 am	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group B
10:00 am - 11:15 am	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Intro. to Comp. TV1-119 Group A
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115
	8	9	10	11
8:30 am - 9:45 am	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Math 115 Group A / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group B	Evaluations 115	**Awards & Covered Dish Luncheon 11am to 1pm Game Room - Student Ctr.**
10:00 am - 11:15 am	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A	Math 115 Group B / Reading/Writing TV1-119 Group A		
12:15 pm - 1:30 pm	Surviving Transition 115	Study Skills 115	Surviving Transition 115	
1:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	Career Exploration 115	

APPENDIX E

PROJECT LEEWAY ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION DATA

APPENDIX E

PROJECT LEEWAY ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION DATA

Project Leeway Enrollment and Completion Data, 2010-2012

	FA 2012	SU 2012	FA 2011	SU 2011	FA 2010	SU 2010
Enrolled in Project LeeWay	9	14	11	20	16	24
Completed Project LeeWay	9	14	11	16	16	23
Enrolled in college in semester after LeeWay	8	14	11	15	16	23
2.0 or higher in first semester after LeeWay	N/A	11	9	12	13	18

APPENDIX F

INITIAL STUDENT INTERVIEW SHEET

APPENDIX F

INITIAL STUDENT INTERVIEW SHEET

Student:

Site:

Interviewer:

Date:

Start:

End:

Read the following to the student:

1. ***Start Recording. Ask student for oral consent with tape recorder on
2. The purpose of this interview is to learn about you and to learn about the effectiveness of Project Leeway. I want to find out if it is effective and why. As a Project LeeWay student, you are an expert—I am here to gain knowledge from you. Participation is voluntary, and if at any point you are uncomfortable or if you want to stop, that is okay.
3. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes, and includes approximately ____ questions.
4. I will record the interview, but nobody outside of the research team will listen to the recording.
5. We will change your name to protect your identity.

Reminders for the interviewer:

1. Ask one question at a time.
2. Don't ask yes or no questions.
3. Don't forget to capture non-verbal information.
4. Distinguish between participant comments and your own observations.
5. Expand your notes within 24 hours.
6. Transcribe the interview afterward.

Question	Student Answer	Non-Verbal Observations
1. Tell me about yourself (background, jobs, family, anything unique you'd like me to know)		
2. How would you describe your educational background?		
3. Has anyone in your family attended/graduated from college?		
4. Have you ever attended college? If no, why not?		
5. What prevented you from entering college sooner?		
6. How did you hear about the program?		
7. What do you hope to get from the program?		
8. What component of the program has been most useful and why?		
9. What college resources and services did you learn about?		
10. What types of study skills have you learned?		
11. How did the program give you confidence in yourself as a student?		
12. How would you describe your		

classmates in Project LeeWay?		
13. How would you describe your instructors in Project LeeWay?		
14. Do you have any questions?		

APPENDIX G

POST STUDENT INTERVIEW SHEET

APPENDIX G

POST STUDENT INTERVIEW SHEET

Question	Student Answer
1. What classes did you take last semester (Fall)?	
2. Did you work this semester?	
3. What was the most challenging thing you had to face this semester?	
4. How did you overcome this challenge?	
5. As you look back on the past semester, what skills/knowledge from LeeWay do you think you most benefitted from?	
6. How often did you see the LeeWay director during the semester?	
7. What did you discuss with her?	
8. How did you use the study skills you learned?	

9. How did you use the math skills you learned?	
10. How did you use the reading/writing skills you learned?	
11. Do you mind sharing your grades with me?	
12. What classes are you taking in the spring?	
13. Do you have any questions?	

APPENDIX H

FACULTY INTERVIEW SHEET

APPENDIX H

FACULTY INTERVIEW SHEET

1. What is your educational background?	
2. What is your teaching background?	
3. What is your Project LeeWay teaching philosophy?	
4. Is there anything you would do differently next time?	
5. Your thoughts about Student A? (What was your perception of this student at the beginning; how is this student doing now; what helped him/her?	
6. Your thought s about Student B?	
7. Your thoughts about Student C?	
8. Your thoughts about Student D?	
9. Your thoughts about Student E?	
10. Tell me about a typical day in your LeeWay class; describe it from beginning to end (group work, walking around, q and a?)	

APPENDIX I

DIRECTOR INTERVIEW SHEET

APPENDIX I

DIRECTOR INTERVIEW SHEET

1. What is your education background?	
2. What is your teaching background?	
3. What are the objectives of PL?	
4. Where did the idea for PL come from?	
5. How does a student qualify for the program?	
6. How do you select students for participation?	
7. Your thoughts about Student A?	
8. Your thoughts about Student B?	
9. Your thoughts about Student C?	
10. Your thoughts about Student D?	
11. Your thoughts about Student E?	
12. PL success story #1	
13. PL success story #2	
14. PL success story #3	

APPENDIX J

SURVEY

APPENDIX J

SURVEY

PROJECT LEEWAY SURVEY

Name:

For each question below, circle the number to the right
that best fits your opinion on the importance of the issue.
Use the scale above to match your opinion.

Question	Scale of Importance				
	Not at all	Not very	No Opinion	Some-what	Extremely
1. Project Leeway has prepared me to be a successful college student.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Project Leeway staff members were available for help when I needed them.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I would recommend Project Leeway to other students.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I will stay in contact with the students I have met in Project Leeway.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I felt support from my classmates in Project Leeway.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Project Leeway was a waste of my time	1	2	3	4	5
7. Project Leeway made me feel better about my academic abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I would have been successful in college without Project Leeway.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Being in Project Leeway helped me to reduce my anxiety about being in college.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Project Leeway helped me learn about careers that I did not know much about before the program.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I think using a study buddy will be a helpful way to study next semester.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Project Leeway was not a good experience.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Project Leeway instructors were available for help when I needed them.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Project Leeway instructors were knowledgeable about the material they taught.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Project Leeway has given me confidence as	1	2	3	4	5

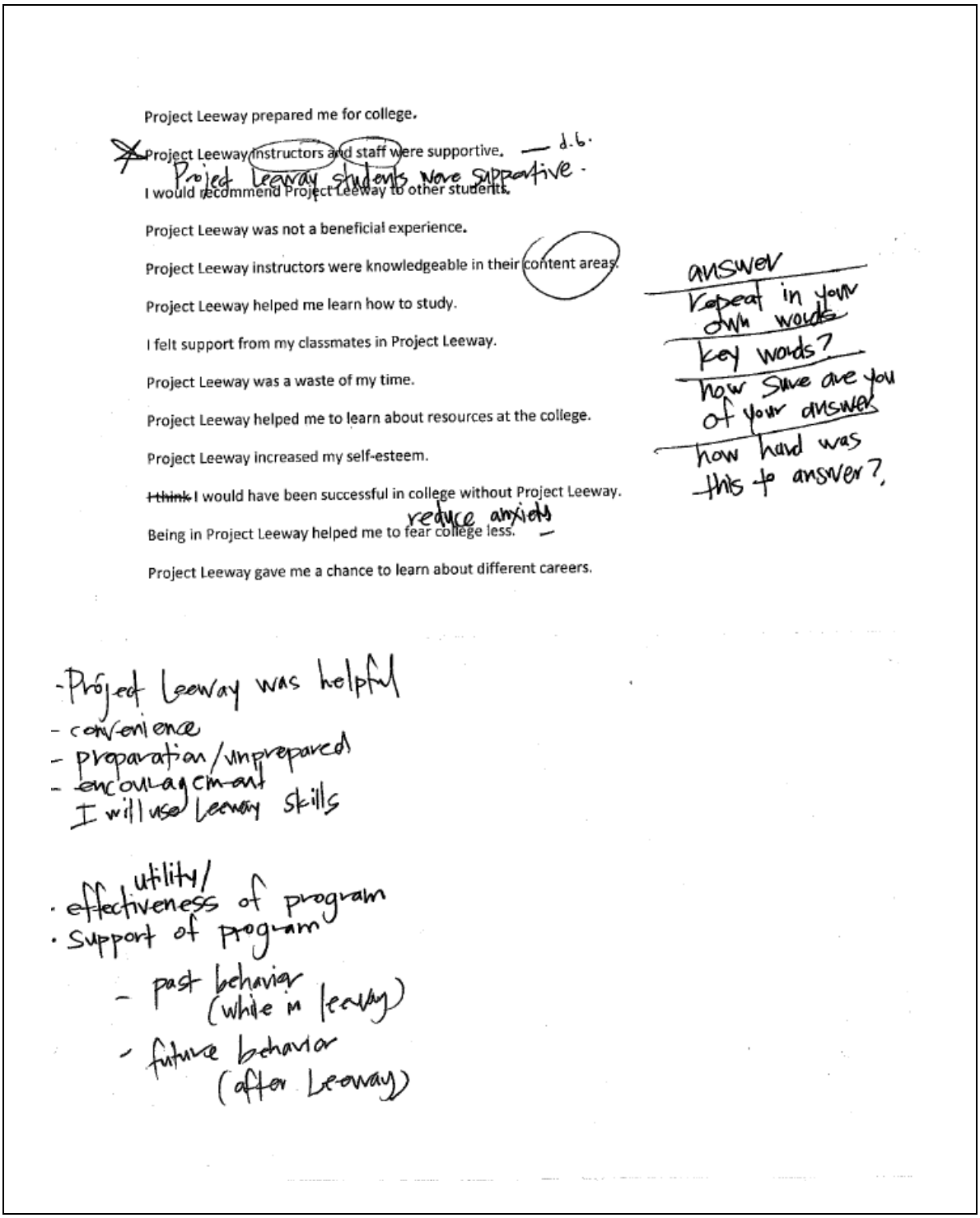
a college student.					
16. Because of Project Leeway, I have made new friends.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Study groups will be a helpful way to study next semester.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Project Leeway helped refresh my math skills.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Project Leeway helped refresh my English skills.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Project Leeway helped me learn how to study.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX K

ROUGH DRAFT OF SURVEY ITEMS

APPENDIX K

ROUGH DRAFT OF SURVEY ITEMS



APPENDIX L

PILOT SURVEY

APPENDIX L

PILOT SURVEY

PROJECT LEEWAY SURVEY

Name:

For each question below, circle the number to the right
that best fits your opinion on the importance of the issue.
Use the scale above to match your opinion.

Question	Scale of Importance				
	Disagree	**Don't Know**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Strongly Disagree**
1. Project Leeway prepared me for college.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Project Leeway instructors were supportive.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I would recommend Project Leeway to other students.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Project Leeway helped me learn how to study.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I felt support from my classmates in Project Leeway.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Project Leeway was a waste of my time.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Project Leeway made me feel better about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I think I would have been successful in college without Project Leeway.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Being in Project Leeway helped me to reduce my anxiety about being in college.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Project Leeway helped me learn about different careers.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Project Leeway was not a good experience.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Project Leeway staff (workers other than instructors) were supportive.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Project Leeway instructors were knowledgeable in their content areas.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I have used skills I learned in Project Leeway in my college courses.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Project Leeway gave me confidence.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX M

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

APPENDIX M

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

A. Instrument Design
   1. Purpose
      I intend to work with and study LeeWay students this summer and follow them into their first full semester in college. I will need to develop a survey to examine the effectiveness of the program.
   2. Scale
      My scale design was based on simplicity and utility. There were five labels in my standard Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree). Careful consideration was given to the midpoint of the scale. Options for the midpoint include no opinion, don't know, neutral, undecided, and don't care (Ryan, 1980, p. 313), but each term has a slightly different meaning. Choosing "don't know" was deliberate; if students do not know whether or not they did or did not gain something from the LeeWay experience based on any given question, this is important data that will help evaluate the material presented in the program.
   3. Item Review
      a. Language
         Most of the survey peer review focused on the language of the items. Larson and Poist (2004) cite Greer et al. (2000) who indicate that among ten factors thought to affect response rate, the content itself, including the language and vocabulary, is the most significant. The language of a survey should be sensitive to the needs of its respondents, and factors such as level of education and cultural implications and dialects should also be considered. LeeWay students will all have a high school diploma or a GED. Nevertheless, the language on the survey should be simple and easy to understand. Some of the items that raised concern were:
         i. *Project LeeWay staff were supportive.*
            My peers were concerned that the term "staff" may be too ambiguous and perhaps unfamiliar to my survey population. A suggestion was to leave the word "staff" but to also include an explanatory phrase in parenthesis after it, such as "workers other than instructors." Also, the term "supportive" was a concern, but there was no consensus as to how it should be changed. Changing "supportive" to "helpful" seemed to change the content of the question too much, so it was unaltered.
         ii. *Project LeeWay instructors were knowledgeable in their content areas.*
            The peer review indicated that students may not understand the meaning of "content area." Instead, this should be more specifically and simply stated to "subjects" or "subject areas."
         iii. *Project LeeWay helped me to learn about resources at the college.*

"Resources" could be a problematic term, so following this term should be a parenthetical statement that lists some resources (counseling, library services, career services, etc.).

iv. *Project LeeWay increased my self-esteem.*
Although most students will be familiar with the term "self esteem," the item could say, "Project LeeWay made me feel good about myself."

v. *I would have been successful in college without Project LeeWay.*
The term "successful" could be problematic since success is unique to the individual. The peer review did not produce an alternate term.

b. Double Barrels
One question was noted as a "double barrel" in the peer review. Originally this question was listed as *Project LeeWay instructors and staff were supportive*, and it was later split apart into two questions: *Project LeeWay instructors were supportive* and *Project LeeWay staff members (workers other than instructors) were supportive*.

4. Constructs
Based on the item review, I determined my constructs would be as follows:
   a. Past Behavior
   Items that fall under this construct will include things that students experienced while in the program.
   b. Future Behavior
   Items that fall under this construct will include things that students experienced after leaving the program, specifically during their first full semester in college.

B. Cognitive Interviews
1. Purpose
Since the next Project LeeWay group will not begin meeting until May, it was not possible to pilot the survey with a significant group of students. Instead, former LeeWay students and staff were used to conduct cognitive interviews to "examine the extent to which [respondents] understand the questions being asked and to provide a more contextualized understanding of survey responses." According to the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, cognitive interviews are used "to determine whether [respondents] are interpreting the items in the intended manner and whether the survey format and response sets are understandable" (3). Ultimately, this helps to increase the reliability of the survey.
2. Selection Process
After my work with Project LeeWay last summer, I remained in contact with a few former students. After contacting four female students, I only received responses from two. I remember these two students being among the most reliable and motivated students in the program last summer, and I knew they would provide excellent feedback on the survey. Since I only got two responses from the four students I contacted, I decided to also ask the director

of Project LeeWay, Clare, to provide additional feedback on the survey items, specifically in situations where there were slight interpretation issues regarding the vocabulary. Several instances where survey items were split into separate questions or where open-ended questions were added were Ms. Fleming's recommendations. Since she has directed this program for more than fifteen years, I was confident that she could help me to make sure the survey was appropriate for this unique group of students.

3. Cognitive Interview Method
   The interviews were conducted the week of April 18, 2011 and each lasted approximately 45 minutes. Since the initial survey I developed was relatively short, I decided to use concurrent probing (using several probing questions). The advantages of using the verbal probing technique is that it allows the interviewer to remain in control of the conversation, and it also helps keep the interview on track (Willis, 1999). Since I knew that I would have a limited amount of time with my students, I felt it was important to keep them on track and avoid idle conversation. In this process, I asked the student respondents to answer the survey question, and then I asked multiple probing questions for each survey item. Ms. Fleming, the program director, elaborated on the use of key terms and the difficulty level of each question. The student interviews were taped so that they could be easily transcribed, and the interview with Ms. Fleming was conducted over the phone.

   The initial scripted probing questions were:
   a. Can you repeat the question in your own words?
   b. What does (key term—such as "supportive," "anxiety," etc.) mean to you?
   c. How sure are you of your answer?
   d. How hard was this question to answer?

4. Probing Revisions
   At the beginning of the first interview, I realized I was not getting any useful information out of asking the student to repeat the question in her own words. I noticed she really struggled to reword the question, and when she tried, it was not significantly different. Also, I noticed that it took her quite a bit of time to attempt this revision of the question, and I was concerned that we would run out of time since our session was limited. I decided to eliminate this probe. Also, some items on the survey did not have a significant key term appropriate for the second probing question, so wherever appropriate, this probe was omitted. The third and fourth probes were given for all survey items.
5. Incentives
   To encourage participation, each student who participated in a cognitive interview was promised a monetary incentive in the form of a $20 Target gift card upon completion of the interview.

C. Cognitive Interview Data
   1. Question: *Project LeeWay prepared me for college.*

a. Probes
   What does "prepared" mean to you?
   How sure are you of your answer?
   How hard was this question to answer?
b. Results
   Both students indicate "prepared" means ready for college. One student recalled specific advice she received in the program, including checking for prerequisites and using time management skills in class. The question may be too general, however, since one student indicated that "prepared" can mean many things, and although you can never be too prepared, LeeWay did help her in some specific ways. One student seemed to have trouble recalling ways in which LeeWay prepared her (even though the probe did not ask for specific instances).
c. Suggested Solution
   This question could be split apart into several questions to specify preparedness in concentrated areas (study skills, knowledge of programs in college, knowledge of registration processes), but doing so would perhaps unnecessarily lengthen the survey, so the item will remain as is.

2. Question: *Project LeeWay instructors were supportive.*
   a. Probes
      What does "supportive" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      Support was an easily understood term. Both students noted they felt supported because they knew they were not alone. Faculty and staff continued to look out for them after the program ended.
   c. Suggested Solution
      The question was unchanged.

3. Question: *I would recommend Project LeeWay to other students.*
   a. Probes
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      This question was very easy for both students to answer, and both students were very sure about their answers. One student recalled a specific experience in her LeeWay math class that reminded her how the program creates a sense of family among its participants. For her, this sense of family was a primary factor in her recommendation of the program to other students.
   c. Suggested Solution
      The question was unchanged; I considered adding a question about LeeWay creating an atmosphere of "family" among its participants, but this question would need some consideration regarding the term "family."

4. Question: *Project LeeWay helped me learn how to study.*
   a. Probes
      What does "study" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      Students did not recite many specific study habits or skills; rather, one student indicated "study" meant "readiness" and being confident while taking tests. She noted having a study buddy (a recommendation from the LeeWay study skills class), showing that specific techniques were discussed in the program. One student noted that studying meant sitting in her room for hours in order to cram all the information she needed for class. This seems like she may be referring to her perception of studying before LeeWay. Both students were sure of their answers.
   c. Suggested Solution
      The question remained unchanged; perhaps an open-ended question should be added so students can indicate specific skills they found most useful. Or, two questions could be added to compare study habits before and after LeeWay: *Before LeeWay, what techniques did you use to prepare for a test?* and *After LeeWay, what techniques did you use to prepare for a test?*

5. Question: *I felt support from my classmates in Project LeeWay.*
   a. Probes
      What does "support" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      One definition of support was "emotional support." This student indicated that when she needed a boost of confidence, LeeWay participants and staff were there for her. Similarly, another student indicated support meant LeeWay classmates cheering her on and encouraging her.
   c. Suggested Solution
      The question remained unchanged.

6. Question: *Project LeeWay was a waste of my time.*
   a. Probes
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      Both students were very sure of their answers to this question. Although they were not asked to do so, both gave specific examples about how the program was helpful (reading and writing review, group work, establishing confidence).
   c. Suggested Solution

The question remained unchanged.

7. Question: *Project LeeWay made me feel better about myself.*
   a. Probes
      What does "feeling good about yourself" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      This question evoked very passionate answers from both students. Both students noted the confidence the experience gave them; one student said that LeeWay showed her that despite everything that has happened in the past, she knows an education will help her move forward, and even if everything else is taken away from her, nobody can ever take away her education. LeeWay showed her how valuable an education is.
   c. Suggested Solution
      The question remained unchanged; however, since students answered this question with such passion and emotion, perhaps an open-ended question should be added so students can indicate specific ways in which the program increased their levels of confidence. This would certainly be valuable information.

8. Question: *I think I would have been successful in college without Project LeeWay.*
   a. Probes
      What does "success" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question was to answer?
   b. Results
      Although success was instantly associated with getting good grades and accomplishing goals, having the right support structure was also noted to be synonymous with success. One student noted it was hard to articulate a specific answer to this question.
   c. Suggested Solution
      This question may need to be more specific. It may not be clear if "successful in college" means "I will successfully graduate" or "I will successfully complete my first semester" or "I will get good grades."

9. Question: *Being in Project LeeWay helped me to reduce my anxiety about being in college.*
   a. Probes
      What does "anxiety" mean to you?
      How sure are you of your answer?
      How hard was this question to answer?
   b. Results
      Anxiety was associated with being lost or asking a "dumb question." In LeeWay, all questions are important, and all students have the same sense

of being anxious and lost. Anxiety was also associated with talking in front of peers/classmates.

c. Suggested Solution
The question remained unchanged.

10. Question: *Project LeeWay helped me learn about different careers.*
    a. Probes
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results
    This was a very easy question for both students to answer. One student recalled having instructors come to class for the career exploration component of the program to discuss different fields of study and careers.
    c. Suggested Solution
    The question remained unchanged.

11. Question: *Project LeeWay was not a good experience.*
    a. Probes
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results
    This was also an easy question for both students to answer. Although the students did not give much feedback or details, both were adamant about their answers. It is clear that the question is straightforward and clear.
    c. Suggested Solution
    The question remained unchanged.

12. Question: *Project LeeWay staff (workers other than instructors) were supportive.*
    a. Probes
    What does "supportive" mean to you?
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results
    Supportive means not being alone and having someone cheering you on. No specific examples were cited, but both students were very sure of their answers to this question.
    c. Suggested Solution
    The question remained unchanged.

13. Question: *Project LeeWay instructors were knowledgeable.*
    a. Probes
    What does "knowledgeable" mean to you?
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results

Knowledgeable means being wise, experienced, and being able to explain the material and clearly showing that [the instructors] know what they are talking about in class. Both students were very sure of their answers to this question.

c. Suggested Solution
The question remained unchanged.

14. Question: *I have used skills I learned in Project LeeWay in my college courses.*
    a. Probes
    What kinds of "skills" do you think this question is referring to?
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results
    One student recalled specific study skills she learned in LeeWay (notifying instructors if you know you will miss class, finding a study buddy, communicating with instructors if you are having difficulties in class). One student indicated applying specific academic skills (reading and writing) as well as study skills. in her college courses
    c. Suggested Solution
    This question should be split apart into two questions:
        i. *I have used some of the study skills I learned in Project LeeWay (note-taking, test-taking, goal-setting, etc.) in my college courses.*
        ii. *I have used some of the academic skills I learned in Project LeeWay (reading, writing, math) in my college courses.*

15. Question: *Project LeeWay gave me confidence.*
    a. Probes
    What does "confidence" mean to you?
    How sure are you of your answer?
    How hard was this question to answer?
    b. Results
    Confidence means to not give up and to believe in one's self. Both students were passionate about this question and very sure of their answers.
    c. Suggested Solution
    This question remained unchanged; an open-ended question could be added to give students a chance to indicate how the program gave them confidence.

D. Results

1. Interpretation and Vocabulary

Overall, the two cognitive interviews revealed language as the most problematic component of the survey since the two students sometimes had slightly different

interpretations of the vocabulary. Two especially problematic words were *skills* and *success*.

a. Skills

Based on interview data, in question 14, the word "skills" seemed too vague. One student interpreted "skills" as academic skills only. She noted using the reading and writing reviews as preparation for the Compass test and for her English course this semester. The other student interpreted this as both academic and practical skills (a more comprehensive understanding of the term), referencing the Surviving Transitions and career exploration components of the course.

b. Success

Based on interview data, in question 8, the word "successful" produced slightly different interpretations. One student noted that for her, "success" in her college courses meant getting good grades, while the other student noted it meant simply passing all her college courses. Since this is a subtle and perhaps unimportant distinction, the question is likely not problematic.

2. Recall

Although not prompted to do so, both students occasionally gave specific examples when asked a probing question that required they explain the meaning of a particular word. This suggests that perhaps more open-ended questions should be included in order to capture these details and observations. Also, in question 4, the temporal recall was not clear. One student recalled all the study skills she learned in LeeWay, while another student seemed to recall her study habits prior to LeeWay. A question such as this should be more specifically stated or split into two separate questions as noted above.

3. Confidence Scale

The confidence scale was relatively high for the majority of the survey items. For those items with a slightly lower confidence rating, the reason seemed to relate to hesitations regarding vocabulary interpretation. For those items with a very high confidence rating, adding additional open-ended questions may be appropriate in order to record the reason why the confidence rating was so high (i.e. why is the student so passionate about this question? What does this mean?)

E. Discussion and Conclusions

1. Reliability

The two students who participated in the survey produced consistently similar answers. Slightly different interpretations of isolated words within survey items only revealed the need to split apart the questions to achieve clarity or to allow for open-ended responses.

2. Limitations

LeeWay students typically have more responsibilities than other students, and as a result, they are somewhat difficult to reach or remain in contact with. As a result, only I only completed two student cognitive interviews. It would obviously be helpful to conduct more cognitive interviews in order to receive

more representative feedback. Furthermore, the two female students I interviewed were among the top students in the program that summer, so it is possible they have more advanced vocabularies than other LeeWay students. Also, each cognitive interview was limited to approximately 45 minutes, so each question was only warranted about 3 minutes on average. Obviously, longer interview sessions would have resulted in more detailed data. Finally, using scripted probes can potentially lead to bias in the interview and can lead the respondent to "particular types of responses" (Willis, 1999). For example, when I asked my students about what the word "skills" means to them, I had to be mindful to allow them to tell me their understanding of the word without cueing them. Instead of answering my question, one student asked if "skills" meant "study skills." If I would have clarified this term for her, it may have caused her to exclude other information that would have been useful in gathering cognitive data.

3. Implications

A consultation with the LeeWay director concerning the slight difference in vocabulary interpretation in questions 1, 4, 8, and 14 revealed the possibility of adding open-ended questions or split questions to improve clarification and allow for detailed responses. Additional cognitive interviews will further improve the survey's overall clarity and slightly ambiguous item wording. Overall, however, the vocabulary seems appropriate for the reading level of the survey group.

APPENDIX N

SURVEY THEME ANALYSIS

APPENDIX N

SURVEY THEME ANALYSIS

Related Theme	Item	N	Mean	SD	% (4 and 5)
Confidence	1. Project Leeway has prepared me to be a successful college student.	15	4.93	0.26	100%
	8. I would have been successful in college without Project Leeway.	15	2.47	1.28	27%
	9. Being in Project Leeway helped me to reduce my anxiety about being in college.	15	4.47	0.74	87%
	15. Project Leeway has given me confidence as a college student.	15	4.74	0.59	93%
Support	2. Project Leeway staff members were available for help when I needed them.	15	4.87	0.35	100%
	4. I will stay in contact with the students I have met in Project Leeway.	15	4.13	0.80	93%
	5. I felt support from my classmates in Project Leeway.	15	4.73	0.59	93%
	13. Project Leeway instructors were available for help when I needed them.	15	4.73	0.35	100%
	16. Because of Project Leeway, I have made new friends.	15	4.87	0.35	100%
Academic Skills	11. I think using a study buddy will be a helpful way to study next semester.	15	4.87	0.35	100%
	7. Project Leeway made me feel better about my academic abilities.	15	4.47	1.06	67%
	17. Study groups will be a helpful way to study next semester.	15	4.60	0.35	94%
	18. Project Leeway helped refresh my math skills.	15	4.73	0.80	94%
	19. Project Leeway helped refresh my English skills.	15	4.47	0.92	87%
	20. Project Leeway helped me learn how to study.	15	4.80	0.41	100%
Resources	10. Project Leeway helped me learn about careers that I did not know much about before the program.	15	4.93	0.26	100%
Other	3. I would recommend Project Leeway to other students.	15	4.93	0.26	100%
	6. Project Leeway was a waste of my time.	15	1.06	0.26	0
	12. Project Leeway was not a good experience.	15	1.00	0.00	0
	14. Project Leeway instructors were knowledgeable about the material they taught.	15	4.87	0.35	100%

APPENDIX O

CPHS LETTER

APPENDIX O

CPHS LETTER

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

April 25, 2013

Rebecca Stasney
c/o Dr. Laveria F. Hutchison
Dean, Education

Dear Rebecca Stasney,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "The Effects of an Extended Orientation Program for High-Risk Non-Traditional Community College Students" was conducted on March 27, 2013.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **March 1, 2018**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 13382-EX

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577
COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS