# INTENSIVE COURSES: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH TO EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS OF LOW SES COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract: The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to gain insight into the experience of low SES community college students in intensive courses. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data from one community college, the researcher conducted this study of if, how, and to what extent, intensive courses contribute to low SES student success. Three research questions guided the study: What is the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES status of students?; What are low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses?; To what degree do intensive courses contribute to low SES students' success? Quantitative analysis of data from one community college found that students performed as well in intensive courses as they did in traditional full-semester courses. Three themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of data from ten one-on-one interview participants from the same community college: Time management is considered vital to success in intensive courses; A sense of accomplishment is perceived as a motivator for both seeking out and completing intensive courses; There are multiple factors beyond course format that influence student learning. Participants viewed intensive courses favorably. Findings from this study are informative to faculty, staff, and administrators of community colleges and universities when they consider intensive course formats.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Community college student attrition has persisted for decades, and is especially pronounced in students of low socioeconomic status (SES). Once overcoming the obstacles of admission to college, low SES students are often faced with unique circumstances that make successfully completing college-level coursework challenging, and oftentimes prohibitive. A number of programs exist across institutions to help better situate low SES students, but persistence and completion remain elusive to many (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016). Research supports that utilizing intensive courses to arrange the curriculum may be more effective (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010), result in higher student course and overall grade point average (Caskey, 1994), and improve overall course learning outcomes (Daniel, 2000; Scott & Conrad, 1991). Given the positive relationship between college degree attainment and earnings as well as economic mobility (Autor, 2014; Lemieux, 2006; Valletta, 2016), further investigation into whether curriculum innovations, specifically intensive courses, may support the academic success of low SES community college students is merited.

## Background and Problem Statement

In general, intensive courses have been linked to the same or better overall course learning outcome attainment in higher education (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Davies, 2006; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Scott & Conrad, 1991). Though an imperfect measure, final course grades are a commonly used measure of success, as are course grade point average (GPA) and overall GPA. However, the literature on intensive courses over the last fifty years is comprised of studies that utilize different metrics to measure success (Walsh et al., 2019). For example, learning retention in intensive courses has also been utilized in studies and shown to have yielded the same or better learning retention to traditional length courses (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Deichert et al., 2015; LaFountain, 1995; Seamon, 2004), and notably shown better results in community college students in developmental courses (Sheldon & Durdella, 2009). While the interpretation of what constitutes an intensive course can vary, it is generally accepted that an intensive course is of shorter duration than a traditional semester-length course. Intensive courses have been adopted at institutions as options to augment a more traditional overarching schedule, as part of an accelerated program, and as an institution defining attribute, such as Colorado College, which has been devoted to a fully block schedule of consecutive rather than concurrent courses for nearly fifty years (Freeman et al., 2020).

In addition to intensive courses, accelerated programs that are fully, or near-fully, comprised of intensive courses are common among high-demand fields and programs oriented toward nontraditional, namely working adult, learners (Wlodkowski, 2003). Such programs are increasing in demand and promoted as a means of earning an education while working, in less time, or a combination of both. Initially developed as a

means of meeting the demands of a changing prospective student demographic, intensive programs are also being considered as a strategy for expanding access to potential student populations that might otherwise not be able to successfully devote themselves to, and ultimately succeed in, an academic program (Monto, 2018).

Faculty perceptions on intensive courses vary. A consistent concern however, is that intensive courses might prioritize efficiency over deeper learning (Dixon & O'Gorman, 2020; Lutes & Davies, 2018) thereby placing an emphasis on assessment performance, including final course assessment, which as noted above, is a commonly utilized measure of student success. Also, faculty can feel overwhelmed by the workload associated with an intensive course, with feedback and assessment having to take place in a shortened timespan. This can lead to a reduced amount and quality of feedback and assessment. However, the generally positive overall outcomes and learning retention in intensive courses, coupled with a student demand for the format, has resulted in a growing number of such courses and programs being offered. Faculty across disciplines are experimenting increasingly and with largely positive perceptions on the efficacy of intensive courses and benefit to students.

A growing student preference for intensive courses, as evidenced by the growing demand noted above, is also supported in the research literature. Faculty perceive student stress levels as being lower when students are studying intently, but on fewer topics, lessening the demands inherent with multiple subjects being studied concurrently. Students indicate positive attitudes toward institutions increasing their offerings of intensive courses (Krug et al., 2016). Studies investigating satisfaction with intensive courses find that students generally rate the overall learning experience positively,

reported higher motivation and confidence (Lee & Horsfall, 2010), and rate communication with other students higher (Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010) than in courses of more traditional length.

While intensive courses are offered throughout various types of higher education institutions, a number of community colleges in particular view them with increasing favorability. This can be attributed, in part, to the potential alignment of the benefits of an intensive course structure and the day-to-day challenges faced by many community college students. Although student demographics vary by institution, the community college student is likely to be older and have a more significant time commitment to work when compared to their college and university counterparts. Intensive courses can provide a more focused program of study for time constrained and often disadvantaged community college students, which can support course, and ultimately, program completion. The myriad challenges facing the community college student, however, are unlikely to be overcome with any one curriculum innovation. Nevertheless, the potential for intensive courses to provide a higher likelihood of academic success, which can prove to be particularly elusive, is especially pertinent to community college students.

In the Fall of 2019, an estimated 11.8 million individuals embarked on the pursuit of higher learning at community colleges across the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). The community college is a uniquely American innovation designed to meet the needs of the communities in which they are situated (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Access and affordability are hallmarks of community colleges, most of which promote open access admissions (Dowd, 2003). This model of open acceptance frequently results in a student body of diverse academic backgrounds

and socioeconomic status, both of which are reliable predictors of college success. Core to the mission of the community college is serving these students, yet approximately only one-third of full-time, first-time entering community college students earn a certificate or degree within 150% of the normal completion time for their chosen program (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Certificate or degree attainment can be a complex success metric for community colleges. Many students enroll at these institutions as a means of upskilling for current or prospective employment in one or more subject(s) without the intent of ultimately obtaining a credential from the institution. In addition, because of its open access model, community colleges also host learners within the community who have an interest in a subject, such as a foreign language, musical instrument, art, etc. for their own enrichment, but are also not necessarily intent on obtaining a formal credential. While some institutions are able to isolate these learners as non-degree seeking, this can result in a financial cost to the student that is not supported by financial aid assistance. As a result of this and other factors, a number of these students elect to declare a major thus being counted as degree seeking. Lastly, many community college students are enrolled in or planning to enroll in another college or university, but are utilizing community college courses to augment their existing or future plan of study.

This backdrop of diverse students' backgrounds and needs, coupled with open access, can leave the community college with a particularly broad scoped mission, making serving students all the more challenging. This is heightened by the average community college student's overall lack of college readiness. Approximately 68% of students entering the community college take at least one developmental or remediation

course because they do not meet the minimum reading, writing, or math proficiency requirements to take on-level college courses (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). Those that are required to complete developmental courses often find their plan of study extended by a semester or a year as a result, increasing the likelihood of attrition. Those that do meet minimum proficiency standards for enrollment in college level courses, are still not required to have met minimum GPA or college entrance exam requirements typical of four-year colleges and universities, and are often likewise not prepared for the academic rigor of college courses.

The ability of students to persist is predicated on a number of factors, including their cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The community college seeks to support student success by tailoring wraparound support services that aid the student to develop proficiencies in both. However, many low SES students still find that non-cognitive and environmental factors related to their circumstances inhibit their ability to be academically successful (Browman & Destin, 2015). Heightened time and financial constraints due to family and employment obligations, can converge to leave little time or motivation (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018) for studying at home or attending class on-campus or virtually. In addition, financial constraints often mean that the student's living arrangement does not lend itself to allocating space and time for the reading, studying, and concentration required of college level coursework. For example, the noise disruptions that can be inherent in areas of more affordable housing can cause distraction while studying and disrupt sleep on nights before classes or exams.

In addition, students coming from a low SES background are more likely to be first-generation college students. Studies show that first-generation college students lack

the mentorship and example of an experienced parent or older family member (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018), leaving them without precedent and guidance to navigate their new environs upon arrival (Stephens et al., 2014). As a result, they are up to eight times more likely to not finish (Ishitani, 2006; Rumberger, 2010). While institutions attempt to provide support for first-generation populations, many are unaware of their status and its implications or where to seek out resources or help tailored to their situation. Apart from the challenges of adjusting to and understanding the nuances and intricacies of higher education institutions, first-generation students often find themselves confronted with a changing relationship with family and friends unfamiliar with their own college experience. This can result in a change in, or even a loss of, acceptance at home thus further exacerbating feelings of isolation for the first-generation college student, all the more so when coupled with the distance that the disparity in SES with their college going peers can present.

Furthermore, navigating the unfamiliar atmosphere, culture, and norms of academia presents psychological barriers of emotional experiences, identity management, self-perception, and motivation (Jury et al., 2017), all of which serve to disadvantage the low SES student and inhibit their success. Stereotypes, classism, 'imposter syndrome', stress, and fear of failure, for example, are all heightened among first-generation low SES students (Harrison et al., 2006; Martin, 2015). While not all first-generation students are low SES, and conversely not all low SES students are first-generation, research findings of first-generation low SES students are consistent with that of low SES students. These psychological barriers add to the confluence of factors that make academic course

success, retention, and ultimately degree attainment especially challenging for low SES community college students.

Many such students postpone, prolong, and ultimately never finish their education, often resulting in limited and lower wage employment and career prospects, which can serve to perpetuate their continued economic disenfranchisement (Kraus et al., 2017; Manstead, 2018; Volpato et al., 2017). Low SES is associated with limited access to economic, social, and cultural capital (Duffy et al., 2016), all of which contributes to a continued cycle of disenfranchisement and ultimately poorer health and wellbeing (Kraus et al., 2017; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). These limitations are effectively transmitted to subsequent generations, and differences in outcomes can be seen at the earliest stages of life. In a 2017 study Hurt & Betancourt (2017) found that "low SES infants had been exposed to greater environmental disadvantage and were exhibiting poorer developmental function than higher SES infants" (p. 497). To overcome these obstacles and difficulties requires great resilience, and a willingness to seek a college education in the face of such adversity even more so. Within this context, the accomplishments of some low SES students are remarkable and due in large part to their persistence and perseverance.

Research and studies have been conducted into the success of support programs and interventions aimed at improving access to, and success in, higher education for low SES and first-generation community college and four-year college and university students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Means & Pyne, 2017). The federally funded TRIO program is one of the more widely known initiatives that works to support members of this population; however, the beneficiaries are relatively few in comparison to the large

population of low SES students. A key finding in a recent study for this demographic is the importance of the emotional support of family members and how higher education institutions might best be able to serve the student by how they engage with families of low SES students (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Additionally, academic and social integration remain consistent factors that support success of low SES students (Means & Pyne, 2017, p. 21), however efforts in these areas have, as of yet, not elevated low SES students to the academic and career success of their more advantaged peers.

While no single innovation in the curriculum can be expected to address the complex issues outlined above, research should address possible changes in curriculum structure and how it can serve these students' needs. Although there are limited studies related to intensive courses at community colleges (Monto, 2018; Sheldon & Durdella, 2009), the relationship between the low SES student at community colleges and intensive courses needs further research. Particularly, using a mixed-method to not only research the correlation between learning through intensive courses and the low SES students' learning success but also to understand students' own perspective, was not found.

Southwest Community College (SWCC) was chosen as a research site because its students shared consistencies with the overall student issues discussed above. SWCC is a pseudonym for an urban/suburban multi-campus community college located in the southwest region of the United States. SWCC is the sole public institution in the community in which it can systematically offer 1000 and 2000 level courses and award Associate Degrees for both direct entry into the workforce or transfer to a college or university. Like many community colleges in the United States, SWCC was initially established as a junior college in the post-war decades of higher education expansion and

later transitioned from a junior to a community college. SWCC is an open access institution with an approximate enrollment of 16,000 students, nearly two-thirds of which identify as female and just under one half identify as nonwhite.

Approximately 50% of SWCC full-time first-time entering students are eligible for Pell grant funding, meaning their expected family contribution is approximately $5,700 or less. Of the 16,000 enrollments, approximately 7,500 are considered full-time equivalent (FTE). FTE is an important metric for colleges and universities, and especially for community colleges since the number of part-time attendees can inflate the overall enrollment and otherwise skew institutional data. In terms of graduation rates, just over 20% of SWCC full-time first-time entering students for the 2016 cohort year completed with a certificate or degree in 150% or less of the normal required time for their chosen program. In comparison to the national average of approximately one-third (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), SWCC reflected a graduation rate of approximately 13% less. Although this graduation rate was restricted to full-time first-time entering students, it was reflective of a notably lower graduation rate of SWCC students when compared to the average of peer institutions in the United States.

SWCC offers courses totaling over 225,000 credit hours a year, within a traditional academic calendar of sixteen-week semesters in the fall and spring, and eight-week semester in the summer. In addition, a limited number of courses are offered in the May intersession, or ‘Maymester’. A variety of course modalities are offered, and vary by subject, discipline, and program, including fully on-campus, blended (or hybrid courses), and online (both synchronous and asynchronous). Within this diverse backdrop of course

structures, courses also vary in duration, and include in order of prevalence, traditional sixteen-week, eight-week, and four-week courses.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the experience of low SES community college students in intensive courses through an examination of student outcomes data and student perceptions. This mixed-methods study aimed to analyze existing data for patterns, anomalies, trends, etc. as a means for better understanding low SES student outcomes in intensive courses at SWCC, and gaining deeper insight into student perceptions. Ultimately, the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data supported an analysis of if, how, and to what extent, intensive courses contribute to low SES student success.

## Research Questions

QUAN: What is the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES status of students?

QUAL: What are low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses?

MIXED: To what degree do intensive courses contribute to low SES students' success?

## Theoretical Paradigm Overview

This study adopted the underpinnings of two paradigms: Post-positivism and Interpretivism. While at first glance, these worldviews might seem diametrically opposed to one another, a closer look indicates that an interpretivist and post-positivist paradigm overlay allows for a mixing of paradigms that complement one another. Even though pragmatism is often viewed as the de facto paradigm for mixed-methods studies (Johnson

& Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), the synergy that the two paradigms provide, serves to strengthen a unique approach to the research problem. Furthermore, the overlay of two paradigms was not intended to bifurcate the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study (Sipe & Constable, 1996) but rather to approach the research holistically from a mixing of these paradigms that supports the mixing of methods.

While post-positivism lends strength in its singular reality, impartiality, and empirical observation (Foshay, 1991), it does not adequately explain the phenomena nor does it provide students' own perspectives. While interpretivism has strength in understanding reality perceived by those who are participants, it does not show the general tendency of the relationship between two variables. Ultimately, this study using both allowed for a paradigm overlay that supported both knowing (post-positivism) and understanding (interpretivism) a research problem that sought to more fully explain the experience of economically disadvantaged community college students taking intensive courses.

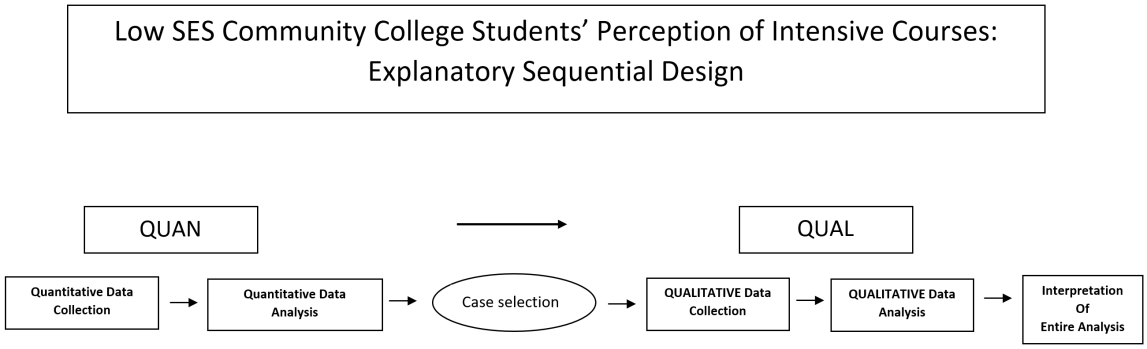
**Methodological Framework Overview**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with a case selection variant (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 82). The case selection variant emphasizes the second, qualitative phase, over the first, and is specifically structured to home in on selecting the participants that may best yield insight into the research questions. Specifically, the population of interest was economically disadvantaged students, and the insights intended to gain were how they may or may not fair in intensive courses. This mixed-methods design involved collecting quantitative data first and then

explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, income and intensive course completion data was collected from existing institutional data at SWCC to examine the relationship between intensive course success rates and income. The second, qualitative phase was conducted as exploratory one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see appendix) of ten individuals identified in the first quantitative phase. Additional follow-up interviews during this phase were not deemed necessary. An interpretation of the entire analysis was conducted to conclude the study.

**Figure 1**

*Explanatory Sequential Design*




While the case selection variant does not overly emphasize the quantitative phase, it was nonetheless of vital importance to the study. And while a quantitative study would offer strength and applicability to broader populations, and be more straightforward in its design, it would lack the voice and perspective of the students themselves. Conversely, a purely qualitative study would lack the objectivity of a quantitative study but provide balance in offering perspective otherwise not captured, especially for underrepresented and socially and economically disadvantaged populations. A mixed-methods approach presented the potential for synergy in utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data and

analysis (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and was consistent with the overarching theoretical framework outlined above.

The first, quantitative phase, utilized existing SWCC data to compile a dataset requested through SWCC's Institutional Research department. The dataset was comprised of course letter grades, course duration in weeks, demographic data, and Federal Pell Grant (Pell) eligibility for Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters over two academic years. Pell grants are "usually awarded only to undergraduate students who display exceptional financial need" (Federal Student Aid: An Office of the U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Although an imperfect metric, Pell eligibility was utilized as a gauge of low SES, and a letter grade of C or higher for a given course was considered successful. Following a preliminary data analysis, a statistical analysis was conducted using chi-square test of independence utilizing SPSS to evaluate whether Pell grant eligibility (a proxy for low SES) and letter grades were likely to be related or not. This statistical analysis tool was well suited to the study because the variables were categorical and/or nominal with grades ranging from A to F and Pell grant eligibility status as eligible or not. A secondary data analysis was conducted utilizing available information within the dataset. This included analyses of demographic data, including gender, race, and age.

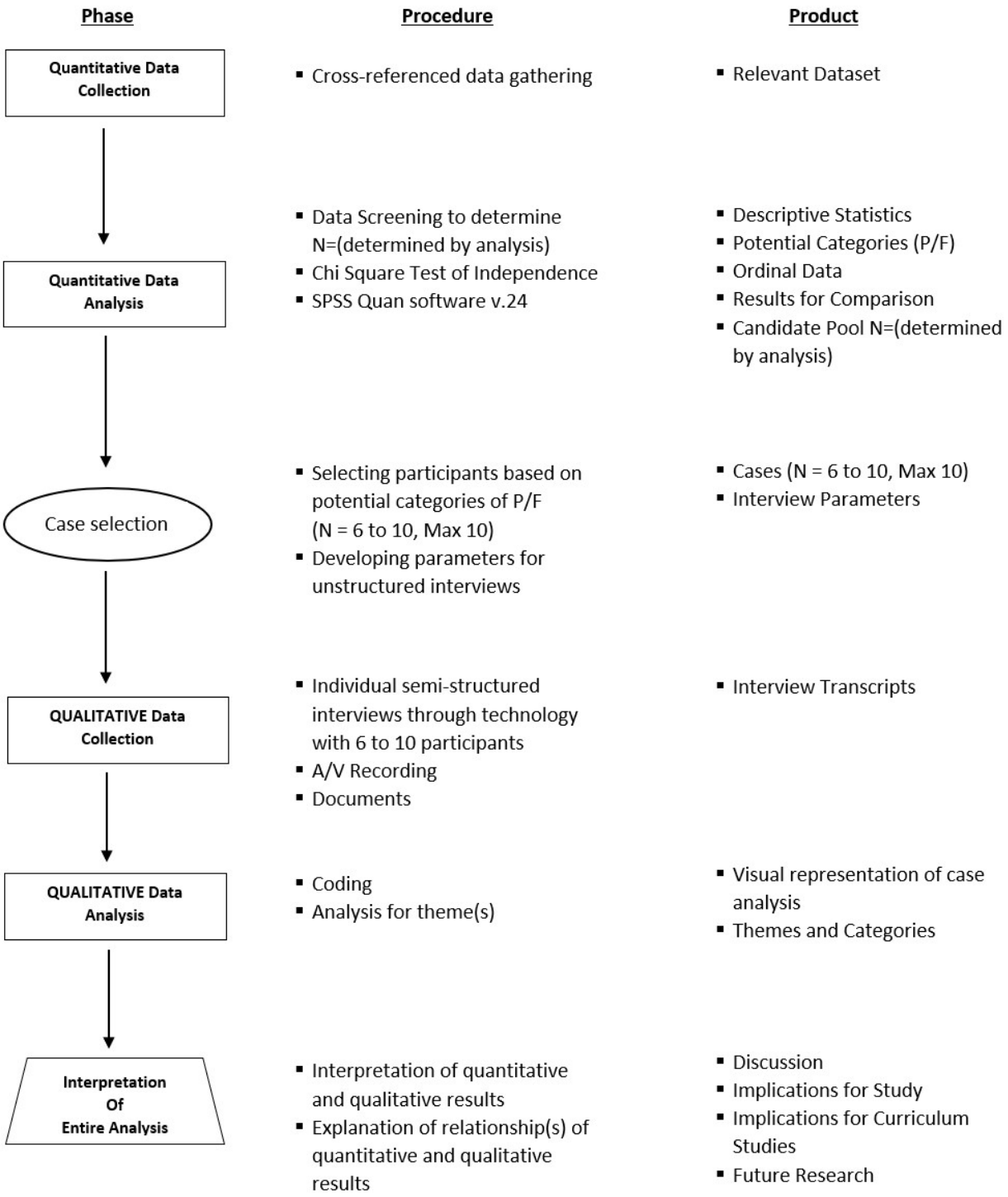
The intent of the quantitative analysis was to better explain the relationship between variables rather than to attempt to make predictions about the relationship. A quantitative phase taking place in the initial phase of the study allowed for a more fitting selection of participants for the second qualitative phase of the study, this is a major component of the case selection variant of the explanatory sequential design. The

criterion for selection of these individuals was not predetermined but rather formulated organically through analysis of the quantitative data.

Upon selection and identification of potential participants for the qualitative phase, students were recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews conducted through distance conferencing technology for convenient access on the part of the participants. The focus of the interviews was the experience of low SES students and how intensive courses influenced their success and to what degree intensive courses provided a structure more supportive of overcoming barriers they might face. Did the intensive course structure allow for the student to focus more intently on one subject? Did the structure lessen the impact of the environmental challenges, time, and other related constraints? The organic flow of the semi-structured interviews was important to allow for the emergence of themes that may not otherwise be anticipated or apparent.

**Figure 2.**

*Procedural Display, Adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark (2018, p. 85)*



## Ethical Considerations/IRB Process

The collection and analysis of individual and/or aggregated data for purposes of research presents some degree of challenge in ensuring that all institutional and review policy and guidelines in terms of privacy and ethics are followed and not inadvertently violated. To mitigate any potential inadvertent ethical issues for this study, it was important to prescribe to and abide by these rules and norms. Because economic and earnings information is associated with this study, that was especially true. A key component of the IRB process was obtaining a dataset and contacting participants to interview for the qualitative phase. The researcher took an ethical approach to ensure participants' confidentiality was guaranteed and not revealed to the public.

In addition, the nature of this mixed-methods explanatory sequential design--case-selection variant--presented a challenge in maintaining ethical relationships in the second, qualitative, phase. Specifically, the first, quantitative, phase, is structured to provide insight into the relationship between socioeconomic status and success in intensive community college courses, which did not involve individual students directly. However, from this data set, the most suitable participants were recruited. So from the outset of this process, it was important to recruit interviewees and conduct interviews ethically, so as not to impose a preconceived expectation of success or failure in the aforementioned courses. Furthermore, the nature of semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed for emergence of participants' perceptions.

## Researcher Subjectivity

The researcher was a part-time adult student working in a full-time mid-level academic leadership position within SWCC. It was particularly important in the

qualitative phase of the study, for the researcher to be aware of differences in his growing up in a middle-class rural setting in a neighboring state and as a first-generation college graduate. His work experience in the public, private, and non-profit sector of the economy in a number of other countries preceded his tenure in academia and included work in remote, challenging, and economically disadvantaged settings. This experience sparked the researcher's interest in, and connection to, the experience and perspective of low SES populations. While this experience, interest, and connection were important, the researcher committed to acknowledging the perspectives of participants in the research, regardless of whether it was consistent with his views.

Furthermore, the researcher believes in the researcher as an objective observer but acknowledges the subjective nature of qualitative research and the significance of associated researcher biases. In particular, the researcher recognized the potential pitfall of confirmation bias in affirming that an intensive course schedule was more conducive to overall student success, and especially students with significant challenges to their environment, a likely environment for low SES students. While the researcher acknowledged that he has biases, any such biases did not influence the quantitative research component through research design, and he remained respectful of students' own perspectives in the qualitative component, which also meant being mindful of the difference between the researcher and participants' socioeconomic status.

**Significance of the Study**

Findings of this study added to the body of research on intensive courses. While the research literature supports the efficacy of intensive courses, much of the research is grounded in undergraduate and graduate studies at colleges and universities. Parallels

between community colleges and four-year colleges and universities exist; however, the open access of the community college and its mission as an institution situated to serve the specific needs of the community make it unique to its college and university counterparts. As a result, innovations to support community college student success are likewise, best studied within that unique context. As such, this study also served to contribute to the limited number of studies that focus on intensive courses at community colleges.

Furthermore, this study contributed to the volume of studies that employed a mixed-methods research methodology. At the time of writing, a mixed-methods research study investigating intensive courses and low SES populations within the community college could not be located. In addition to its methodology and use of quantitative data analysis, the study being grounded in the synergy of two seemingly opposing paradigms, post-positivism and interpretivism, constituted a unique contribution to the field of curriculum studies. This may serve to support future mixed-methods research in the curriculum studies field.

Also, community colleges are increasingly pressed by stakeholders to produce outcomes for their students and communities. SWCC leadership recently began exploring the feasibility of adopting a fully intensive eight-week schedule format throughout the college. This strategy was perceived as a prospect to increase course completion, retention, and ultimately graduation. The results and findings of this study may further inform SWCC stakeholders and decision makers. In addition, this study highlighted students' own voices through academic research into the experience of low SES students

at SWCC, a key demographic of the institution which holds ‘you belong here’ as one of its core values.

Ultimately, this study yielded quantitative and qualitative findings that provide insight into whether intensive courses may benefit the academic success of low SES community college students. A number of support interventions exist to aid populations that have historically struggled with academic success in higher education, to be successful within the structure of higher education as it currently is. This study’s findings aimed to offer insight into whether changing a mainstay structural component, the academic course calendar from traditional to intensive, would aid in the success of low SES populations.

# CHAPTER II

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES students, low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses, and the degree to which intensive courses contribute to low SES students' success. A literature review comprised of three areas of existing research was conducted to support the study: intensive courses, low SES student experience, and curriculum innovation. First, intensive courses have been experimented with as an early curriculum innovation for over a century, providing relevant historical context. Central to more contemporary research on intensive courses is the comparative relationship between traditional length and intensive courses, both in terms of student success as well as student and faculty perceptions. Second, research on the experience of low SES students considers social and economic differences as well as inequality in educational attainment. Lastly, investigations into curriculum innovations provide context for pedagogical, technical, and practical means of change that might serve to support the success of low SES students A literature review of existing literature on intensive courses, low SES student experience, and curriculum innovation, within the context of higher education, is presented below.

## Intensive Courses in Higher Education

Intensive learning at higher education institutions varies in format and scope ranging from accelerated course offerings to exclusively short-term courses and programs throughout the school. The practice of offering, and what constitutes intensive courses, varies across disciplines, programs, and institutions. The summer semester, however, has become a mainstay in the schedule of course offerings of many colleges and universities, meaning more faculty and their students are increasingly likely to have experience in intensive courses. Apart from the summer semester, intensive courses are also offered within the fall and spring semesters as a complement to a traditional schedule of courses. In addition, some programs are offered as an intensive academic program comprised solely of intensive courses. The latter is often viewed as an opportunity to extend access to higher education to nontraditional, often working adult, students who are unable to commit to a traditional semester schedule and would otherwise be unable to earn a college degree. Within this varied context, intensive courses themselves also vary, in terms of duration, contact hour, and modality. However, it is generally accepted that an intensive course is a course of shorter duration than a traditional semester or term.

### *Historical Antecedents*

Historical antecedents of intensive courses in the United States higher education system span well over a century, and are of significance to modern practice. The first documented experiments of intensive organization of instruction (Kuhns, 1974; Kuhns & Martorana, 1974) in United States higher education were largely focused on a nontraditional approach to the academic calendar in the latter nineteenth century. The first notable experiment occurred at Harvard, the oldest college in the United States,

offering its first summer quarter in 1869 (Davis, 1972, p. 143). The first colleges in the United States largely followed the British model of four terms of nearly year-round study, except a long break in the Spring (Davis, 1972, p. 142). Accordingly, in its earliest days, Harvard, originally included a winter but not a summer quarter, allowing students to teach in the common schools whose academic calendars were more reflective of the agrarian calendar (Schoenfeld, 1967, p. 14).

While most institutions, including Harvard, would eventually follow the nationwide trend toward two semesters of study with a break in the summer months, variations of the academic calendar emerged. The modular calendar was a prominent variation (Menefee, 1971, p. 67; Scott & Conrad, 1991, p. 414) and was adopted in different forms by Scio College, now University of Mount Union, in Ohio and Williamston Female College, now Lander University, in South Carolina. Scio College was the first to adopt a modular calendar termed the 'One-Study Plan' beginning in 1868 (Powell, 1976, p. 2) and was known for a time as the 'One-Study University' for its intensive study of one subject at a time (Osborne, 1967, pp. 523-524). While Scio college abandoned the 'One Study Plan' in 1877, newly formed Williamston Female College, adopted a similar structure that same year. Williamson Female College divided the school year into seven five-week sections of concentrated study (Lander Sherrill, 1918, pp. 46, 54-55; Powell, 1976, p. 2), and would continue that modular calendar system for thirty years.

Hiram College would develop the 'Hiram Study Plan' in the 1930s during the Great Depression (Powell, 1976, p. 3) and continued their intensive learning format through the late 1950s (Eckelberry, 1958). Notable examples to exclusively follow a

modular calendar after the conclusion of the Hiram Study Plan were Mount Vernon College (Eckert, 1972), now a campus location of the George Washington University, in Washington D.C.; Martin College (Hefferlin, 1972), now University of Tennessee Southern, in Tennessee; and Colorado College in Colorado (Brooks, 1999; Gose, 1995). While both Mount Vernon and Martin Colleges would ultimately abandon their experiments with the modular calendar, Colorado College continues to employ their variation of the modular calendar, known as the 'Block Plan' to this day (Freeman et al., 2020). These more recent examples, as well as those from over the course of more than a century, are foundational to contemporary conversations and debate on the efficacy of intensive courses in higher education. Central to this conversation and debate is the relationship between time and learning. Historical foundations of research on the connection between these two variables emerged during the approximately same time period as that of experiments with intensive courses.

Carroll (1963) articulated a model of school learning for children that explored the relationship between time and learning with time as the key variable. Bloom (1974) described the implication of this publication as follows:

> In setting time as the central variable in school learning, Carroll produced a major shift in our thinking about education and educational research. If teachers and curriculum makers can define an appropriate criterion of achievement, then it becomes the responsibility of the teachers and the schools to provide the time necessary for the students to attain the criterion. If time is the central variable and the necessary time is provided, then the attainment of the criterion is possible for all students who can be motivated to use the time they need. (p. 683)

While these early publications were primarily discussing school-age children, the notion of time as a principal learning dimension and thus programming adequate time for learning had, and continues to have, implications for higher education, including intensive courses. In fact, the Carnegie Unit, which standardizes the amount and frequency of class meetings, was originally recommended by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1909 as a standard unit of credit for high schools (Powell, 1976).

Karweit (1984) would later critique what she deemed as an oversimplification of time provisioning by stating simply "time is a necessary but not sufficient condition for learning" (p. 33). Similarly, Walberg (1988) would emphasize this point by highlighting the distinction between 'productive time' and 'time on task' and also include the notion of 'spacing', "one of the most dependable and ubiquitous findings from experimental psychology" (p. 79). Spacing refers to the spacing effect, which finds that learners are better able to retain information that is presented in smaller amounts over a longer period of time (spaced presentation), as opposed to large amounts in a shorter period of time (massed presentation). While this effect is most observable in research laboratory settings, the findings have also been linked to practical application in the classroom. Therefore, the implication for research on intensive courses seems evident. However, more recently Carrington (2010), did not find results consistent with spacing effect theory in a study of intermediate accounting students which concluded that students in intensive courses performed no differently than students in traditional two day per week courses.

### *Traditional and Intensive Courses in Comparison*

As referenced in Chapter 1, students in intensive courses have been shown to perform the same or better than students taking traditional semester-length courses (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Gamboa, 2013; Scott & Conrad, 1991; Scott, 1995). These findings hold largely true across disciplines (Daniel, 2000), though not uniformly. For example, Carrington (2010) found a "significant association between course schedule and student performance" (p. 51) of intermediate accounting students, comparing not only between those in a traditional length semester course and an intensive summer course, but also between those meeting two times and those meeting three times per week. The latter were significantly less successful than in any other schedule, suggesting that "the three days per week schedule is not a good way for students to take Intermediate Accounting" (p. 58) and standing in contrast to expectations of the spacing effect outlined above. Conversely, Henebry (1997) found the inverse to be true in a similar study that compared financial management students enrolled in classes that met one, two, and three days a week with the latter performing the best. This suggests that "students have a better chance of passing the course when a class schedule meets more than once a week" (p. 114), and seems to support the impact of the spacing effect.

These seemingly contrasting findings are emblematic of the confounding factors inherent within the existing literature on intensive courses. Such factors include variability in course length, course logistics, and measures used for comparison (Walsh et al., 2019, pp. 138, 141). For instance, course logistics, which includes the instructor, their teaching style and whether they are full-time or tenured faculty can be an influencing factor on student performance. While Carrington (2010), above, was able to significantly

diminish the effect of different teachers on student performance, Henebry (1997), also above, notes that differences in teaching style, not controlled for, may well have influenced student performance. Another important factor is the characteristics of the students themselves, such as gender, age, and GPA. It is reasonable to deduce that students enrolled in an intensive course may possess attributes that better position them to successfully complete the course, or simply put, these students may be high achievers. However, in a study conducted at the University of West Georgia analyzing over 45,000 observations over several semesters, Austin & Gustafson (2006) found "a significant improvement from taking shorter courses that cannot be explained solely by student characteristics" (p. 35).

In addition, one might infer that some subjects lend themselves more to an intensive format than others, however the literature supports that students perform well in intensive courses from a variety of disciplines and subject matter. In the field of medicine for example, at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, an experiment that modified the curriculum of a pre-clinical anatomy course from a 130 hour, full-semester course to a 105 hour, six and one half weeks course was determined to be "as effective, if not more effective than the previous course" (Halliday et al., 2015, p. 154) when comparing final course grades and the corresponding component of the medical licensing exam. Furthermore, meta-analysis of research across disciplines on the performance of students in intensive courses supports that students perform as well or better than students in traditional length semester courses (Daniel, 2000; Scott & Conrad, 1991). In fact, students have been found to have performed better in a number of general education

course disciplines (Boeding, 2016; Gamboa, 2013), which is of particular importance to the success of students in the early stages of their academic pursuits in higher education.

In instances where students in traditional semester courses have been shown to have performed better than students in intensive courses, the differences, while statistically significant "are not dramatic" (Harlow et al., 2015, p. 275). Notably, exam scores and final course grades alone are an imperfect measure of learning as scores may not necessarily reflect the understanding of, or proficiency in, a certain subject, though many studies rely upon grades as a mode of comparison "because it is a convenient method" (Seamon, 2004, p. 859). Learning retention, though challenging to evaluate, may provide additional insight into the comparison of intensive and traditional courses. Seamon (2004) compared the results of a pre and post-test comprised of course learning outcomes in both a summer intensive and a traditional fall semester educational psychology graduate course. Initial findings were consistent with the literature in that students in the intensive course performed better than those in a traditional course, in the case of equal instruction time. However, the "advantage faded" (Seamon, 2004, p. 864) when the same students completed the same post-test three years later and the difference was no longer statistically significant. However, the sample size of the second group was notably smaller as maintaining contact with students after they conclude their studies can prove challenging.

More recently, Deichert et al. (2015) compared students in introductory psychology courses in three modalities utilizing an exam that did not impact course grades but was designed to measure retention of information taught in the course. Students in the intensive format performed better, suggesting that they were better able to

retain the information and that "accelerated course formats produce learning outcomes that are similar or superior to those found in traditional course formats" (Deichert et al., 2015, pp. 8-9). A variation of the intensive course format, intensive hybrid courses, have also been shown to produce the same learning outcome attainment when compared to traditional format courses across a number of general education courses (Bowen et al., 2014; Monto, 2018). These courses typically reduce the class meeting time by a percentage while in turn increasing the amount of time that the student engages with the material online. The intensive hybrid course format "provides one promising alternative model to educational access in a community college setting" (Monto, 2018, p. 658) where many students are often working, older, and have more responsibilities outside of the classroom. While further study is needed, the existing literature suggests that learning retention does not suffer in the intensive course format and may be a means with which to better serve students who may not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue, or be successful in, their higher education academic endeavors.

### *Student and Faculty Perceptions*

As noted above, the literature largely supports intensive courses producing the same or better student learning outcomes. Students seem to view intensive courses favorably as evidenced by their enrolling in them, though faculty may have reservations about student and faculty workload, academic rigor, and overall expectations of an intensive course (Kretovics et al., 2005; Scott & Conrad, 1991, p. 411). Research literature on faculty perceptions of intensive courses is more easily located than research on student perceptions of intensive courses, which might be a result of the convenience of engaging fellow academicians as research participants, or may be a product of the debate

among educators about the efficacy of intensive course offerings being brought to the fore in the research literature. Some faculty express concern about the condensed workload required to provide timely feedback and assessment of assignments (Holzweiss et al., 2019; Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Walsh et al., 2019) while also conducting and managing other aspects of the course in a compressed timeframe. Faculty also often have to make adjustments to their courses and course delivery (Daniel, 2000; Scott, 1995) in order to fit within the compressed timeframe, which also adds to the additional workload of teaching an intensive course.

While faculty perceptions are not monolithic, a chief concern among faculty regarding intensive courses is the preservation of academic rigor in the compressed timeframe inherent within an intensive course. In this regard, a key critique of intensive courses is that some instructors may be compelled to, or simply choose to, reduce the content of the course, making the intensive course no longer comparably rigorous to a similar traditional course. With much of the research utilizing final course grades as a basis for comparison between intensive and traditional courses, another reservation of some faculty is a perception that a higher overall grade in an intensive course is more easily attained because of a perceived lessening of the content and rigor. While such concerns are not without merit, Lutes and Davies (2013) found that although there was a statistically significant difference when analyzing rigor based on workload calculations between the two formats, it was very small, and in fact "the instructor and the specific subject are more likely to be the differentiating factor" (p. 28). For example, faculty teaching reading or writing intensive courses may be more likely to adjust the content to be less for an intensive course (Lutes & Davies, 2018), though students may actually

perceive there to be more reading in the intensive format (Monto, 2018, p. 656). Lastly, in an interpretive qualitative study of eighteen faculty members teaching both intensive and traditional courses extensively, they did not believe that reduced instructional time compromised academic quality, and that the condensed timeframe actually increased learner responsibility (Johnson, 2009).

The expectations of time commitment, workload, and rigor in intensive courses may differ between faculty and students. While students may have reservations about the intensity of a course in an abbreviated timeframe, some may anticipate that the workload and time commitment is actually lessened as a result of it being an intensive course (Kretovics et al., 2005; Lee & Horsfall, 2010, p. 197; Lutes & Davies, 2013, 2018). However, in a study that evaluated student surveys of the same course taught in both intensive and traditional format courses, Kucsera and Zimmaro (2010) found that "intensive courses did not present lighter course workloads than did traditional classes; they were not perceived as 'easier' "(p. 66). Again, the literature on intensive courses, in this case specifically on student perceptions, presents limitations, whether through confounding variables, such as the context of comparison or through variability in methodological design. For example, comparing university undergraduate students in a summer intensive course with students from the same institution in a traditional course may yield different findings than comparing undergraduate students taking one intensive course as a complement to a full schedule of traditional courses during a fall or spring semester.

In terms of how intensive courses are perceived by students, a uniform view is not yielded in the literature; however, perceptions of the learning experience and perceived

learning are a key focus. Students in various levels of higher education programs indicate a preference for intensive courses because of the ability to focus more intently on one aspect, or subject (Lee & Horsfall, 2010, p. 196; Walsh et al., 2019, p. 146), and may not feel that they would have learned more if provided with additional time (Herrmann & Berry, 2016). However, student preference for the intensive format may wane over the duration of the course (Joyce et al., 2015) though interest in intensive courses remains strong and enrollment in them is likely to continue to grow (Krug et al., 2016). This is predicated not solely on the perception of students that an intensive course can make learning more manageable but also on the positive learning experiences of students in intensive courses. As Scott (1995) articulates:

> Students said that high-quality intensive course learning experiences depend on the presence or absence of certain instructor characteristics such as enthusiasm for the subject, creativity, flexibility, and good communication skills. Moreover, good experiences require effective teaching methods. (p. 209)

While these instructor characteristics and effective teaching methods are crucial to fostering a positive learning experience of students in a course of any length, students feel they have to be "present in greater quantities and to a greater degree in intensive courses" (Scott, 1996, p. 77).

In addition, students have identified frequency of communication between the instructor and students, as well as between students, as being an important aspect of a positive learning experience in intensive, especially those with an online component, such as hybrid intensive courses (Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010). The result of enhanced and more frequent communication extends beyond increasing active participation and

accountability to also aid in fomenting a sense of community and establishing connections with others, which could prove challenging in an abbreviated time period (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). However, at least one study showed that further enhancing the sense of community in intensive courses with fellow learners through cooperative group did not improve the learning experience and may have decreased motivation (Vreven & McFadden, 2007), suggesting that limits must be considered as to its benefits. This may be attributed to the constraints of learning in an abbreviated timeframe. Nevertheless, the sense of community between and among students is perceived as an important component of a high-quality and positive learning experience. This is especially pertinent for nontraditional, often working adult, learners participating in intensive courses.

### *Intensive Courses in Accelerated Degree Programs*

Adult learners are often the intended audience of accelerated degree programs comprised primarily, if not entirely, of intensive courses. What were once primarily intensive weekend programs for working adults (Watkins, 1989, p. A35) have since evolved to include diverse offerings that often incorporate students of various age levels and employment status. In addition, many of the principles found in accelerated degree programs, have been applied successfully to skill enhancement training of current practitioners, such as in healthcare (Kapur et al., 2015; Neep et al., 2018). Most prominent within the literature though, is the opportunity and viability of intensive courses as a means of extending access to higher education for adult learners, and more recently for community college students. In fact, while much of the historical antecedents outlined in the section above transpired at the site of often private and elite, liberal arts

colleges and universities, modern adoption of intensive courses came about largely as a result of the traction that accelerated programs gained for adult learners.

Accelerated learning programs have evolved from being course to program based at established college and universities where a working adult might otherwise face up to eight years of study to complete a college degree (Husson & Kennedy, 2003). This important transition demonstrated both the viability of intensive courses as the cornerstone to accelerated learning programs as well as the opportunity for adult learners to pursue a college degree who might not otherwise have been able to, thereby removing a barrier and increasing access to higher education. Much like their traditional program counterparts, accelerated degree programs also face similar scrutiny and critique of learning outcomes, retention, and rigor. However, Wlodkowski and Westover (1999) found that "students demonstrate learning that is not significantly distinguishable according to format—traditional or accelerated" (p. 17). While further research is needed, Jonas et al. (2001) conducted similar research comparing traditional with nontraditional accelerated undergraduate business students, finding that that nontraditional students in the accelerated program performed better on a standardized test designed to assess knowledge and application of business topics.

Furthermore, older adult learners' attitudes in intensive courses are comparable to younger learners in traditional courses. According to Wlodkowski and Westover (1999), "viable reasons for such affirmative student perceptions are that the motivational conditions for inclusion, positive attitude, meaning, and competence are being met along with effective instruction and materials" (p. 16). While the accelerated degree program format extends access to higher education by removing a barrier for many learners, a

sense of community remains a crucial component. In addition, a sense of inclusion or belonging is vital for populations that may not identify as a traditional college or university student. While adult learning theory is often applied to the design of accelerated degree programs which draw on the learners' experience (Boyd, 2004; Kasworm, 2003), similar innovations in the curriculum can be employed to extend access to learners in a variety of higher education settings (Swenson, 2003). In the community college, for example, as noted in the previous section above, the intensive hybrid course format has been shown to have potential to increase access to higher education in a community college setting (Monto, 2018).

Accelerated degree programs are an extension of intensive courses that extrapolate the concept from the course to the program, which can be completed in less time than a conventional degree program. While intensive courses have been a part of the higher education landscape in various forms such as winter term, summer semester for some time, the idea of completing the degree itself in less time is a newer concept and is less commonly practiced. This unfamiliarity within higher education contributes to accelerated degree programs being perceived as controversial and at risk of commodifying education through proprietary institutions that more commonly offer degree programs in the accelerated format (Wlodkowski, 2003). Nevertheless, accelerated degree programs have shown comparable graduation rates as conventional programs (Wlodkowski et al., 2001, pp. 12-13). While further research is needed, the continued growth of accelerated degree programs is likely to continue as demand continues to increase.

## Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Student Experience in Higher Education

The body of literature on socioeconomic status is expansive, and the research on low SES populations in colleges and universities is also extensive. As the term implies, socioeconomic is a combination of social and economic. Interestingly, a standalone field of socioeconomics has not yet seemed to emerge, rather the study of socioeconomics is often conducted within the field of sociology and its related disciplines or economics and its related specialties. Furthermore, the notion of socioeconomic status and its implications have not yielded uniform findings or positions in sociology or economics. Nevertheless, studies framed within the construct of socioeconomic status, and especially centered on low SES populations, have been conducted for decades yielding valuable insight within the literature. With the substantial expansion of higher education and its promise of opportunity over the last several decades, the relationship between low SES and higher education has also been investigated extensively.

### *Theory and Foundations of Low SES*

Socioeconomic status (SES) can be defined as a construct that represents one's social and economic background (Villalba, 2014), which infers an inequality inherent in the broader social structure. While SES is often used interchangeably with *social class* or *class*, they can be considered as different constructs within the literature. Rubin et al. (2014) states: "SES refers to one's *current* social and economic situation, it is relatively mutable…in contrast, social class refers to one's sociocultural *background*, typically remaining static across generations" (p. 196) While class has historically featured prominently in sociological research models, some researchers suggest that although economic inequality is increasing, class differences are waning (Grusky & Weeden,

2008, p. 66). Kingston (2000) more poignantly described the United States as a classless society positing that "groups of people having a common economic position -commonly designated as 'classes'- do not significantly share distinct, life-defining experiences" (p. 1) However, many researchers support the construct (DiMaggio, 2012, pp. 16-19; Hout, 2008, p. 26; Jones, 1998, p. 145; Mantsios, 2020). In fact, Markus and Fiske (2012) posit that "social-class differences and the inequality they reflect now organize American society more than ever" (p. 1).

Regardless of whether class is acknowledged as a construct or not, the literature is consistent on the rise in income inequality (Chatterjee et al., 2007, p. 1383; Piketty & Saez, 2001). Although inequality is inherent within the construct of SES, the contrast has become increasingly extreme. During the post-World-War II economic expansion of 1947-1977, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita doubled in the United States while the incomes of families at the 20th percentile nearly doubled as well. In the thirty-year period that followed (1977-2007) GDP per capita nearly doubled again, yet the incomes of families at the 20th percentile increased only 7%. During that same timeframe (1977-2007), those at the 99th percentile saw their incomes increase by 90%, and those at the 99.9th percentile saw their income triple (Duncan & Murnane, 2011, pp. 4-5). While the disparity in income growth is marked, for those living at the lower end of the income distribution, the disparities they face in health and wellbeing is even more extreme (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). Working class and low-income families, though not monolithic in their experience, possess inadequate purchasing power, face job insecurity, often don't have health insurance or access to healthcare, and face food insecurity (Lott, 2012).

Furthermore, these inequalities are frequently transmitted to subsequent generations (Alon, 2009, p. 750; Calarco, 2014, p. 1035), though economists do not agree about the *extent* to which economic inequality is transmitted across generations (Rumberger, 2010).

The inequality in income, experience, and health and wellbeing seems to be tolerated as an unavoidable circumstance of society, in part because of the widely held belief in meritocracy as an ideal and as "a hierarchy-legitimizing ideology that justifies current societal inequality" (Son Hing et al., 2011, p. 448). The term meritocracy first appeared in Young's sociological satire *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), and has since been featured prominently in the literature across disciplines. Son Hing et al. (2011) describes the meritocracy in principle and in practice as follows:

> Meritocracy is considered by many to be an ideal justice principle, because only relevant inputs (e.g., abilities) should be considered and irrelevant factors (e.g., ethnicity, gender) should be ignored when distributing outcomes. Thus, meritocracy is bias free and can be seen as creating social mobility; this is the American dream.…In practice, merit-based outcome allocations might be enacted in a manner that reinforces the status quo and favors dominant groups…Thus, meritocracy can be seen as a form of hegemony where supporters of meritocracy, knowingly or unknowingly, help to maintain and legitimize social inequality. (p. 433)

Meritocracy appears to be a prominent and entrenched ideal within much of American society, which research suggest makes the United States an outlier among other nations (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012, p. 243). It is not however, by any means the sole cause or contributor to inequality or issues of class and SES.

Race and gender further compound issues of class and SES. As Mantsios (2020) illustrates:

> On the one hand, issues of race and gender cut across lines. Women experience the effects of sexism whether they are well-paid professionals or poorly paid clerks. As women, they are not only subjected to stereotyping and sexual harassment, they face discrimination and are denied opportunities and privileges that men have. Similarly, a wealthy black man faces racial oppression, is subjected to racial slurs, and is denied opportunities because of his color. … On the other hand, the experiences of women and minorities are differentiated along class lines. Although they are in subordinate positions vis-à-vis white men, the particular issues that confront women and people of color may be quite different, depending on their position in the class structure. (pp. 179-180)

Furthermore, being African-American and being female are two key attributes that increase one's chances of being below the poverty line in the United States. However, more than two-thirds of families below the poverty line are White (Lott, 2012, p. 651), suggesting that social status is an issue for the White population as well.

### *Educational Attainment*

A foundational cornerstone of a meritocratic society are educational institutions, which are often perceived as a medium for socioeconomic mobility through educational attainment. For many low SES individuals, a college education is seen as "a means of escape and a pathway of social mobility…a sentiment that has become ingrained in the American dream" (Walpole, 2003, p. 46). While a college education is largely viewed as essential to socioeconomic mobility and is featured prominently in the literature on low

SES across disciplines, researchers have found that in many instances, educational institutions perpetuate the status quo (Autin et al., 2015; Boudon, 1974; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008; Staaf & Tullock, 1973; Stephens et al., 2014; Stiglitz, 1973; Walpole, 2003). For example, the increased concentration of wealthy students in selective schools, known as higher education stratification, contrasts with the high concentration of low SES students in community colleges where they are far less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than students attending selective colleges (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). A major contributor to this disparity in education attainment are the barriers to access to colleges and universities that low SES students face (Alon, 2009; Bastedo et al., 2018). Aronson (2008) likens these barriers to a funnel that disproportionately filters out low SES students in each stage of the process.

Low SES students that persevere and ultimately matriculate into a college or university still face difficult odds, with low SES students being eight times less likely to complete college than their high SES peers (Rumberger, 2010, p. 253). Those that are low SES *and* first generation college students are four times more likely to leave after the first year, and only 11% earn a bachelor's degree after six years (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2). Such gaps in educational attainment are the result of a number of contributing factors, foremost among them is that the academic environment does not foster a sense of belonging for many low SES students (Ostrove, 2007). The college and university environment "built and organized according to taken for granted, middle- and upper-class cultural norms, unwritten codes, or 'rules of the game'" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1178) can feel foreign, making adjustment and academic success, an already challenging endeavor, particularly illusive.

Jury et al. (2017) identifies three categories of psychological barriers that low SES students in higher education face: emotional experiences, identity management, and self-perception, with identity management being "one of the toughest challenges low SES students face when entering in the cultural context of higher education" (p. 26). Aries and Seider (2005) investigated the relationship between class identity and college experience finding that low SES students at an elite college exhibited a "heightened awareness of class which led to feelings of intimidation, discomfort, inadequacy, deficiency, exclusion, and powerlessness" (p. 419), though this was not as prevalent among low SES students at a state college. These stressors serve, not only as obstacles to broader educational attainment, but importantly as obstacles to academic achievement and persistence in their individual coursework that comprises their degree path. Furthermore, many low SES students enroll in college having had lower levels of academic preparation which may result in their experiencing academic difficulties in their coursework, and lower their educational aspirations as a result (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016, p. 117). Conversely, some low SES students who perform well academically may reject their new identity as a high-achiever and begin to take their own actions to maintain the status quo (Batruch et al., 2017).

The literature on the achievement gap disparities in educational attainment at colleges and universities between low SES students and their more affluent peers has been consistent for some time. Accordingly, some academic and support interventions have been implemented at a number of colleges and universities to improve the support structure and outcomes for this group. In a recent study, Browman and Destin (2015) conducted experiments to investigate the impact of low SES students' motivation in

students that were exposed to cues suggestive of the university's commitment to socioeconomic diversity at the institution. Compared to students who were not exposed to cues suggestive of a commitment to socioeconomic diversity, those students who were, "demonstrated greater academic efficacy, expectations, and implicit associations with high academic achievement" (p. 172). While the support and outreach of the educational institution is important to fostering an environment of inclusiveness, emotional support of family has been shown to be an important factor contributing to low SES student success in higher education. Roksa and Kinsley (2019) found that "family emotional support is beneficial for academic outcomes as it promotes psychological well-being and facilitates greater student engagement" (p. 415). However, first generation low SES students often find that their parents are limited on the type of encouragement they can provide since the parents themselves are also inexperienced and unfamiliar with navigating the higher education environment (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 245).

**Curriculum Innovation and Low SES Students in Higher Education**

Slaughter (1997) describes the process of curricular formation as "complex and defying easy theoretical treatment". Yet, at its core, curriculum in higher education can be "understood as an educational vehicle to promote a student's development" (Barnett, 2009, p. 429). Educators contend with what to teach and how to teach in their courses and programs so as to best support the development of students on their learning journey. As part of the iterative curricular process, some educators introduce innovations into the curriculum aimed at improving outcomes and at better supporting the success of their students. For example, Zhu and Shen (2021) integrated financial literacy concepts into the curriculum of an introductory computer programming course to help better equip

students with the "essential financial knowledge to manage their debts and make intelligent financial decisions" (p. 32). Incorporating financial literacy concepts into the curriculum of an unrelated discipline, computer programming, is a novel strategy and illustrative of curriculum innovation.

In a recent study, Hasanefendic et al. (2017) analyzed the characteristics of "academics who introduce innovation in their departments and/or institutions to foster disruptive and transformative changes in pedagogical approaches and curricular practices in diverse higher education settings" (p. 112). Among other findings, intrinsic motivation was identified as a key characteristic of innovators, and changing socioeconomic contexts was identified as an impetus to adapt learning processes. Many innovations are rooted in issues of class, race, and gender, which influence the curriculum as increasingly diverse students are represented in higher education institutions (Slaughter, 1997). While these issues might influence the curriculum or prompt innovation, no single curricular strategy will address the underlying issues of inequality. Rather, curriculum innovation can be considered as a means through which educators can foster change that better supports learning and can also be oriented toward one or more marginalized group(s).

Culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies have been employed as curriculum innovations that center pedagogy as a means to achieve more equitable outcomes for marginalized groups and minoritized populations. Disparities in educational outcomes as a result of social disadvantage however, remain a persistent issue facing a number of groups, including low SES students. Gale et al. (2017) advocate for an innovative approach to framing a socially just pedagogy as follows:

> To arrest fissures in social inequality that we now see emerging within (and as a result of) education systems, we argue for a new framing of socially just practice that specifically tackles *economic* inequality, as the central site to intervene. We also challenge a tendency in much of the extant literature to focus on more obvious markers of "difference"—gender, race, and cultural or linguistic background—as the primary basis to recognize "need" (and then, in turn, establish appropriate forms of "response"). This, we argue, has too often resulted in the "problem" being located with "the other," with elites left questioning what is it about "the other" that needs to be the focus of pedagogic (and bureaucratic) intervention to move them from being "less marginalized" to "more mainstream?" (p. 346)

Challenging core assumptions of the role and responsibilities of educators and notions of difference is an innovative approach, though issues of diversity can be multi-layered and complex. Individuals can hold multiple social identities simultaneously, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, and may prioritize, or identify more strongly with, one over the others (Castillo-Lavergne & Destin, 2019; Graham-Bailey et al., 2019). Applying the same practice of centering economic inequality in other areas of higher education, such as admissions, may inadvertently yield less racial diversity than focusing on racial identity itself, as Reardon et al. (2018) demonstrated using a simulation model.

In their description of a socially just practice, above, Gale et al. (2017) illustrate a shift away from deficit thinking, which research indicates may be an important attribute in the relationship between curriculum innovation and low SES students. Martin et al. (2018) define deficit thinking in this instance as "a mental model that places the onus for

social class inequities on the individual person or group of people rather than the system of class oppression that created inherent advantages or disadvantages" (p. 87). Whether consciously or subconsciously, deficit thinking can prevent educators' ability to adequately appreciate "how their teaching practices may contribute to the ongoing disadvantage students from low SES backgrounds experience" (Thomas, 2014, p. 817). David et al. (2009) state "that students are likely to feel alienated and withdrawn when the teaching and curriculum overlook their individual identities and differences" (p. 196). Moreover, reframing one's mindset from deficit thinking to an asset-based approach (Martin et al., 2018) that acknowledges the values and experiences that all students bring, may serve as a foundation for developing effective curriculum innovations.

In addition to more philosophically oriented pedagogical shifts, curriculum innovations can also be developed as practical changes to the curriculum. These changes in curricular practices may be small in scope and gradually introduced, but still represent a novel change with meaningful impact. In describing, for example, the introduction of an adaptive learning platform to the curriculum, Bowen et al. (2014) state "there is much to be said for innovative attempts to re-engineer complete aspects of the curriculum…but we favor a more modest, step-by-step approach" (p. 132). Simple strategies such as introducing PechaKucha timed presentations, which aim to be more engaging than traditional platforms (Ave et al., 2020), demonstrate the simplicity of some innovations while also suggesting that what constitutes curriculum innovation is neither static nor uniform. The more traditional presentation platforms may still be considered novel by some, and PechaKucha may no longer be considered an innovative approach in the future as it becomes more widely used or other adaptations or variations emerge.

The intuitive association between innovation and technology has produced robust research literature on curriculum innovation; however, technological developments do not need to be the site of innovation and may not be the most impactful for low SES students in higher education. Experiments with course format innovations, such as an online, hybrid, and intensive hybrid approaches have yielded research findings relevant to low SES students. According to (Bowen & McPherson, 2016), purely online courses with no face to face component result in "statistically significant reductions in learning outcomes for all students, especially for disadvantaged students" (p. 130). In contrast, intensive hybrid courses have been shown to produce academic outcomes comparable to traditional courses and may expand access to higher education to nontraditional students with substantial work and family commitments outside of the classroom (Monto, 2018). Low SES students, many of which are nontraditional students themselves, share common characteristics of nontraditional students, including substantial work and family commitments, and may likewise benefit from the intensive hybrid course format innovation. In addition to course format innovations, dual enrollment programs where high school students take college courses to earn college credit, increase first-year GPA and decrease the likelihood for remediation (An, 2013). Low SES students benefit from dual enrollment programs by being more prepared for college and more likely to persist, which is imperative to overcoming "socioeconomic disparities in the curricular sequence from K-12 education into higher education" (Crosnoe & Muller, 2014, pp. 621-622).

**Summary**

This chapter presented an overview, within the context of higher education, of intensive courses, low SES student experience, and curriculum innovation. Experiments

with intensive courses span over a century, and while a uniform basis of comparison between intensive and traditional length courses has not emerged in that time, the predominance of research literature supports that students perform as well or better in intensive courses. Student and faculty perceptions indicate that there are advantages and disadvantages to the format and that intensive courses likely require adaptations to both teaching and learning.

Low SES students experience higher education differently than their more affluent peers. A review of the literature shows that low SES students navigate a deeply entrenched inequality in society and in higher education. Rates of educational attainment are lower among low SES students which can be attributed to a number of factors related to both the student and to the institution of higher education. Support interventions and curriculum innovations have been introduced, but educational attainment and inequality remain persistent issues for low SES students.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method methodology that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data in its design to gain insight into the experience of low SES community college students in intensive courses. An overlay of two seemingly opposing theoretical paradigms, Post-positivism and Interpretivism, served to underpin the study. The mixing of these two paradigms supports the mixing of methods while also fomenting a holistic approach to the study which aimed to support an analysis of if, how, and to what extent intensive courses contribute to low SES student success. The collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was designed to more fully explain the experience of economically disadvantaged community college students taking intensive courses. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with a case selection variant (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 82) was used, which comprises data collection and analysis in two principal phases, quantitative and qualitative, culminating in an interpretation of the entire analysis. Data was collected through the compilation of a dataset with existing data from SWCC's institutional research department, analyzed, and employed to inform participant selection in the qualitative phase consisting of interviews conducted and analyzed by the researcher.

## Research Design and Rationale

The mixed-methods research design was a fitting method of inquiry for this study. The explanatory sequential design with a case selection variant employed by the researcher allowed for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in two phases. The quantitative phase informed the qualitative phase, and both quantitative and qualitative findings were analyzed to gain further insight into the experience of low SES students in intensive community college courses. Interpretation of the entire analysis resulted in more substantive insights than would have otherwise resulted in either a solely quantitative or solely qualitative research design. This mixed-methods approach to the research aligned with the purpose of this study, which was to gain insight into the experience of low SES community college students in intensive courses through an examination of student outcomes data and student perceptions. A specific outcome through the formulation and testing of hypotheses was not anticipated or integrated into the research design of the study; rather, both quantitative and quantitative findings were allowed to emerge organically.

## Research Questions

QUAN: What is the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES status of students?

QUAL: What are low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses?

MIXED: To what degree do intensive courses contribute to low SES students' success?

## Quantitative Phase

Quantitative principles and statistical methods were employed to ensure the same level of rigor as would be anticipated of a quantitative study, though it was not designed or underwritten as a solely quantitative study. Furthermore, this study incorporated the use of a dataset comprised of a robust amount of data, which may not necessarily be anticipated of a solely quantitative study where the constraints of data collection may have limited the amount of data in comparison to a large dataset. The dataset was an integral component of the quantitative phase of the study with existing data held within a repository at SWCC. The breadth of data points themselves as well as the number of years of data available to be collected and analyzed for purposes of this study were more substantial than would have otherwise been possible had the researcher engaged in active data collection. This was because the length of time required for direct data collection would have exceeded the time horizon of the research project. The inclusion of a robust dataset, allowed for the extensive quantitative and statistical analysis of three years of data at SWCC and included demographic data which provided for secondary quantitative and statistical analysis. Both primary and secondary analyses yielded results that established the basis for selection criteria of participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Detailed below are steps and procedures incorporated in the design of the quantitative phase of the study.

### *Data Collection*

Quantitative data collection for this study leveraged existing data points previously collected and stored by SWCC as part of its operations. Though a part of its data repository, these data points were not previously compiled in this format to yield a

cohesive dataset with the specific information requested. As such, the dataset was compiled, by institutional research staff in SWCC's Institutional Research department at the request of the researcher for purposes of this study. Upon receiving final approval of both the researcher's home institution of study and SWCC, a meeting with Institutional Research department staff was held to outline the overall data needs and articulate specific details required of the researcher for this study and of the SWCC Institutional Research staff to fully understand the data needs and ask any clarifying questions.

A dataset was produced by the SWCC Institutional Research staff that encompassed three academic years, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. An academic year at SWCC is a twelve-month period comprised of a Fall, Spring, and Summer semester with the Fall semester commencing in August, ending in December; the Spring semester commencing in January, ending in May; and the Summer semester commencing in June, ending in July. For the entirety of the three-year time period, each data entry included the following data points: academic term or length of a given course; course details including name, prefix, and number; final course letter grade; demographic data including age, gender, and ethnicity; and Pell eligibility. This deidentified data with these detailed data points served as the dataset underlying statistical analyses for the quantitative phase of the study.

The dataset, compiled by an institutional researcher within the Institutional Research Department at SWCC, was provided to the researcher in Excel format. Specifically, the Excel file included three separate workbooks organized by academic year that included the data points outlined above. The dataset was merged into one workbook to better facilitate analysis and the data was scrubbed to remove duplicate

columns. For example, as part of the record keeping at SWCC, course length may be coded and recorded in multiple ways but in the same category e.g., 16wk, Sixteen, and Jan-May. In this instance, the fields were duplicative for purposes of this study, so they were reduced to one field in order to indicate course length. The researcher utilized Microsoft Excel to conduct this scrubbing of the dataset prior to importing the data into IBM SPSS.

### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of the data was conducted within the IBM SPSS software through remote access at the researcher's institution of study. A thorough accounting of the data analysis is elaborated in Chapter IV, while the design of the data analysis process is described in this section. The researcher did not seek to establish a hypothesis and formulate a series of statistical tests to prove or disprove such a hypothesis. Rather, the analyses of data were designed to be conducted with an objective standpoint from which to analyze the data for any emergent patterns or anomalies that might suggest parameters for the qualitative phase of the study. Specifically, the analyses called for an examination of the dataset to guide the process of determining which characteristics might be most important to include in a candidate pool of participants for the qualitative phase. This part of the analysis is an important part of the overall design of the study as it contributes to the case selection process prior to initiating the qualitative phase.

Both quantitative and statistical analyses were integrated into the design to provide a more complete overview of the quantitative dataset. For example, pass and fail rates of students in intensive courses are represented by a percentage that is an arithmetic calculation and an important contributor to the overall quantitative analysis, but alone

may not satisfy the requirements of having met a statistical significance. Due, in part, to the size of the dataset, IBM SPSS was utilized to calculate the overall of rates of success in a course, defined for purposes of this study as having earned a letter grade of A, B, or C, and conversely a letter grade of D or F was defined as fail. Whereas Microsoft Excel is capable of making similar calculations, the sheer number of data points made IBM SPSS a more effective mechanism for analysis. In addition, these calculations are included as part of the statistical analysis conducted with the software.

A core tenet of the analysis was to examine the relationship of low SES status of students and intensive courses. As such, the analysis undertaken sought to analyze the relationship between low SES students and intensive courses compared to the relationship of their more affluent peers and intensive courses. Through chi-square test of independence, this relationship was evaluated to test for independence and the strength of independence between these variables. Pell Grant eligibility status was utilized as a proxy for low SES status. In addition, secondary analysis was conducted to evaluate other relationships between and among variables with both low SES and other students, as well as with intensive and traditional courses utilizing demographic data including, race, age and gender. As noted above, this part of the analysis sought to identify key characteristics that might merit further investigation in the qualitative phase of the study. Lastly, the success rate of SWCC students overall and the relationship between letter grade achieved and intensive or traditional courses was evaluated to gain perspective on this relationship overall at the institution.

### *Data Storage*

The dataset compiled by SWCC's Institutional Research Department included an extensive number of data points for virtually every course attempted by a student at the institution for the three-year time period described above. This data was deidentified such that the researcher would not have a mechanism to determine the identity of any student at the individual level. Strict measures were undertaken to ensure the security of the dataset and that privacy was maintained, even though the data was deidentified. Upon receipt of the dataset, the data file saved in Microsoft Excel format was saved to a secure password-protected cloud storage service managed by the researcher's home institution of study. The data file remained on, and was not relocated to or stored on, a removable data storage device.

In addition to the original data file, data analysis records and reports exported from IBM SPSS were also saved to the secure password-protected cloud storage service managed by the researcher's home institution of study. These reports reflected the findings of statistical analyses conducted in multiple iterations to analyze and test for relationships and strengths of relationships within the data. As such, multiple files in both Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word were created, including duplicate data files in both formats for data redundancy and to facilitate efficacious analyses and referral of findings in preparing the report for purposes of the study. These files were also saved to the same password protected cloud-based storage and were not saved to or relocated to a removable data storage device.

## Qualitative Phase

Qualitative research principles and guidelines were adhered to in the design of the qualitative phase of this mixed-methods research study. As with the quantitative phase described in the previous section above, the qualitative phase of this study was designed to maintain the same level of rigor as would be anticipated of a solely qualitative research study. Furthermore, the explanatory sequential design of the overall mixed-method study emphasizes the latter qualitative phase of the study. The qualitative data collection, undertaken by the researcher in the form of interviews conducted utilizing Zoom distance conferencing technology, reflects this emphasis though both quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are of equal importance in their contribution to the overall design of the study. The philosophical nature of the researcher's field of study, Curriculum Studies, is more commonly associated with qualitative research, so the mixed-methods design of this study represents a unique design within the field. The sections that follow describe in more detail the qualitative procedural and research design of this mixed-methods study.

### *Data Collection*

Qualitative data for the study was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher over Zoom distance conferencing technology. Interviews were conducted through Zoom as a convenience for the research participant so as to aid in recruiting students willing to participate in the study as research participants. Interviewees were current SWCC students identified as potential participants informed by criteria identified in the quantitative phase, which represents the case selection in the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Due to the dataset in the quantitative phase being deidentified, potential participants were drawn from a participant candidate

pool that was generated by SWCC IRB research staff. Potential participants received a study participation recruitment email sent from an SWCC IRB staff member. The names and contact information, including email, of those potential participants was not, and remains, unknown to the researcher. Only potential participants having received the participation recruitment email from SWCC who elected to reply to the email became known to the researcher. In this manner, an intentional sample of currently enrolled SWCC students with experience having taken one or more intensive courses at SWCC was recruited to participate in the study.

Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher provided a copy of the consent form to the participant, allowed time for questions or clarification, and collected a digital signature of the consent form in order to proceed with the interview. The qualitative data was initially recorded as audio-only transcripts utilizing distance technology software. Although the researcher could view a live image of the participant, their image was in no way recorded as part of this study, so no accompanying video recording was captured. An audio transcript, however, was captured simultaneous to the audio recording, utilizing the same distance technology software that captured the audio recording. This was in accordance with the IRB approvals from both the researcher's institution of study and SWCC. Due to the limitations of the real-time audio transcription recorded by the distance technology software, the audio transcripts required edits and revisions to ensure that the transcription aligned with the audio recording, thereby accurately capturing the spoken communication of the participant. After assigning an alias to each participant, these audio transcripts and corresponding files were saved for in-depth analysis in a secure location as described in more detail below.

### *Data Storage*

The audio files of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which also include the simultaneous transcription, were initially recorded in M4A and VTT file format by the distance technology software. These files were saved to a secure password-protected cloud storage service managed by the researcher's home institution of study. In addition to these files, a document containing the imported transcription was created and edited in Microsoft Word format and stored in the same cloud storage location for the duration of the study. In addition to these digital files stored in cloud storage, a physical document was produced that contained the identity of the participants and their corresponding alias assigned by the researcher. This document was stored in a locked file cabinet within the researcher's office, and upon full completion of the study, it will be shredded utilizing secure shredding by the researcher. Likewise, all files stored within the secure password-protected cloud storage service managed by the researcher's home institution of study will be removed and permanently deleted upon the full completion of the study though pertinent remains incorporated within the publication of the study.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations inherent within the conduct of qualitative research involving human subjects were carefully considered in the design of both the data collection and data analysis of the qualitative phase of the mixed-methods research study. All participants were provided an electronic version of the consent form prior to the researcher conducting the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The researcher reviewed the consent form while providing a brief overview of the semi-structured interviews and allowing time for questions prior to beginning the interview. Furthermore,

the researcher assured participants that as a researcher, the information and experiences they shared would not be shared or published in a way that could identify them. Also the researcher made clear prior to, and throughout, the interviews that participants could refrain from discussing anything that made them uncomfortable.

## Participants

Purposeful sampling was interwoven into the recruitment process for participants in the qualitative phase. The quantitative phase and its findings served to inform and reinforce the participation recruitment process. In addition to this crucial element of the study's design, intentional efforts to enrich the student voice of the qualitative phase of the study were employed. Specifically, extensive recruitment communication and coordination were conducted by the researcher to attempt to gain a broad representation that better approximates the diversity of the student body at SWCC. This representation attempts to incorporate diverse elements of identity including gender, race and ethnicity, and age of those participating in the study. A brief description of each participant is outlined below. Following the thick description tradition of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher provides a holistic portrayal of each participant.

### *Participant 1: Derek*

Derek was a twenty-three-year-old male working toward an Applied Science Associate's degree of Aviation Science with a major in the Professional Pilot program. He had completed all the requisite coursework for his degree and was working toward the completion of the requisite hours of flight time to graduate. Derek's parents both graduated college with a bachelor's degree, and his mother also went on to earn a master's degree. Derek submitted a successful application to this selective admission

program at SWCC and maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout all of his coursework. He lived with his mother who was divorced from Derek's father while Derek was in high school.

Prior to attending college, Derek struggled academically in high school, grappled with his parents getting divorced and a traumatic event involving his girlfriend's mother that he was not comfortable discussing. After graduating from high-school, Derek fell into a deep and prolonged depression with no intention of furthering his education. Derek indicated that he "just woke up one day and was like, 'all right, that's enough of that, I'm gonna stop feeling sorry for myself, I gotta do something', so that's what I did" (Interview with Derek). He began working full-time in the lawn care industry until being laid off as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Derek was made keenly aware of the substantial increase in overall compensation he received at the time through unemployment insurance, which prompted his motivation to seek a career earning a higher wage than he had been earning previously, and subsequently a degree that would prepare him for a career as a commercial pilot.

### *Participant 2: Kyle*

Kyle was a nineteen-year-old male studying social work with plans to transfer to a local regional university to complete his bachelor's degree in social work. Kyle was a traditional student that began attending classes full-time at SWCC after high school. In addition to taking classes full-time, he also worked part-time in the retail industry, and had an active social life with an engaged friend network. Kyle received financial assistance through the native tribe that he is a member of, in addition to federal financial

aid, including being a Pell grant recipient. He lived at home with his parents as a cost-saving measure while he pursued his academic coursework at SWCC.

It appeared to the researcher that Kyle preferred to focus on the practical aspects of his experience in intensive courses and in higher education in general. The informal design of the semi-structured interviews was intended to allow for a natural flow of conversation and sharing of experiences that might include things of a personal nature. While the researcher avoided probing questions that might be deeply personal or deemed intrusive to the participant, efforts were made to glean insight into the perceptions of the participants which was supported through a better understanding of their personal experiences. Kyle did not express or exhibit any sense of discomfort with any of the questions; however, the conversation did not naturally flow in a way that provided deeper insight into his experience beyond the classroom. Although these personal aspects of the participant interview were limited, details and insights into Kyle's learning experience, prior to and during his time at SWCC, specifically related to intensive courses, were gained through the interview.

### *Participant 3: Beverly*

Beverly was a twenty-three-year-old female studying for admission into the veterinary technology program at SWCC. Beverly currently lived in a different city than that in which SWCC's campuses are located, so her coursework thus far had been completed entirely online. She was a first-generation college student, had achieved advanced level placement in her courses in high school, and had fully intended to pursue a college education upon graduating from high school. Beverly indicated that she:

> always wanted to go to college, but wasn't necessarily sure how to pay for it, or [have] like any guidance on it, so I was like 'well I want to travel', so I took off to North Dakota, worked there for two or three years. I found out that your first two years of college, at least, can get paid for, like through the Pell grant and everything. So I signed up for it finally (Interview with Beverly).

Prior to moving to North Dakota to work in the oil field industry, Beverly had never been outside of Oklahoma. Financial constraints were an ongoing challenge for Beverly, which is in part, what prompted her to relocate to the North Dakota oil fields for work because employment in that industry, and particularly that location, could provide stable compensation. In addition to the financial incentive, Beverly had friends also working in the oil field industry in North Dakota that encouraged her to join them there. Furthermore, Beverly indicated that tensions had developed between her and members of her family, specifically her father. As a result of these culmination of factors, Beverly left Oklahoma for the first time to live and work in the oil fields of North Dakota a week after she graduated from high school. While living there, Beverly began her studies online at SWCC, later moved for a short time to live with her mother in Georgia, and most recently moved to the southwest region of the United States, all while studying online. Ultimately, Beverly aimed to finish her veterinary studies and pursue a career as an equine dental technician.

### *Participant 4: Leslie*

Leslie was a nineteen-year-old Associate of Science in Electrical Engineering major. She planned to transfer to a university upon graduation from SWCC to begin pursuing a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering

Technology. Leslie exceled at, and was drawn to advanced levels of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Furthermore, she was highly motivated to excel academically and undeterred by the challenge of subjects often identified as being difficult. Prior to her tenure as a student at SWCC, Leslie took multiple courses throughout four summer sessions at her high school, which comprised the same learning outcomes and content as a course of one full year in duration. Leslie indicated that this schedule arrangement offered flexibility during the school year while in high school to take on more challenging courses and opportunities including two separate internships. Having had this experience, she found that the opportunity to complete college level courses during the summer before her freshman year at SWCC was compelling.

Leslie exceled academically and sught out opportunities, as she describes, "I like to know as much as I can…I also like to do a lot" (Interview with Leslie). However, the COVID-19 pandemic, which struck the United States in the Spring of 2020 had a profound impact on Leslie and severely hampered her motivation. While Leslie was initially pleased to learn that she would enjoy an additional time away after Spring Break, this quickly evolved into being in the virtual learning environment for the remainder of the school year. Leslie described, "I feel like they didn't do a great job of making sure that we were okay, basically they just kind of let everything go for the rest of the Spring semester…I let it all go basically" (Interview with Leslie). This year and a half time-period of quarantine, distance, and hybrid learning served as a motivator that prompted Leslie to seek out the in-person experience of two internships as part of her studies in high school before transitioning to being a full-time student at SWCC.

***Participant 5: Hannah***

Hannah was a twenty-four-year-old working toward an Associate of Science in Pre-Professional Health Sciences with a Pre-Medicine major with plans to transfer to a university to earn a bachelor's degree in molecular biology. After completing her undergraduate studies, Hannah aspired to gain admission into a medical school at a university to earn a degree in medicine and ultimately pursue a career in either women's health or psychiatry. Hannah had always excelled at science and was continually intrigued and fascinated by science, and specifically the health sciences. As Hannah described it, she "always found the human body to be so fascinating in that way that, you know, you can carry a baby, and you know, bring life to the world" (Interview with Hannah). While other aspects of the medical sciences were intriguing to Hannah, such as the exploration of the human mind, she was particularly drawn to women's health in no small part because of her own personal experience as a mother of three children that she cared for daily at home.

Although Hannah was comfortable and confident in her academic pursuits as a college student, that was not the case when she was in high school. Hannah described:

> I struggled with being in class all day long and just felt really overwhelmed with the amount of homework that my teachers would give me. I just felt like I was never gonna catch up, no matter what I did, so I just fell behind (Interview with Hannah).

Further challenging her ability to focus on her studies, Hannah's relationship with her father was strained. Hannah indicated, "I often was trying to hide out in my room a lot, so I just didn't really care much for school. I just kind of wanted to just sleep" (Interview

with Hannah). Hannah attributes her ability to overcome these obstacles in her academic pursuits to how having three children compelled her to "grow up really quickly", which has led to "a more mature outlook on things" (Interview with Hannah). The stability of a well-paying career was important to Hannah, so that she can support her children in the future.

***Participant 6: Jared***

Jared was a twenty-eight-year-old working toward his Associate of Arts degree in Psychology with plans to transfer to a local regional university to earn his bachelor's degree, and later a Master's degree in counseling, so that he could work as a licensed professional counselor. Jared aspired to earn a Doctorate of Psychology in the future as part of his academic and career plans as well. Jared felt that his coursework at SWCC served primarily to support his plans to pursue a bachelor's degree because he believed that having an associate degree alone would not support his career goals due to the higher-level degree requirements of the career path he had chosen. Earning a degree at SWCC was financially motivated, as Jared describes, "it's a lot cheaper to get your basics at SWCC, switch over to [a local regional university] so that you can long term, do the things you want to do" (Interview with Jared). In addition to being a full-time student at SWCC Jared currently worked full-time at an addiction recovery center. He and his wife had two young children together.

Before pursuing his current academic and career goals, Jared worked full-time as an operations manager for Marriot corporation in the hospitality industry. Jared indicated, "I was not gonna go to school…they sent me to San Francisco, to Austin, to Memphis, to pretty much help and fix hotels…and you didn't need school for that" (Interview with

Jared). Furthermore, Jared was resolute that having not gone to a college or university after finishing high school had benefited him personally and had better prepared him to more fully appreciate and derive value from his college experience. The change in trajectory from working in the hospitality industry where he felt a college degree was not a requisite credential for success to seeking a higher-level academic degree was the result of a trauma experienced four years prior. Jared's six-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a form of cancer that took her life nine months later. Throughout the process of attempting to cope with the tragic loss of a young child, Jared felt that the counseling he received was inadequate, which led him to want to improve on the counseling that others like him received. This gave Jared a new sense of purpose and a change in direction that led to his pursuing academic endeavors that he had previously not seen as beneficial or needed for his career.

***Participant 7: Henry***

Henry was a nineteen-year-old working toward an Associate of Science in Pre-Professional Health Sciences with a Pre-Dentistry major and planned to transfer to a university in the region to gain admission into dental school and pursue a career as a dentist. Henry expressed a focus on gaining admission to dental school first and then make a determination as to whether he may want to pursue a career as a specialist in the field of dentistry, such as an orthodontist or oral surgeon, which would require additional years of study in the form of a residency. Henry expressed reluctance in deciding to enroll as a student at SWCC, as he indicated, "initially I wasn't really a fan of it. Growing up my whole life…my brothers both went straight to a four-year" (Interview with Henry).

Henry described the important role that his older brothers play in guiding him and serving as mentors for him in his academic pursuits, both are doctors.

Henry expressed some trepidation about the experiences he was missing as a student at SWCC rather than at a four-year college or university. His friend circle is particularly important to him, and he remained in close contact with many of his friends from high school who are attending local universities, as well as those who moved outside the region to attend top-tier universities. It seemed that attending a top-tier institution was also well within reach for Henry, but that he had made the decision not to. Henry's mother recently underwent surgery and was battling an illness. Henry indicated, "Initially I really did choose SWCC to help take care of my mom, run the whole house, and stuff like that" (Interview with Henry). He was favoring a nearby university to transfer to, rather than a more competitive program further away, so that he could remain at home to help his mother. In addition to these academic and personal responsibilities, Henry worked part-time at a local electronics retailer three to four days per week.

***Participant 8: Sarah***

Sarah was a twenty-year-old working toward an Associate of Arts with a major in Political Science with plans to transfer to a local college or university to earn a bachelor's degree in the same field, and ultimately pursue a PhD in political science. Sarah aspired to become a professor of political science at a college or university, but this was not always her chosen path. Initially, Sarah wanted to be a veterinary technician and was accepted into this selective admission program at SWCC; however, the math required for this path of study proved exceptionally difficult for her. Sarah indicated:

> I've struggled with math my entire life, and I didn't really have, like a definitive reason why, I just always struggled with it, and it was like an unspecified learning disability in math, but I don't have any other learning disabilities. I found out this last year that I'm, um, dyslexic with numbers, so it's called dyscalculia, and it's pretty much the explanation of why I was unable to continue with the veterinary technician program (Interview with Sarah).

After that time, Sarah changed her major to management and then to political science, which she was pursuing.

In addition to her full-time studies, Sarah worked part-time for an apartment complex, cleaning recently vacated apartments for new tenants. This work required that Sarah work a full shift each workday for two weeks out of the month when tenants are moving out of apartment spaces, which did not provide Sarah the flexibility or consistency common with other part-time positions. The multifaceted demands on her time, had made stress management difficult for Sarah. Managing stress was particularly important for Sarah because she struggled with anxiety and mental health, which had been exacerbated by the challenge of full-time academic pursuits. During her first semester, Sarah took five courses concurrently, which heightened her anxiety. Sarah recalled, "I lost like half my hair and half my eyebrow, because I have this like nervous tick, with like rubbing my eyebrow. It was *not* good" (Interview with Sarah). Sarah henceforth enrolled in only four, rather than five, courses at any one time to help manage the anxiety she experienced and attempt to maintain a more positive state of mental health.

***Participant 9: Sharon***

Sharon was a forty-three-year-old working toward an Associate of Applied Science degree in Nursing, Registered Nurse (RN). Sharon was recently admitted to this selective admission program which accepted only a percentage who apply each year. Her nursing degree program was designed for working professionals already working in the healthcare field as either a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Paramedic. Known at SWCC as the career mobility track RN degree program, this program provided a pathway for current practitioners with the relevant credentials and qualifications gained through their training and work experience as a LPN or paramedic, to satisfy certain elements of the RN degree requirements. Sharon had been working as an LPN for over twenty years, so this program was especially appealing to her as a non-traditional student. Sharon had the support of her spouse and family that had recently made it possible for her to work fewer hours to focus more intently on her academic career. Sharon aspired to continue her studies beyond an associate degree to culminate with a Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) degree, before returning to the workplace full-time as an RN.

Sharon was a nontraditional student who at forty-three was older and more experienced than most of her peers in her academic program, which Sharon appeared to be acutely aware of, and somewhat self-conscious of. Sharon indicated, "…of course I'm older, and this is my first time back in college. And so it was a whole lot to begin with" (Interview with Sharon). Sharon expressed a lack of familiarity and comfort with utilizing technology, and it appeared that Sharon attributed this, in part, to her age as well as the number of years that had transpired since she last attended school. The interview, conducted utilizing distance technology, proved challenging for her prior to the interview

taking place and appropriate consent forms being digitally signed, which were ultimately overcome. Sharon described, “Me personally, I’m a face-to-face person. Technology is not my best friend…as you can tell, with the beginning of this [laughs] But, uh, I’m learning” (Interview with Sharon). Sharon’s laughter at what she perceived as a shortcoming, followed by a statement of optimism seemed to capture a sense of growing confidence and comfort with the path ahead of her.

### *Participant 10: Tina*

Tina, who self identified as Hispanic, was a forty-two-year-old working toward an Associate of Science in Pre-Professional Health Sciences with a Pre-Nursing major and planned to transfer to a university in the region to gain admission to a Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) program. Tina worked in the healthcare industry as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) where she had over fifteen years of experience. She served as a nurse care coordinator for a major non-profit organization that aims to decrease infant and maternal mortality in the community in which SWCC is situated. A major part of Tina’s role was educating mothers and fathers in the community about practices they could adopt to help decrease the infant mortality rate. Many of the people that Tina educated lived at or below the poverty level, were victims of domestic abuse, and/or were mothers breastfeeding babies born jaundiced due to the mother’s substance addictions, so they were considered high-risk. This element of social work inherent within her work seemed an important motivator for Tina. In addition to managing the day-to-day and after-hours demands on her time, Tina was a married mother of five children.

Prior to pursuing her studies at SWCC, Tina attended a major university in the region for three years immediately upon graduating from high school. Tina described:

> I went to university right out of high school. Nobody, really I guess, seems to explain to people like you can take your time, you know it is a four year college, but it's okay if you take five or six years. I really didn't have help financially from my parents, and so I had to work full time. I was taking fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours trying to have a social life, you know the whole thing, and so I kind of got burned out and just stopped after like three years (Interview with Tina).

After leaving the university, Tina gained employment in early childhood development before pursuing her LPN certification. Believing her previously earned credits in college coursework had expired, Tina only learned that she could return to her academics during her son's advising appointment with an SWCC advisor about his enrollment. Tina graduated six months prior from SWCC with an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts as a result of her previously completed coursework and those she completed as part of her continued academic pathway to an Associate of Science in Pre-Professional Health Sciences at SWCC, and subsequent transfer to a university.

**Summary**

This chapter presented a description of the methodology employed to undertake this study designed to gain insight into the experience of low SES community college students who have participated in intensive courses as a part of their academic pursuits. A mixed-method methodology consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis constituted the explanatory sequential design with a case selection variant. This study design leveraged the quantitative data analysis to inform the selection of participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Furthermore, purposeful sampling

was conducted to attempt to incorporate elements of diversity such as gender, race and ethnicity, and age of participants. A brief description of each participant attempted to capture their background and experience as it was conveyed to, and interpreted by, the researcher. An in-depth description of the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis is detailed in Chapter IV, below.

# CHAPTER IV

# ANALYSIS

This mixed-methods study explored the relationship between low SES students and intensive courses. As part of the first phase of the study, quantitative data was collected in the form of a large dataset, and subsequently analyzed with IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Crosstabulation and chi-square test of independence with standardized residuals were employed to conduct the analysis, which generated results for further analysis and interpretation. Multiple iterations of these tests were performed on various data points to examine the relationship and determine statistical significance of that relationship, as well as effect size of any relationship, between variables. Upon completion of the quantitative phase of the study, qualitative data collection was conducted. Utilizing findings from the quantitative analysis, potential participants for the qualitative phase were recruited and interviewed in the form of one-on-one semi-structured interviews over distance technology. Participant profiles are described in Chapter III above. Analysis of interview transcripts resulted in the development of three themes and three sub themes, analyzed in the form of a thematic analysis with interview excerpts interwoven throughout. These quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented below.

## Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted on a dataset generated by SWCC's institutional research department. This dataset was generated at the request of the researcher to include relevant data points for both primary and secondary analysis. The dataset captured three academic years of SWCC student course records which included course, final grade, and student demographic information. An initial scrubbing and consolidation of the dataset was conducted prior to analysis, which included conversion of raw data into binary format for analysis and interpretation utilizing IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS). Using IBM SPSS, an analysis of chi-square test of independence with crosstabs data and Cramer's V and Phi was conducted over multiple iterations utilizing different data points from the dataset. These tests were run for both primary and secondary analysis as described below.

### *Primary Analysis*

Primary analysis of the dataset investigated the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES status of students. For purposes of this study, success was defined as a final letter grade recorded of 'A', 'B', or 'C', and Federal Pell Grant eligibility was utilized as a proxy for low SES status. A final letter grade of 'D' or 'F' was defined as unsuccessful, and final letter grades that signified a withdrawal, incomplete, audit, or other special signifier were defined as an unearned letter grade and were omitted from the analysis. Final letter grades of P (Pass) and NP (No Pass) were coded successful and unsuccessful accordingly. This letter grade was an option provided to students during the initial onset and disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted all courses to shift to a remote and online learning

environment, so SWCC provided this option to students in response. Lastly, course letter grades were coded as either intensive or traditional in binary format, whereby an intensive course was defined as being less than the traditional format length of sixteen weeks, and traditional courses were defined as being sixteen weeks in length.

The first test conducted as part of the primary analysis was a crosstabulation and chi-square test of independence. This analysis was conducted using two variables, success and course format, of low SES students. Records of students not considered low SES were omitted from this test. The success rate of low SES students in traditional courses was 84%, while the success rate of low SES students in intensive courses was 83.5%. A near equivalent pass rate, coupled with standardized residuals near or less than one, suggested that the relationship between the two variables, success and course format, was negligible. Moreover, a statistically significant relationship was not observed between course success and course format of low SES students, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 90,882) = 3.63, p =.057. This finding was consistent with the literature.

To further support the primary analysis, a second test was conducted utilizing the same two variables, success and course format, to evaluate the entire dataset. All records, regardless of SES status were incorporated into the analysis. Utilizing the same crosstabulation and chi-square test of independence analysis tools as before, results indicated a success rate for all students in traditional courses of 86% and a success rate for all students in intensive courses of 86.3%. A near identical pass rate with standardized residuals at or near one, suggested that the relationship between the two variables, success and course format, would be negligible as was found in the previous test. However, a statistically significant relationship between the two variables was observed,

$\chi 2$ (1, N = 240,240) = 5.55, p =.019. While this finding suggested a relationship between the two variables, a Phi Coefficient of 0.005 reflected a negligible effect size, indicating that course format had little to no effect on course success.

Lastly, a third analysis was conducted to examine only intensive course final grade records for both low SES and those not considered low SES students. Records of traditional courses, regardless of SES status, were excluded from the data and analysis. The results indicated a success rate of 84% for low SES students in intensive courses compared to an 88% success rate of other students in intensive courses. A standardized residual of -4.8 for success of low SES students in intensive courses, and a standardized residual of 11.9 for failure of low SES students in intensive courses suggested that the relationship between low SES status and success was significant. Furthermore, the relationship between the two variables was observed to be statistically significant, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 66,659) = 263.11, $p < .001$. This finding strongly indicated a relationship between success and low SES status, suggesting that the two variables were not independent of one another. However, a Phi Coefficient value of 0.063 suggested that while the relationship between student success and low SES status was statistically significant, the effect size was negligible.

### *Secondary Analysis*

Secondary analysis was conducted to investigate potentially significant findings that might further enrich the quantitative analysis and subsequent phase of the study. Utilizing the same dataset and configuration as was utilized in the primary analysis, multiple iterations of tests were conducted and analyzed. The same quantitative and statistical analysis tools were employed to investigate the relationship between variables

related to demographic data. Using crosstabulation and chi-square test of independence, data records of low SES students in intensive courses were evaluated. Data points of low SES students in traditional courses were omitted from the secondary analysis tests, as were records of students in both traditional and intensive courses who were not considered low SES. Demographic categorical identifiers are those established by SWCC and recorded within the dataset provided. Gender, race, and age of low SES students in intensive courses were analyzed below, and gender, race, and age of participants in the qualitative phase are presented below in Table 1.

First, the demographic data point of gender of low SES students in intensive courses was evaluated utilizing two variables, gender and course success. Records where gender or race was not reported were omitted from this analysis. The success rate of students identified as female was 83.7% while the success rate of students identified as male was 82.8%. Standardized residuals that were near or below one suggested that although the success rate of those identified as female was slightly higher than those identified as male, the relationship between the two variables was not significant. Furthermore, the relationship between gender and course success of low SES students was not found to be statistically significant, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 23,968) = 3.08, p = .079

Second, the demographic data point of race was evaluated utilizing two variables, race and course success. Records without gender or race being reported were omitted from this analysis. For purposes of this test, records were categorized and converted into nominal data as one of two variables, students identified as White and students identified as a race other than White, which included students identified as more than one race. The difference in success rates between the two groups was approximately four percent with

the success rates of students identified as White being 81.7% and the success rate of those identified as a race other than White being 85.6%. The standardized residuals of those identified as a race other than White indicated 2.5 and -5.5 for success and failure respectively, suggesting a strong relationship between the two variables. In addition, a statistically significant relationship was observed, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 23,968) = 66.65, $p < .001$. However, the effect size was measured at 0.05 indicating a negligible strength to the relationship between race and course success of low SES students in intensive courses.

Lastly, an analysis of the age of low SES students in intensive courses was conducted utilizing the same tests as conducted in the previous two analyses, crosstabulation and chi-square test of independence. Prior to conducting this test, records were grouped into one of two nominal categories, age 24 and younger and over the age of 24. The relationship between the two variables, age and course success, were evaluated and the success rates found to differ by over four percent with the success rate of those 24 and younger being 81% and the success rate of those over 24 being 85.4%. The relationship between the two variables was found to be statistically significant, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 23,968) = 82.08, $p < .001$. Furthermore, the standardized residuals for those over age 24 were 2.5 for success and -5.6 further supporting a relationship between age and success. While the relationship between age and success was found to be statistically significant, the effect size of 0.05 indicates that the magnitude of the strength of the relationship between the two variables was negligible.

**Table 1**

*Profiles of Participants*

| Participant | Name | Gender | Age | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Derek | Male | 23 | White |
| 2 | Kyle | Male | 19 | White and American Indian or Alaska Native |
| 3 | Beverly | Female | 23 | White |
| 4 | Leslie | Female | 19 | White and Asian |
| 5 | Hannah | Female | 24 | White and American Indian or Alaska Native |
| 6 | Jared | Male | 28 | White |
| 7 | Henry | Male | 19 | Asian |
| 8 | Sarah | Female | 20 | White |
| 9 | Sharon | Female | 43 | White |
| 10 | Tina | Female | 42 | Hispanic or Latino |

## Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data captured through semi-structured one-on-one interviews was conducted by the researcher in such a way to allow for themes and sub-themes to emerge without predetermined expectations. Rather the themes and sub-themes elaborated below are the result of an objective study of the interview transcripts after all interviews had been conducted. While many aspects of the experiences of the participants conveyed through their interview responses are not consistent with any one given theme or sub-theme, a few recurring themes did emerge. Three major themes are: Time

management is considered vital to success in intensive courses; A sense of accomplishment is perceived as a motivator for both seeking out and completing intensive courses; There are multiple factors beyond course format that influence student learning. Presented below is the thematic analysis of the experience of low SES students in intensive courses.

***Theme 1: Time management is considered vital to success in intensive courses***

All participants indicated that practicing good time management was vital to being successful in an intensive course. The concern with time management was consistent among participants regardless of age, college and work experience, major, or the subject matter of the course. Most participants were engaged in part or full-time employment as a source of income to either supplement financial support received for their studies or as a source of income to support themselves and their family. In addition, most had family responsibilities that required a part or full-time commitment as parents of children or as caretakers of a parent or loved one. The challenge of rigorous academic studies coupled with these responsibilities necessitated a keen awareness of, and management of, time and time constraints as a result of competing demands on their time. This was made acute by the intensive nature of intensive courses where content and due dates are accelerated to accommodate a compressed timeframe.

When asked if and how the intensive course format may have helped with balancing the demands on their time, responses suggested that the format was beneficial to striking a balance of the numerous demands on their time while also necessitating that they practiced good time management practices themselves. In those descriptions, two aspects of time related to participants' experienced emerged, external and internal (Wang,

2010). External time was presented in the form of time management while internal time was presented in how the participants experienced time differently as a result of their intensive course experience. Tina, Sharon, and Sarah highlighted such a sense of time. Tina described how she experienced the first intensive course she enrolled in:

> Actually, I feel like it helped. Because a lot of it, too, just seemed like you had an appropriate amount of work. I never felt like I had too much work to do each week. I felt like, okay, and it was moving at a faster pace. So it's kinda like when you start reading a book and you really get into it, you don't want to have to wait to read the next chapter, or whatever you know, or like watching a movie um, and so sometimes, like, when you're on a role you want to keep going, and you want to keep going so that you're not forgetting things, and I felt like with being in the faster pace classes, I was able to kind of keep the wheels turning, and my interests were still engaged as opposed to being like, 'Oh, you know what I can do this at the end of the week', or 'you know what I can wait two weeks to do this assignment' if you constantly had weekly deadlines.[1]

In her recounting of her first intensive course, above, Tina experienced time differently than she had expected and differently than if the course had been in the traditional format. As Tina continued, aspects of internal and external time began to converge:

> And so I literally just had to write down. Okay, on this day I'm going to do an hour of this, on this day I'm going to do two hours of this, and I was able to make

[1] All quotes in this chapter are from single one-on-one research participant interviews and not separately indicated in the text.

> it work by splitting up my time. But again, my interest kept in it, and I kept knowing that I had timelines every week, instead of just saying 'in two weeks, you have to do these three assignments', because sometimes myself I like to procrastinate, and then I'm like, 'Oh, my gosh! I have two days, and I have three assignments to do' so, I would encourage it.

Upon reflecting on the intensive nature of the course and how it seemed to grasp her attention and maintain her interest, Tina recognized that the course required her to manage her time differently as well. Both aspects seemed to instill a sense of confidence that propelled her to be successful in a subsequent intensive course and again in another. Tina explained:

> I did it the first time, and I again. I was like, 'Okay. I can do this'. It wasn't so bad. And then I realized that I was gonna take one fast-paced class during the summer, and again I had that time to do it. And then statistics. I just finished, so I felt like I never was just stagnant and like, 'this is boring, you guys lost me'.

Tina acknowledged her propensity to procrastinate, but that being successful in the intensive course format precluded that. Furthermore, the courses in which she had experience with the intensive course format seemed to maintain her interest and the workload did not appear to overburden her.

While the workload could be made manageable through time management practices, a function of external time, the amount of work in an intensive course was generally found to be substantial, a function of internal time. This perception was consistent with research on student perceptions of intensive course workloads (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010, p. 66). Sharon described:

> I felt like I was being fed by a water hydrant, if you will. Um we… I mean it was…It was a lot, but of course I'm older, and this is my first time back in college. And so it was a whole lot to begin with.

Sharon seemed to perceive that her age meant that she experienced her time in the intensive course differently than she would have if she had taken the same intensive course at a younger age. This also seemed to imply that she perceived her experience of time in the course differently than that of her younger peers.

All participants had experience in both intensive and traditional-length courses, so their responses would often compare and contrast their experiences in the two formats. Sarah described:

> Um, I would say that just definitely like the amount of time you have to complete your work is much, much smaller. Traditionally you get like two weeks to complete a unit or something like that, for this it's like you get like a week, and sometimes it's only like three days depending on what the course you're taking is, and I've taken two and they were both from my summer semesters. But I just remember it being very, very demanding, as far as the deadlines go…There's no room for late work *at all*. You have to get everything done on time or you risk absolutely bombing your GPA.

Although the intensity of the course format was made apparent in her response above, Sarah later reflected on aspects of the intensive course format that supported her learning: "Honestly, I'm…I might be a special case, but like for me, like as much as the deadlines were stressful, it kind of reinforced me to stay on top of my work, if that makes sense?" Sarah seemed to indicate that while the intensive course format was more

challenging and stressful, the intensity of the course timeline compelled her to change for the better, which resulted in her being successful in her courses. This was consistent with Johnson's (2009) study where faculty expressed that the reduced timeframe of the intensive course format actually increased learner responsibility.

Moreover, aspects of Sarah's experience seemed to align with that of other participants, suggesting that the intensive course format fomented a change in internal time that prompted changes in external time, time management to support their success in the course. For example, participants described how the intensive course format compelled them to make changes that ultimately supported their academic success in one or more courses. Kyle explained:

> You really have to stay on top of things because there's been a few times where I've not… So, right now, I did this, starting probably last semester. I have a little planner where I write down as soon, literally the second, the syllabus was available. I went to the syllabus looked where everything was due. I'm sure, like in-person classes have this as well, but in the eight-week [online] classes, they always will have a syllabus that says, like everything. Every assignment is planned out, this is when it's due, you just have to have it done by here. Whereas my sixteen-week classes, usually sometimes the professors, like just go by the fly.

Kyle indicated that his experience with intensive courses helped him to develop time management and planning skills related to his studies.

The more structured nature of the intensive course format in which Kyle studied, meant that Kyle himself had to become more structured in his approach to the intensive course. Kyle reflected:

> Eight-week [intensive] classes, you know exactly what you're doing…you have that whole syllabus. So I just take my planner out, and I write everything down that's due, so I'm not stressed about having to keep track of it all. Whereas my first couple of semesters, I didn't do that, so sometimes I would forget something's due. So it could be like. 'oh, I am fine for the week, and then I check my announcements, and the professor's like, 'everyone did pretty great on that assignment that was due', and then I'm like, 'what? there was an assignment due?'

Kyle described the growth as an individual that took place as a result of his experience in the intensive courses he took. It was not evident from the response whether that same growth may have occurred as Kyle gained experience and matured as a college student, but Kyle clearly attributed his learned skill in time management and planning to his experience in intensive courses.

Contrasting with other participants' experience in having gained time management and planning skills as a result of their experience in intensive courses, Derek did not seem to attribute any learned or enhanced skills as a result of his intensive course experience. Derek compared his experience in traditional and intensive courses:

> So it was definitely, uh more intense than a sixteen week course. Overall, I didn't find it extremely difficult. Um… it was definitely more work, but overall it was more so, just… more things crammed into a timeframe. So say a sixteen week course, you'd have like one assignment or one test a week, and with an eight week course you'd have two a week.

In the excerpt above, Derek seemed to experience internal time no differently in the intensive course format than he did in the traditional course format. Derek's propensity toward procrastination was consistent across the two course formats. He explained:

> I've always been really good at doing things last minute. That's kind of my specialty. I don't know. I just I like to… I like to put things off. I perform better under pressure than I do if I'm planning stuff out. So for me personally, an eight week course was arguably easier than a sixteen week course, because, like it kinda forced me to work on things a little bit more.

Although Derek's experience in an intensive course did not foment traditionally accepted time management practices, he felt that he ultimately performed better as a result of the intensive course format. Rather than having developed time management and planning skills as a result of the intensive course experience, Derek's work ethic was enhanced, which seemed to support his being successful in his intensive course.

While participants managed and experienced time differently as well as making changes and adjustments, those who had taken both traditional and intensive courses during a Fall or Spring semester indicated that the mix of traditional and intensive courses provided a means to better manage their time during the semester. Hannah described:

> I don't think I would [have preferred] it in a traditional format, because in the beginning of the semester I was only, I only had two classes to focus on, so I was able to kind of get ahead more in those classes. And then once the eight-week

> classes started uh it wasn't as hard because I was already ahead in my other classes.

In this excerpt, Hannah aptly described the flexibility that a mix of both traditional and intensive courses would provide during a full-length semester, providing a balanced approach to planning the semester. Hannah indicated that this had become her preferred approach, but that at times, the course format for the courses in which she was enrolled were not always available. Hannah explained, "I was actually wanting at least one or two of them to be eight-week, because I would be able to get ahead in my other classes, and then it'd be easier. But I guess I couldn't find any". Although the courses that Hannah wanted to enroll in were not available for that particular semester, the strategy she had developed as a result of her experience in intensive courses appeared to work well for her to manage her time and to ultimately support her academic success.

Similarly, when discussing their experience in intensive courses, and how the format helped and/or hindered their ability to manage multiple demands on their time, some participants acknowledged the intensive course format granting them more free time, which allowed for more flexibility in their schedule. As a result, they could more freely advance in the subject they were studying. For example, Leslie described:

> I noticed I had a lot more free time. And so during that free time I'd use that to learn, do homework, because, of course, there's going to be more homework and more learning than normal. But it felt like I was more productive, honestly, because I had basically these big gaps in between. And then I still had the freedom with my weekends where I would go work um, and do the activities that

> I wanted to do. And then um… I would get back into focus. It was like it was more like um… I was able to focus.

Leslie seemed to differentiate the cadence of the intensive course in which she was enrolled in comparison to a traditional length course that would last for the duration of an academic semester. Furthermore, Leslie found that the intensive course format lent itself to increased focus and productivity in comparison to a schedule of solely traditional length courses. This perceived increase in focus and productivity seemed to support Leslie's academic success as well as her ability to find time that she otherwise would not have had available to her.

Lastly, Kyle was the only participant interviewed who had taken two successive courses in the intensive format. Specifically, Kyle completed Spanish I in the first eight weeks of a sixteen-week semester and subsequently completed Spanish II in the second eight weeks of the same sixteen-week semester. Kyle described:

> What I was thinking was that I didn't want to take, like two extra classes at the same time, because I hadn't been in college before. It was my first semester, so I didn't know what to expect. So, my thoughts were like, 'Oh, I could just take two eight-week classes at separate times, instead of taking two, sixteen week classes at the same time', because for some reason I thought it would be easier to do that.

In describing his experience taking two successive courses in Spanish, Kyle believed that the intensive nature of two courses would be offset by the fact that he would have fewer courses to balance at one time as a result of this approach to his scheduling. Ultimately, it appeared that this strategy of allocating his time over the course of the semester proved to be more manageable and easier to Kyle than it would have otherwise been if all his

courses were the traditional length courses taking place over the duration of the full-length semester.

In conclusion, through analysis of participant descriptions of their experience in intensive courses, two key aspects of time emerged, external and internal (Wang, 2010). Participants overwhelmingly described the benefit and necessity of time management, an external aspect of time, that resulted during their experience in one or more intensive course(s). Derek was one exception, as he indicated that although he did not develop more traditionally accepted time management skills as a result of his experience in an intensive course. He did, nevertheless, believe that the format resulted in his performing better in the course overall. Apart from Derek, participants found that the intensive course format required more work in a shorter period of time as is consistent with the nature of the intensive course format, and as a result, their behavior, and in many cases skills, were honed to adapt to the intensive environment where they experienced internal time differently. No participants indicated that their success in the course was inhibited as a result of their course being structured as an intensive course. Overall, participants seemed to feel that the intensive course format supported their ability to manage their time, which ultimately supported their academic success. Tina described, "You have to be really good at juggling and really prioritizing what days you do what, and where to do it…I don't know I just felt like that was the best for me, and how I could actually stay with my grades, and I was able to get, 'A's in all of my classes".

There are also two subthemes that emerged as important, which are addressed next.

*Employment contributes to the necessity and ability to balance demands on time*

Most participants were employed full-time, with some employed part-time, and only two did not work at all. At SWCC, the majority of students work a part or full-time position while pursuing their studies, which is comparable to national statistics where between two-thirds and three-fourths of students work a part or full-time position (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). The participants held a diversity of jobs that for some was a source of income in an entry level role with others working in the industry in which they aspired to upon graduation, such as the health care professionals working as LPNs with the goal of achieving the RN certification. The type of roles seemed fluid in that some would be working part-time during some periods of reflection and then full-time during other periods, sometimes as a result of their industry and other times as a result of the shifting workload of their studies, such as being admitted to a selective admission program or pursuing their studies in different parts of the year where their studies shifted from full-time to part-time as in summer. Whatever their role in their job, participants seemed to indicate that their employment contributed to an acute awareness of how work further constrained their time. Furthermore, this necessitated a more careful approach to managing their time and planning accordingly to balance the constraints that work, school, and other factors played in their lives.

Sarah, for example, worked in a part-time position that was essentially full-time for half of the month, cleaning apartment units in preparation for new tenants at the end of each month. When asked how she balanced the demands on her time, Sarah said the following:

> Uh, less sleep…If I'm being honest, less sleep. I would say, like any time I wouldn't spend cleaning. I would spend working, and I wouldn't tell my job this, but I did bring my computer with me every now and then. If I had like some downtime, if I had finished the unit and I was waiting on someone else to finish getting their stuff out like I can just bring it with me. But it's kind of like I didn't really have a way to balance it other than just kind of being manic and getting everything done it. It was like I had no, I had no personal time. I will say that.

Sarah seemed to indicate that her work required so much of her time at certain points during a given month that no amount of time management skill could compensate for the shortage of time that her job presented. Furthermore, Sarah seemed to acknowledge that while her employer would not approve of her utilizing work time for her school, she had little choice but to take advantage of pauses in her workday.

Employer support seemed to vary as Sarah described above, but Sharon felt that her employer was supportive of her academic pursuits. When reflecting on the sense of accomplishment associated with having completed two courses during an eight-week summer semester and if there were aspects of the course itself that helped her to be successful, Sharon reflected on the balance of demands on her time between work and school. Sharon explained:

> Um…during the summer I still worked full time, so I was able to do that, and it was maybe just that they were maybe a little bit shorter. I don't know, like right now I'm Monday through Thursday in class, and I feel like it takes up a whole lot of my every day, and whereas the summer classes were just kind of little bits and pieces. And my Comp I class I was only in class for an hour and a half during the

> week, which made you know, my working possible and stuff. So maybe just the convenience of less time in class or less time scheduled with something, you know?

Unlike Sarah, above, Sharon was working in the same industry as she aspired to after graduation: healthcare. This seemed to play a role in her employer's support of her academic pursuits, which allowed Sharon to shift from full-time in the summer to part-time employment in the fall. Also, the intensive course format of her summer courses required less commitment to attend class in-person, allowing her to continue to work full-time in the summer before shifting to part-time employment in the fall semester.

Like Sharon, Beverly seemed to feel that her summer schedule, which was comprised of eight-week intensive courses, provided the flexibility that she needed to continue with her studies while also working part-time. Beverly explained:

> During the summertime I was down in Georgia, so I only had a part time job there. And so I would work, maybe for six hours a day, come home study, and I didn't have to be at work until about four o'clock in the evening, so it's like I would study, and then I would take that hour, get ready for work. Then I'd go to work, and after work I'd come home and study a little bit more, and that was my schedule. I was right back and forth from work and school.

Beverly seemed to develop a rhythm that balanced her work and school commitments because of the scarcity of time that both obligation placed on her. It seemed that Beverly developed a keen sense of time management as a result of the time constraints and her prioritizing her academic pursuits.

In addition to the demands of work and school on participants, some identified a connection with their major and the work that they were doing to support their studies, which in Kyle's case weren't necessarily related. Kyle found a sense of assurance in his chosen career path of social work through his current employment in the retail industry. Kyle explained:

> I don't really know how… a better way to describe it, but just like an interest in helping people. It just feels like it's something I enjoy doing. Like right now I work in retail so like I don't know… It's just something satisfying about whenever you help someone do something, and they're like, 'Oh, my gosh!, thank you so much, I really appreciate it, you're so great'. I don't know it is… it feels rewarding.

In addition to this finding, Kyle recalled that the intensive courses he took in conjunction with courses of traditional length facilitated his ability to work. The online modality also played a factor. Kyle explained:

> That's one of the main reasons why I do take an eight-week class like pretty much every semester is because it's so much easier to work. Because I've worked throughout my entire time at college… like it makes it so much easier, because usually the eight-week classes are online. And they're online… like I pretty much can just work on it whenever I want. If I wanted to, I could get the entire next week of work done, like in one day, or I could just like put it off for a week if I'm busy that week, and I don't want to do it, and then just do it the next week. Like, it's very flexible on whenever I want to do it.

In Kyle's case, the online modality was key in offering the flexibility that he needed to be able to manage his time between work, school, and other obligations. It seemed that had Kyle been obligated to attend classes on-campus, it would have been more challenging, or even prohibitive, to maintain his employment while pursuing his academic career.

One of only two participants not currently working, Derek, reflected on previous semesters where he was working while also studying. The time commitment required of taking an intensive course while also working seemed to be unexpected to Derek. Derek described:

> I wish I'd known… probably going back to just the time commitment that it takes… just being aware of how much time it would actually take me. Yeah, because I was working at the beginning of my political science course. I was working overnight, and I'd get home at seven AM, and have to do homework until nine AM, and then I'd sleep all day and then wake up and go back to work. So I didn't have a lot of free time. So yeah, just being aware of the time commitment that it takes to do an eight-week course.

Derek appeared to understand the sacrifice required promptly into his studies by adjusting his schedule to prioritize his academics and employment. He acknowledged that he did not have a lot of free time, but it seemed that the demands of the intensive nature of the course in which he was enrolled and his employment necessitated a balance that resulted in little to no free time.

*Family Responsibility contributes to the necessity and ability to balance demands on time*

All participants had some form of responsibility to a family member. This responsibility included some with multiple children of a wide range of ages, those

helping a parent maintain a household, and those caring for one or both parent(s) with health-related issues. A sense of commitment and responsibility to family appeared to be a priority to participants, and as such was a key factor in managing their constrained time, but without, it seemed, any consideration of failing to meet those obligations. This sense of obligation, whether expected of the family member(s) or not, seemed to run deeply enough that it shaped how not only how their time was managed but, in some cases, the trajectory of their academic or career pursuits. For example, Henry took on the responsibility of caring for his mother who is combatting an illness and had recently undergone surgery. Not only was this family responsibility a major commitment for Henry, it was a determining factor in his deciding to attend SWCC and transfer to a regional university rather than attending a university immediately after finishing high school. Henry described:

> I also help take care of my mom. She recently had surgery, so that's a big thing this fall, like I've been taking care of her so like balancing all that stuff out plus school, running the house…I initially, I really did choose SWCC just to help take care of my mom, and run the whole house, stuff like that. It's like a personal choice, so I mean it's up in the air, depending on her health.

At the age of nineteen, and as a first-year college student, Henry seemed to acknowledge and accept the responsibility of caring for his mother while also managing the affairs of the household. Managing this level of responsibility while also pursuing his studies has meant that Henry has had to more carefully manage his time, even more so than his older siblings, and especially with intensive courses.

Parents of children seemed compelled to strike a balance between the demands on their time being both parents and students. Hannah, a mother of three young children balanced the full-time responsibility of being a mother with her studies by prioritizing time spent with her children during the day. In the evening, and often late into the night, she worked on her studies, which were online courses, many of which were also intensive. The intensive courses helped to make it so that she could maintain the balance that she has arrived at, which worked best for her and her children. Hannah explained:

> I don't want to take time away from my children, so I'll usually stay up till about two AM to get the online courses done, and um, then I'll spend the day with my kids. Sometimes, though, in the mornings, if I'm a little behind, I will, you know, put on a show for them, and try to get the courses done. Um, just a few hours. But I really try to not to impede too much in my time with them.

Hannah essentially worked more than the equivalent of two full-time jobs by serving as the caretaker of young children throughout the morning, day, and evening, and then shifting to studying, all while taking a full-time courseload.

The importance of the time that she spent with her children during the day seemed justified to her by the prospect of being able to provide for them, as they grow, through her career aspirations. Hannah continued:

> Well, I have three kids at home that, I um, that I care for every day, and I just focus on college and my kids. So it's hard kind of balancing both of those things. I feel like, because, you know, I have my three kids that depend on me. I um. I don't really have like an option for failure.

She seemed to feel that with the current state of the economy, it would be difficult to sustain her household financially, so she had higher aspirations:

> I've always been interested in the medical field. So I wanted to. Um I… that's what just what my calling is. And um, that's a long journey education, education-wise. So um I'm really just trying to hurry, and um get things done as fast as possible so that I can support, you know my children in the future, and make good money for them.

Hannah seemed to feel that taking a mix of both intensive and traditional length courses would allow her to study a full-time courseload that a similar grouping of traditional length courses concurrently would not. This was important to her as she aimed to move forward with her studies without losing momentum to attaining the series of academic degrees necessary to work in the medical field to which she aspired.

Similarly, Jared also a parent, felt strongly about the importance of time with family, especially with his two children. Jared was made acutely aware of the importance of time, and time spent with young children, after the tragic loss of his daughter at a young age. This tragedy shaped Jared's perspective on how to not only manage but to prioritize his time in such a way that would allow him to pursue his studies, but at a pace that allowed for the balance that was important to him. Jared explained:

> For myself, I've experienced tragedy in my life to where I realized early on that life is temporary, and that if you're going to do something, make sure that it is custom to what works best for you, so you can enjoy the small things that you can enjoy the things that you do love doing instead of just giving them all up and going to a traditional I'm gonna do five classes of semester and bully through it,

> which at the end people are wrecked, and they don't want to, uh they don't even want to do the career that they've spent so much time doing because they spent so much time doing something that they didn't really like, which would in a lot of terms be academic progress.

Not following the conventional notion of academic progress, Jared put more emphasis on his own well-being and the well-being of his children. Jared continued:

> I made a very conscious effort that if I were to go to school that I was going to still, uh allow myself allocated time to enjoy my kids and enjoy uh playing music and enjoy reading books, and I wasn't going to let that be stripped away. I'm going to take a quick course on [certain subjects], not just because I know it, but because it's like, 'Okay, let's get through it', and I get to allow myself the variance of that time that I would be in-class to spend with my family.

Jared seemed to indicate that he felt intensive courses permitted him the opportunity to spend more time with family.

Lastly, a sense of family responsibility was also experienced in the form of an obligation to a family member for having provided support and encouragement for academic and career aspirations. Beverly's father was an early and ardent supporter of her earning her college degree. Although Beverly wasn't caring for her father, she conveyed that because her father instilled a sense of work ethic in her, it served as a motivator for pursuing and persevering in her studies. Beverly explained:

> My dad um he… he was always a really hard worker, and he had his own business and um… he was really on top of my schooling and my studies, like that was the most important thing growing up. Like, even if we were sick, he was like,

> ‘you’re going to school until that nurse calls and sends you home, you’re going’. So… but that was always one thing. He was very on top of me, going to like college, and further in my career, because he was like, ‘you want a good career, so you’re able to retire, you don’t want to work your fingers to the bone till you die’, you know. So he’s really on top of it, and I’ve really… I didn’t thank him for it back then. But now I’m just like, ‘thank you’.

Beverly’s appreciation for her father having instilled a sense of work ethic and high esteem for continuing her education, seemed to evolve into her ability to manage her time in a way that lent itself to success in intensive courses, and ultimately in her academic endeavors. The emotional support that Beverly received from her father was transmitted into her academic efforts, which is consistent with research on the positive impact of family emotional support on low SES students (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019).

### *Theme 2: A sense of accomplishment is perceived as a motivator for both seeking out and completing intensive courses*

All participants emphasized the importance of gaining a sense of accomplishment through the completion of one or more courses in less time than would have otherwise been expended on a traditional course, which is sixteen weeks at SWCC. This was described as being significant whether it was an eight-week summer course or an eight-week course that was taken concurrently with traditional-length courses. Beverly, for example, when asked what advice she might give to students considering an intensive course or students enrolled in an intensive course currently, opined:

> If this is what you want to go into and do, just stay dedicated and motivated to your goals and to your long-term goals. Because, like, if you just keep pushing

> through like any intensive course, or even a sixteen-week course, you know, if you just really push through like there's always that reward at the end whenever you finish.

Beverly seemed to feel that persistence was a determining factor in one's academic success and that the sense of reward attained at the conclusion of one or more course(s) would not only justify the hard work and dedication but also serve as a motivating factor toward continued academic success. For Beverly, this was a major motivator and she seemed to feel that the same motivation could benefit other students aspiring to success in their academic endeavors, and specifically in intensive courses.

In addition to the sense of accomplishment that participants described as a reward for their efforts, a sense of having gained an advantage that would have otherwise not been present also emerged. For Henry, Leslie, Tina, and Sharon, the length of time required to earn a college degree appeared to be a key factor for participants to consider, and the advantage they felt that intensive courses provided them in making progress toward their degree was described. Henry explained:

> After I graduated high school, like a month after, I took two SWCC classes, Comp I and College Success, just to kind of boost me ahead, and to help out because I know it's uh, because summer I'm really pretty much free, so I wanted to do that, and also I'm trying to be a dentist, so I just kinda want to get that done.

Henry seemed to feel that his work in intensive courses during the summer semester provided an advantage toward completing the multiple degree requirements for his chosen profession as a dentist. Moreover, Henry seemed to feel that the general education courses he completed, while necessary for his degree attainment, may not have been as

relevant to his ultimate goal of becoming a dentist, but the satisfaction of having completed them was a rewarding motivator nonetheless.

Henry was a first-generation college student, which seemed to be a factor for other participants, but was especially pertinent in his description of how he came to enroll in intensive summer courses. Henry described:

> I have two older brothers, and they're both also doctors. They both went to [university] and stuff like that, so anything educational, they kind of like guide the path for me. And then, I knew they always took summer classes throughout college and stuff like that, and they're like 'you can take it now if you want to, or you can wait'. I was like, 'let me just do it now'…because without them, I don't know, I'd probably be doing something stupid in my summer.

While Henry was self-deprecating in his response, he seemed more importantly, to be elevating his older siblings and the advice that they provided. Their example provided a role model and guidance for Henry, who as a first-generation student, lacks the experience of a parent, which can be a challenge to the learning and persistence of first-generation students (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Moreover, their guidance and example seemed to be a motivating factor for Henry to seek out intensive summer courses.

Like Henry, Leslie also described a sense of accomplishment associated with having completed intensive courses in the summer. She went on later in the interview to explain:

> You know, like whenever you're done with this class, you're like, 'Okay, well, you know, not only am I on the right track, I'm getting a little bit ahead, you know'. And so far all of the classes that I've taken that were intensive, I've had a

> level of success which I was…I felt accomplished. Um and it definitely, even though for a short amount of time it did stress me out a little bit, like I said it was more of a rigor, it was more condensed, it was very fast paced, but once you're done, you're done. You have a sense of accomplishment that you did it, and that you can look into the future for the next steps.

Again, for Leslie, the stress associated with an intensive course seemed justified in the short-term so long as it supported her goal of attaining her educational goals in the long-term. Furthermore, Leslie indicated the importance of the accomplishment as a motivator to continue and for 'the next steps'.

Tina shared a similar sense of accomplishment with having completed a number of intensive courses in an eight-week format rather than electing to complete the same course in the traditional sixteen-week format. In describing her first experience with an intensive course, Tina explained:

> That's why again, why I did it the first time, thinking, if this isn't for me and I can't handle it, then lesson learned, you know I won't do any more. But I just really felt like…the material that it was, and it all being online, and it all being kind of short again, I just kind of felt like if I can make this dedication for eight weeks, I'll have one class under my belt. And so to me it was more appealing to be like, Okay, I can do this class in eight weeks instead of having it drag out for sixteen weeks.

For Tina, the notion of having a completed course 'under [her] belt' was compelling enough to her that she was willing to try taking an intensive course not having enrolled in one previously, knowing that with persistence, she would be able to attain a completed

course. Sharon, who like Tina is pursuing a career as a nurse, also appreciated the opportunity to attain course completion in a short time. Sharon described:

> It was a lot. But um, I enjoyed getting all of that done so quickly…during the summer I wanted to get them just done with and over with, and I had no clue how much it would be…[it was] helpful in that I got two classes done in a really short time, and they're behind me. They're done.

A sense of accomplishment was important for participants that seemed most related to the completion of courses over a short period of time, which intensive courses made possible. Other participants also indicated a sense of accomplishment being derived primarily from the completion of courses in a shorter period of time, but other factors also emerged as important. For example, Leslie felt that the abbreviated timeframe associated with intensive courses enhanced her ability to focus and increased her motivation. Leslie explained:

> Putting it all together, condensing it makes you, makes you focused on the subjects and topics, and makes you focused on whenever you're learning that you actually have to process it and like, actually understand it. So when you go home um, you're doing this on your own, and you're learning, and you're able to basically say, 'Yeah, I know this', but in the sixteen week um where it's in like shorter increments, but it's expanded over a long time, and I feel like it also allows you to lose your focus and um lose a little bit of that motivation, that's the word, 'motivation'. And when you're in an intensive course, you're a lot more motivated to finish off and do it well and know it better versus sixteen weeks, which was a lot… it's honestly feeling too much of this planning.

Lastly, for Derek, the sense of accomplishment seemed to have more significance than simply gaining advanced momentum toward course or degree completion. Derek gained a sense of pride and confidence that he attributed to the increased workload and rigor of the intensive format. Derek explained:

> The work ethic thing is a big [factor], just dedicating time to having to learn the material and having to do work in a shorter timeframe. That's a big one for me um other than that, I would say exceeding my own expectations was also a big one. So um… exceeding my own expectations. It forces me to do more work than I originally would have to do. So it makes me realize what I'm capable of doing, and not just doing the minimum that I need to do. It's expanding on what I believe my capabilities are.

This appeared to be a significant aspect of Derek's experience that he attributed to the intensive course format. Derek indicated that he struggled with academics in high school and had a propensity toward making a minimal effort toward his study and procrastinating, which is consistent with Rowan and Kenyon's (2016) study where low SES students lowered their educational aspirations as a result of a lack of preparedness in high-school. It seemed that Derek favored this approach for a lack of confidence in himself, but that in describing his experience in the intensive course, Derek was validated in his ability to accomplish more than he otherwise would have thought possible. In short, the intensive course brought out the best in him.

### *Theme 3: There are multiple factors beyond course format that influence student learning*

The course format, whether intensive or traditional, was one of a number of factors that influenced participants' learning. Understandably, the focus of the questions being on student experience in intensive courses yielded responses relevant to the format; however, other factors also emerged during the participant's interviews. Among those outlined below, professors and their course curriculum, design, delivery, and interaction were described by participants. Second, the matter of retention and retaining what was learned in intensive courses was another factor that was identified by participants. Third, the impact of modality on learning was discussed with participants' experience ranging from fully online learning to a blended learning modality and to a fully on-campus learning modality. Lastly, personal challenge and/or trauma emerged as a major factor that influenced learning for several participants. These factors are outlined in detail below.

**Professors.** Professors were an important factor, both positive and negative, for a number of participants. This was to be expected given the often pivotal role that, as educators, professors play in facilitating a learning environment for their students. This perception was expressed by participants, and several of them highlighted the importance of selecting a course with careful consideration of who the professor for the course is. Students utilize resources, including online resources, such as 'RateMyProfessor' to research a professor based on the experience that other have posted online through the website. Henry explained:

> A lot of this is tied to my brothers again, and like my cousins, who are also a little bit older than me too, that went through the SWCC path. Also looking at TikTok, like, TikTok really shows me college tips, like RateMyProfessor. I always use RateMyProfessor, just because it kind of like gives me a well establishment of what I can do, or how people have gone through this, and as I mentioned, I'm trying to be a dentist. GPA is a huge role in that, so I'm really trying to get like all A's. RateMyProfessor really helps you with that, gives you a difficulty of how the professor like grades and stuff like that.

Through the advice of fellow first-generation family and extended family members, Henry seemed to hold the online evaluations of professors in high regard and to rely on online tools to inform and guide his decision-making. While such online tools are not always accurate, Henry's efforts to investigate demonstrated the importance of the factor: professor, in students' learning.

Apart from attempting to select professors by considering the difficulty of grading and assessment from past student perspectives as Henry described above, how the course curriculum was designed and delivered by the professor was perceived as important. Like Henry, Sharon utilized online resources, namely 'RateMyProfessor' to help her, but the professor's teaching process was also important. Sharon described:

> I would suggest really use 'RateMyProfessor'. I cannot say how much having the two teachers that I had really helped the course. They were very organized. They were very, you know, good at this is what's due today, this is what we're doing tomorrow, this is what… you know just staying on the course, and it really helped me um stay on-point and organized with it, because I mean when you're going

> that quickly, if you fall behind a little bit, it's like you're falling behind a whole lot, because they're just so fast. So um, staying on point, really picking your professors well, and having a good support system.

For Sharon, the organization of the course itself was considered to be of utmost importance due largely to the intensive nature of the course. Sharon attributed her ability to succeed in both courses to the organization of the professors, but also acknowledges the importance of having a good support network.

Participants also shared perceptions of how professors negatively impacted their learning, which was shaped by their experience in having taken an intensive course with that professor. For example, Kyle discussed a challenging experience he and his classmates had in an intensive online course. Kyle explained:

> I feel like going back to like the professor responsiveness. Most of them have been great about that. I do have one professor in specific who I remember where um she was… It was like she had one office day, and sometimes she'd be like, 'I'm actually gonna be busy that day, because I have all these other responsibilities, so I might not even respond that day', so that was one of the most difficult classes I feel like.

Although Kyle hesitated initially, he seemed to gain a clear recollection of the professor and how, from his perspective, she expressed a reticence to be available for students. The lack of access to and responsiveness from the professor presented a challenge to Kyle which seemed to inhibit his ability to learn effectively in the course.

Another challenging aspect of the course was the manner in which the course assignments, including grade-bearing assessments were structured. Fewer assignments

during the course of the semester meant higher stakes assignments that could adversely impact students' overall grades in the event of one poor performance. This was exacerbated by a lack of clarity in the instructions and overall direction for the coursework. Kyle described:

> But also we had like almost no work in that class at all. Um, we'd have like these discussion boards and stuff, and they were worth so much of our grade that if you did bad on that one, then you're basically not doing well in the class, because there's only a few assignments. And um… she didn't have the most specific directions. So it was like our whole class basically struggled, dealing with her.

Kyle continued to explain that this actually resulted in an unexpectedly positive outcome in the course, which was that classmates were brought together through other channels that they themselves facilitated. Kyle explained:

> It also kinda turned into a positive thing. We had, like a group chat, like everyone in the class, because we can see who's in it. So basically, what happens is that we have this app called 'Group Me'. So what we would do is that we'd go to like the little messages where you can see everyone, and we'd send everyone an email of an invitation to the Group Me. So everyone in the class was in the same chat, and we could talk to each other and communicate and be like, 'oh, the professor told me this', so that's what she said on that. So like we were able to work around her being unresponsive.

Kyle perceived the professor to be unresponsive and that the unresponsiveness of the professor inhibited his learning and ability to be successful in the course. Research suggests that communication between instructor and student is an important factor in the

success of students in an intensive course because of the compressed timeframe (Ferguson & DeFelice, 2010). Overcoming this issue resulted in an unexpected but positive development, that ultimately supported his learning, possibly better than would have otherwise been possible had he and his classmates not been faced with the adverse situation. The sense of community that Kyle and his classmates built has also been shown in the literature to be a contributing factor in supporting student success in intensive course (Lee & Horsfall, 2010).

Other participants indicated that the interaction with, and responsiveness of, the professor were lacking, possibly as a result of the course format. In instances where this was the case, it seemed that the modality was online without an in-person component to the intensive course. In reflecting on her experience in intensive courses, this was the first observation that Beverly made. Beverly explained:

> I'm not going to throw anyone under the bus or anything but, um… I wish that the teaching was a little bit more in-depth, which I understand eight weeks, you know. So you don't get as much, but it could have been improved a little bit… Okay, really honest, the interaction wasn't very good.

Beverly's honest perspective on the lack of meaningful interactions in the fully online course was consistent with the literature about online teaching (Holzweiss et al., 2019; Krug et al., 2016) . She went on to explain in detail:

> And my teacher personally, she was more into the topic of the assignment than the actual instructions of the assignment itself. So she would be like, 'write a research paper over government surveillance'. Okay, So we would write that paper, and then she would leave little comments like, 'Oh, well, it could have said

> this instead of this', and she would base her grading off of it. I was like, 'well, but what did I do wrong in the assignment?' And she'd be like 'Oh, no, you followed the format perfectly'. She just didn't like what I had to say, I guess, but that was the main difficulty I had with it… She had her own way of teaching, and it just didn't necessarily click with my way of learning.

Though reticent at first, Beverly ultimately described her perceptions of the professor as inhibiting her ability to be successful in the course. In the interaction that she described above, there was a lack of connection between the teacher and student, which left Beverly feeling that the teacher only cared about the teacher's perspectives, rather than what students thought. Beverly also seemed to feel that the quality of the course offering was not of the caliber that it should be and that she did not align well with her instructor which adversely impacted her learning.

Like Beverly, Derek seemed to feel that the instructor of at least one of his intensive courses did not foster a learning environment that he felt supported his learning in an intensive course format. Derek explained:

> I didn't really have any interactions with the instructor. It was an online course and um a lot of the stuff we did was through um, What's it called? It was like an online program for quantitative reasoning. So a lot of the stuff we did was through that. Um, my political science instructor, I was not a fan of um was not a fan of them. They were very… I can't think of the right word to describe it, but it's like your typical… a teacher someone would describe as like, strict and very unforgiving, so that one I wasn't a huge fan of um, especially with an eight-week course. You know it's one thing if somebody is just not turning work in, or

> they're not trying to turn work in. That's a different story. But yeah, I just… it wasn't a very… they weren't a very inviting professor, like not a pleasant person to work with.

Derek's perception of his political science instructor seemed to have been a negative experience that had a lasting impact. While Derek was ultimately able to overcome this issue, he seemed to feel that the instructor's disposition did not foster a learning environment that was conducive to his learning, especially for an intensive course.

Leslie was able to offer a unique comparative perspective between how she perceived her recent experience in high school intensive courses compared with her recent experience in college-level intensive courses at SWCC. Leslie explained what it was like in her high school:

> Um. And if I were to kind of compare like high school intensive, the high school ones were a lot harder, because not only are you having to keep up with um, their rigor, but it's also such a long time of like condensed information. If you were in a classroom for about one hour, that would have been an equivalent of about one week of information, and it was a lot to process. I feel like that definitely helped me with going to college, where it was the same process, but because it's shorter, um, you weren't as overwhelmed and overloaded basically.

Leslie felt intensive courses in high school were harder to process, and the teacher's teaching was to deliver all the content, even though she was able to manage them. She had a different experience with the intensive courses in college that was more interactive and in-depth.

> Um, with college, the intensive classes that I took, the two of them, over the summer, they were all, they were both very interactive and very um, you know, they went into depth over these things, but the ones that I had in high school, um, a lot of these teachers they were… You could tell that they did not want to be there, and then they didn't really enjoy teaching that much over the topic. Um, so it really it definitely made a lot of students, um, you know, drop out basically, um, and only the ones who were really wanting to continue, they had to unfortunately just endure it. Um, so the experiences in college, so far with the intensive courses have been ten times better. I love them a lot more than the experience with high school.

Leslie's perceptions of her instructors from her intensive courses in high school seemed to align with some of the negative perceptions that other participants shared about some of their instructors in college. However, Leslie's unique position having taken intensive courses in both high school and college, provided her a basis of comparison where she seemed to better appreciate the disposition of the instructors she had in college, and viewed them largely positively. Part of her negative responses stemmed from having high school teachers that did not seem to like teaching intensive courses. So the instructors' own attitude to teaching a course different from the traditional course format is also important.

**Learning Retention.** When contemplating learning retention, participants' perceptions varied. Some participants expressed a preference for the courses within their major to be a traditional rather than an intensive course. Hannah explained:

> I don't know if I could handle so many eight-week courses within a semester. I think it's nice, having at least two classes where um I don't have to crunch as much information uh, especially classes that pertain to my degree, because I want to have the application of knowledge, not just the knowledge. I want to be able in my science classes, for instance, to be able to use this in the future. So I feel like I really need to take my time to retain that information.

Hannah spoke favorably of intensive courses, but when considering the retention of information she was learning, she seemed to feel that a traditional course might be preferable, especially where courses with subject matter pertaining directly to her major.

Another participant, Leslie, seemed to have somewhat contradictory perceptions of learning retention when comparing the intensive courses with the traditional courses she had taken thus far. Initially, Leslie explained:

> Personally, I feel like it is the same exact way when it comes to retention. Um, when it comes to testing, and the finals, especially finals, um, it is a lot easier to remember that information, because it is within a timeframe of, you know, four weeks, eight weeks whatnot versus sixteen weeks where you're having to remember the things from like the first week. Um, but other than that, the retention from what I learned three weeks ago for my sixteen-week class versus what I've learned um like a week ago with my um eight-week class. It's the same, because I have developed a strong sense of um writing notes um reflection.

Leslie seemed to favor the timeline of the intensive course format as she perceived it to help with memory recall.

When exploring the subject of retention later in the same interview, Leslie conveyed that she felt certain subjects lent themselves better to the intensive course format than others and that her field, engineering, would best be completed in a traditional course format. Leslie explained:

> I'm sure there are some intensive courses, although all the classes that I've taken so far that are intensive, they have been secondary, or not as a priority. When it comes to actual engineering, I feel like I'm going to take a moment and just take those full-term classes, because in engineering it's one of those classes… It's one of those um concepts where you have to use your brain. You can't… sorry, let me explain it better. So in engineering you're using your mind, you're using concepts, you're using ideas, theories, whatnot, and you also talk, you communicate, and you interact.

For Leslie, engineering was a subject that was built upon concepts and theories, which requires many interactions and communication, and thus a longer time to process. She further pointed out:

> With an eight-week class, you probably wouldn't be able to have that same type of um understanding connection, basically how engineering works altogether. So when it comes to those classes for sure, taking the time to take a break and focus on what I love and what I need to do, you know. The classes that I've taken that are intensive or summer classes, whatever,… they weren't my goal, they weren't my passion, I took it because I,… need to basically get it out of the way for things that I enjoy better.

Leslie appeared to feel that courses with subject matter directly pertaining to her degree, in her case engineering, would best be taken in the traditional courses format so as to better support understanding, retention, and subsequent application of knowledge attained in earlier courses.

Similarly, Beverly seemed to feel that the discipline or subject matter of the course might impact their ability to be successful in an intensive course. Beverly, struggled with how best to articulate what role the subject might play and how it might differ from a traditional course, but she concluded that certain courses might best be taken in a traditional course format. Beverly explained:

> Personally, I would probably avoid something like chemistry or something where I really have to dig deep and know, like the periodic table, stuff like that. Um, like memorizing classes… How would I explain that even more? Hmm…like anything that takes a really long, and I'm trying to think of how to explain this the best… like a really long time to actually be able to memorize it, retain what is being shown. I might steer away from the eight weeks there so…but, I mean if I was taking something other than calculus like for math, I think that would have been fine.

Beverly seemed to express that the difficulty, as perceived by the learner, is an influential factor in whether she would feel comfortable taking a course in an intensive rather than a traditional format. Furthermore, the ability to retain the information learned throughout the course was seemed to be similarly related with more difficult subject matter being better suited to a traditional course format.

Later in the interview, Beverly considered the faster pace of intensive courses, compared to the traditional length courses that she had taken thus far, a good fit for her and her learning style. When comparing the two courses that she had completed in succession, Composition I and Composition II, the first was completed in the traditional length, which is sixteen weeks at SWCC, and the second was completed subsequently in an intensive eight-week course. Beverly explained:

> I've always been a really fast paced learner, especially in English, like so like I took composition one as a sixteen week course, and I had it done within like the first couple of days, you know, for the week I was like, 'Well okay, I can work on my other courses'. So you know, like taking this intensive course, it was really perfect for me. Yeah, it was a lot of work, a lot of knowledge, a lot of reading that's for sure. so um… but I mean it really fit in with the person that I am, because I'm a really fast learner in that sense. So I mean… I feel like I've retained most of the knowledge, I mean, like what I've read in like twenty chapters of the book, you know here and there, but for the assignments, personally, I've retained a lot.

This excerpt supports Beverly's earlier observation in that she seemed to feel comfortable and confident in her ability in the subject matter being discussed, English Composition. Whereas, had the subject matter been one in which Beverly felt less confident and deemed the material to be more difficult, she would have preferred the traditional course and retained more as a result. Furthermore, Beverly referenced her learning at a fast pace which supported that both students' learning styles and the nature of the subject also impacted learning retention.

**Course Modality.** The modality of the courses in which the participants had experience was diverse and included fully online, hybrid, and on-campus variations. Participant preference varied due to a number of factors. For Leslie, the in-person modality of her intensive courses helped her to feel more confident in her interactions with her instructor. Leslie described:

> All the eight-week classes that I've taken have been basically condensed to where it could have been sixteen weeks. Um, I felt that because it was in-person, I was actually able to feel the connection with the instructor and ask questions without hesitation about a miscommunication, or any type of uh judgment that I may receive as well. I just felt like I participated better, but that is also probably some bias that I have, because I don't really like taking online classes. I can't really focus that well.

Leslie expressed a preference for in-person courses because, in part, the modality enhanced her focus. More significantly, it seemed that she had reservations about how corresponding with an instructor with questions might prompt her to hesitate, which would ultimately inhibit her ability to be as successful in her course if it were online.

Some participants expressed a perspective on the other end of the continuum of modality, preferring fully online courses. For example, Beverly was grateful for the fully online modality available to her for her studies because she was at a point in her personal and professional life where she was uprooting from one place to another for work and family. The flexibility that the online modality offered made it so that Beverly could move great distances, continue to work, all while continuing her academic pursuits at SWCC. Beverly explained:

> And then it was just one thing after another, really like my Mom actually lives down in Georgia, so I just went down to visit. She talked me into staying in with her, and I was like, 'okay'. So I went from North Dakota to Georgia, and I… I was all in school during this time. So yeah, it… it's a lot of change, and a lot to do. But I mean as long as I stay dedicated to my classes… which that's also another pro of being online, that I can take my class everywhere with me.

For Beverly, the opportunity to consistently pursue her education as she has, would not have been possible if not for the fully online modality.

Some participants indicated that they were unaware of the fact that the course in which they had enrolled was an intensive course. Derek, for example, enrolled later than other students, and only discovered that his course was not the traditional format of the full semester when he received the first correspondence from his instructor at that time. The course in which Derek was enrolled, was conducted fully online. Derek explained:

> I was completely unaware, it was an eight-week course, so it was kind of a shock, cause I hadn't taken an eight week course before, um… so you know, whenever you get the first email from teachers and whatnot? On the first day of the semester, they talk about how much time you're going to have to devote to it, how much study you need to do. Like you need to do X amount of hours per week to succeed in this course. So that was a little intimidating, but once we actually started. Um, it was a lot more relaxed than I was expecting it to be.

While Derek was not anticipating, or seeking out, a course taught in the intensive online course format, he adjusted accordingly, and was able to successfully navigate the intensive online course format.

**Personal Challenge and/or Trauma.** Many participants indicated that they were currently contending with or had previously contended with a personal challenge and/or trauma. In some cases, a personal challenge may have meant having dropped out of a previously attended college or university and recently returning to higher education at SWCC as a working adult. This transition to being a nontraditional student with children also attending classes at SWCC represented a significant adjustment. In other cases, more traumatic events impacted the trajectory of participants' academic and personal lives, such as the loss of a young child. Whatever the case, participants shared how navigating a personal challenge and/or trauma impacted, and continues to impact, them and their learning in both traditional and intensive courses.

In describing her experience in intensive courses at SWCC, Sarah indicated that she had consistently struggled with her mental health. Sarah described:

> I mean, I will say that, like I…I've like, struggled with my mental health before I began college. So it was like always a pretty consistent uh, difficult thing in my life, but with going to college, my first semester was absolutely terrible, and it…I don't know, I was so anxious I could hardly like think, and it was kind of like I was just…if I can put this…in a way that makes sense, like…I've kind of felt like I'm just walking through college, and like I don't remember a whole lot of it, but I'm just like doing it, and it's like I…I don't know. I feel I felt…I guess, a little like spacey ever since I started, just like trying to keep up with everything, and I mean like I guess it's normal to like be a little overwhelmed with your work. But I…I feel like I…I will say I've learned in school, but like I can't remember

everything I've taken. I can't even tell you what my other eight-week class was, like I just know I took one. So it's been…yeah.

While Sarah seemed to struggle to find the words to describe how her depression and anxiety impacted her, it seemed clear that it was challenging and unhealthy for her in her first semester, making it difficult for her to learn.

Derek spoke about having dealt with a prolonged depression, his parents' divorce, and a personal trauma that involved his girlfriend, but that he felt might be too upsetting to discuss. Derek described:

> So after I graduated high school there was a period of several months where I just didn't do anything didn't work. Didn't do school. Just super, super depressed, didn't do anything just stayed at home laid in bed, and that was all I did. Um. And then, whenever I started working, that's whenever it was kind of just like a slap in the face.

When asked what brought him out of that depressive space, which ultimately made it so that he was able to overcome and begin a new path forward, Derek explained:

> To be perfectly honest, I have no idea. I just woke up one day and was like, 'all right, that's enough of that'. I'm gonna, you know, stop feeling sorry for myself. I gotta go do something. So that's what I did.

Although Derek was unable to identify a specific factor that lead to his being able to shift toward a space of better mental health, this shift was a major factor in it being possible for Derek to embark on an academic and professional career in aviation.

Though younger than Sarah and Derek, Leslie also found herself contending with depression and grappling with how to move forward. Leslie described:

> Even though I'm pretty studious, I definitely had a moment in my life where I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and I definitely fell off of my track after um… after about… in Covid time. It definitely kind of threw me off guard, and so at that point it kind of went a little bit downhill.

For Leslie, the disruption brought about by the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, adversely impacted her mental health. Leslie explained:

> And of course, because everything was online. Um, the teachers they weren't really checking in. They weren't really talking. They basically posted assignments and called it good for the rest of that week, and all the teachers would also post something like in the beginning of the week. So, as long as you did everything in the beginning you could basically have a week off of school. And because there just wasn't regulation, like I said over like checking in and making sure that Everything's okay… a lot of students just like, let go… like just how I did. And on top of that I didn't feel like… I definitely feel like my home life definitely affected it. Um, I don't really like being home a lot. It's not my comfort zone. And so it just all kind of affected me mentally. And then that's how everything went away.

Leslie seemed to describe the sense of communal trauma endured by those living through a difficult and unprecedented time, which was an especially important factor for young adults navigating through that time period.

Jared described how a personal trauma impacted and shaped his trajectory, including his academic aspirations. Jared explained:

> My history is what shaped and wrote, writes, my future. Um, to go into that uh about five years ago, about the day, few days before Thanksgiving of two

> thousand and seventeen, my um, I had a six-year-old that got diagnosed with osteosarcoma cancer, and nine months later she passed away at a Saint Jude's, Memphis. And I talked to a counselor, a therapist, and they literally pulled out a piece of paper, and they were like, How are you today? And I'm like I've had a multitude of therapists in my life, and I instantly. It's like, 'How long have you been doing this?' And she was like, very proudly, 'twelve years'. And if you've ever dealt with grief, I was a grieving father that was very, very concerned about this, and in those times you need a reason to live, to keep going, right. Things get very complicated, very, very fast. And I instantly, it's like, 'Well, how do I feel? I feel like I want to take your job'. And she was like, 'well to do that, you're gonna have to go to school' And it's changed, I'm very proud to say I don't want to do that. I want to become her boss and re-educate her.

Jared found inspiration and motivation from the tragic loss of his young daughter after a brief battle with cancer. The trauma that he continues to endure was the principal reason for his deciding to pursue a new career path in counseling, which required furthering his education. His philosophy on balancing the demands of his time with his family, work, and school is a major factor on how he approached learning.

The participants' personal accounts of their personal challenges and trauma are demonstrative of the dynamic aspects of life that students navigate day-to-day. These challenges or traumatic experiences can be particularly difficult to overcome for low SES populations who might not benefit from the same support structures as others. This was especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically impact certain populations more than others. While only one participant, Leslie, referenced the

pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and disruptions to daily life as having a profound impact on her, the sense of communal trauma that nearly all endured during this time period has been described as influential and is likely to have repercussions not yet fully understood (Paceley et al., 2022), including for the participants.

## Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted within this mixed-methods study. The quantitative analysis consisted of a primary and secondary analysis with multiple test iterations conducted within each. Primary analysis suggested that low SES students at SWCC performed as well in intensive courses as they did in traditional courses, with no statistically significant relationship between course format and course success of low SES students observed. A subsequent test also suggested that all students at SWCC performed similarly whether in an intensive or a traditional course. Interestingly, while a statistical significance was observed, the effect size did not support a strong relationship between course format and course success of all students at SWCC. When comparing the success rate students of low SES status with those not identified as low SES, the latter performed better at a statistically significant level, though this outperformance is in line with overall performance metrics. The literature suggests that students perform as well or better in intensive courses as they do in traditional courses. The findings were consistent with the literature in students performing as well in intensive courses as they did in traditional courses.

While the primary analysis examined how low SES students performed in intensive and traditional courses, and how that performance compared to their peers not

considered low SES, the secondary analysis investigated the impact of demographic data points, gender, race, and age on the success of low SES students in intensive courses. Findings suggested that both race and age had a statistically significant relationship to success of low SES students in intensive courses. Although the effect size was small, those identified as a race other than White performed better than those identified as White. Likewise, those over the age of 24 performed better than those under the age of 24, though again the effect size was small. Gender was not found to be statistically significant, suggesting that low SES students, regardless of gender, performed the same. While the statistical significance of each demographic data point varied, this secondary phase further informed the selection criteria for the recruitment of participants in the qualitative phase, where efforts were made to ensure a candidate pool reflective of the diversity of SWCC.

Participant responses in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the researcher provided the basis for the three themes and sub themes discussed in this chapter. These themes were developed organically throughout the qualitative phase providing the basis for the thematic analysis comprising the predominance of this chapter. The first theme, *Time management is considered vital to success in intensive courses,* was found to have been elaborated directly or indirectly by participants to varying degrees. The second theme, *A sense of accomplishment is perceived as a motivator for both seeking out and completing intensive courses,* also emerged in conversation with participants to varying degrees. The third theme, *There are multiple factors beyond course format that influence student learning*, was identified as a part of the thematic analysis by the researcher at the conclusion of qualitative data collection.

The thematic analysis concluded the qualitative phase of the study, which was preceded by the quantitative phase as described above in Chapter IV. An interpretation of the entire analysis is described in detail in Chapter V, below.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the relationship between low SES students and intensive courses, gain insight to the low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses, and to examine the degree to which intensive courses contribute to the success of low SES students. The quantitative and qualitative analysis detailed in Chapter IV informed the interpretation of the entire analysis, the final segment to the mixed-method explanatory sequential design with a case selection variant, in the following chapter. Findings from the quantitative phase converge with findings from the qualitative phase in some instances and diverge in others. An interpretation of the findings from this study were developed within the context of each research question that guided the conduct and analysis of the study. Following this interpretation of findings, an analysis of how the findings connected with the existing body of literature was conducted. Some aspects of the findings were more aligned to the literature than others, while low SES student perspectives were found to both align with and be reflected in the literature of existing studies on intensive courses and socioeconomic status. Upon reflection on the study and findings, implications and recommendations for further study were developed and are detailed in Chapter V, below.

**Interpretation of Analysis**

An interpretation of the entire analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, constitutes the final phase of the explanatory sequential design with a case selection variant. Findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases both diverge and converge. Through the lens of each of the research questions that grounded this study, an interpretation of the findings is described below.

*What is the relationship between intensive course success rates and low SES status of students?*

The research question above, most aligned with the quantitative phase, sought to examine the relationship between low SES students and success in intensive courses. The design of the study, and therefore this research question, was focused on the relationship of these two variables in order to glean further insight, rather than to affirm or refute that such a relationship existed. The design of this mixed-methods study did not intend to reach predetermined outcomes; rather, through the primary and secondary analysis of the quantitative data, findings were allowed to emerge. Primary analysis was centered on the core question of the relationship between low SES students and course success, while secondary analysis aimed to garner further insight into certain aspects of low SES students by considering demographic data of those students.

Primary analysis findings indicated that low SES students performed equally as well in courses of intensive and traditional format. This finding was consistent with the body of literature on intensive courses, which supports that students perform as well or better in intensive courses as they do in traditional courses (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Davies, 2006; Gamboa, 2013; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Scott & Conrad, 1991).

Likewise, the same conclusion was made of student academic performance for all students at SWCC, which is also consistent with the body of literature on intensive courses (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Davies, 2006; Gamboa, 2013; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Scott & Conrad, 1991). In both groups, low SES and all students at SWCC, student performance in intensive courses was observed as being as well as, but not better than, student performance in traditional courses. Furthermore, utilizing Federal Pell grant eligibility as a proxy for low SES, students considered low SES did not perform as well in intensive courses when compared to their more affluent peers. This discrepancy in academic performance is also consistent with the overall academic performance of low SES students when compared to their peers not considered low SES, which is also consistent with the body of literature on low SES student academic performance (Allan et al., 2016; Walpole, 2003)

Leveraging demographic data as a core component of the secondary analysis yielded both anticipated and unanticipated findings that were intriguing. When evaluating age as a factor of academic performance of low SES students in intensive courses, students over the age of twenty-four performed better, which is supported by research on the efficacy of intensive courses and academic programs for non-traditional and working adult learners (Kasworm, 2003; Wlodkowski, 2003; Wlodkowski et al., 2001; Wlodkowski & Westover, 1999). Gender was not shown to be a statistically significant factor in the success of low SES students in intensive courses. However, when evaluating race as a factor of academic performance, a statistically significant relationship was found, with low SES students classified as a race other than White performing better than their White peers. Recruitment of potential participants with one or more of these

demographic aspects was incorporated into the qualitative phase of the study, in part, to attempt to gain further insight into areas where quantitative and qualitative findings might diverge or converge.

*What are low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses?*

The above qualitative research question aimed to glean insight into low SES students' perceptions of intensive courses and give voice to their experience. The themes and subthemes that emerged suggest that low SES students viewed intensive courses positively while also acknowledging their limits. A consistent theme interwoven throughout participant responses was the importance of time management, both as a component of success and as a compelling motivator to be successful. Given the commonly accelerated pace of curriculum inherent with intensive courses, this finding was not unanticipated. Similarly, the commitment to work and to family can heighten the need to balance the many demands on low SES students' time. Given the likelihood that a low SES student is to have work and/or family responsibility, this was also not unanticipated. Participants seemed to understand in retrospect, when recounting their experience in intensive courses, that an intensive course required more of them in a shorter period of time, which necessitated enhanced time management skills to be successful.

A second theme that emerged from participant responses was how importantly they perceived a sense of accomplishment associated with intensive courses. The perception of advancing more quickly toward academic and career goals was deemed important and was often a motivating factor for seeking out intensive courses and/or completing them once enrolled. For some, the final completion date of their ultimate

academic achievement at SWCC, or beyond, may not have actually been advanced. Nevertheless, having one or more courses completed in the summer or during a fall or spring semester provided a sense of fulfillment that spurred a sense of accomplishment and subsequent motivation to continue completing more courses, regardless of the format. Viewed as a series of course requirements by participants, this sense of accomplishment also served as a motivator for persisting through to completion of their academic degree.

While course format was centered as a factor influencing learning for purposes of this study, other factors also influenced participants' learning, including personal challenges and/or trauma. The curriculum of the course and how the class was structured surfaced as an important component to success, as did an acknowledgment of the important role that the instructor has in those aspects of the course as well as in their success in the course overall. Perceptions of the role, responsibility, and performance of the instructor varied with course organization being perceived as a critical factor for students to be successful. Because of the pivotal role that instructors play as educators in the learning process, this was anticipated, though heightened by the virtue of the higher stakes environment of an intensive course format. Related to the design and delivery, course modality also impacted students' learning in intensive courses with the flexibility of online courses emerging as a consistent factor supporting many students' success.

Lastly, personal challenge and/or trauma were a major factor that impacted learning for some low SES students. Personal challenge associated with mental health was often in the form of depression and anxiety experienced by students as a result of personal and environmental factors that could be exacerbated by the pressures of learning

in a college environment, and moreover learning in an intensive course environment. This potentially resultant pressure placed further emphasis on the importance of time management skills to mitigate the pressure and stress with a balanced approach to the demands on their time. For others, the impact of trauma was more far-reaching in its impact. The loss of a young child markedly shaped the trajectory of one participant, who viewed the intensive course format as a favorable means to better balance the demands on his time with his family. The youngest of the participants was deeply impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a communal trauma with lasting effects that will continue to be studied in the future.

*To what degree do intensive courses contribute to low SES students' success?*

The final research question above, most aligned with mixed-methods, considered both quantitative and qualitative elements including aspects of the previous two research questions. An evaluation of the overall success of low SES students in intensive courses from both a quantitative and qualitative lens suggested that these findings converged. For example, quantitative findings indicated that low SES students performed as well in intensive courses as they did in the traditional course format. Likewise, qualitative findings indicated that low SES student success in intensive courses was on par with that of their success in traditional format courses. However, thematic analysis in the qualitative phase found that a sense of accomplishment was a key component of success in intensive courses, suggesting that the intensive course format served as a motivator to persist and ultimately be successful in intensive courses. Beyond achieving success in the form of an academic letter grade in an intensive course, the motivation to persist could

also extend to persistence toward achieving overall academic aspirations, such as a college degree.

Another such relationship was extrapolated from within the qualitative findings where time management was found to be a requisite skill for success in intensive courses. This skill was consistently identified by participants in the qualitative phase and is also a vital skill to success when pursuing a college degree. In that sense, a relationship can be inferred though a statistically significant relationship between the time management skills attained through completing an intensive course and overall academic success was not evaluated, but many participants in the qualitative phase indicated that their experience in intensive courses honed this skill. Another relationship could be inferred from within the qualitative findings where participants indicated that the intensive course format also honed their ability to manage and prioritize the demands on their time, which was heightened by the commitment to family and work. Again, while inferences could be made from an interpretation of the qualitative findings, a statistically significant relationship between work and family commitment and success in intensive courses was not evaluated. The degree to which the skills attained as a result of completing an intensive course support low SES students' success appeared significant from the qualitative findings but is not able to be determined from the quantitative findings.

While gender was not found to be a statistically significant factor in the success of low SES students in intensive courses, the qualitative findings suggest that the relationship merits further investigation. Multiple female participants indicated that the intensive course format was a contributing factor in their academic success. The divergence of these findings could be attributed, in part, to the success of students

participating in the study, as recruitment efforts were unable to yield participants who were unsuccessful in an intensive course. In addition, the nature of qualitative findings giving voice to the quantitative findings, served to better explain the findings overall, and suggesting that intensive courses contributed to the success of low SES women to a greater degree than was supported in the quantitative findings. Conversely, both race and age contributed to a significant degree in both the quantitative findings and was also observed in the qualitative findings.

**Connection to the Literature**

This study was underwritten with the body of literature, detailed in the Chapter 2 literature review, as a foundation for the design and conduct of the study. Several aspects of the study's findings aligned with, or were reflected in, the corresponding body of literature. First, the academic performance of low SES students in traditional and intensive courses was aligned with findings of existing research studies. Second, low SES student perceptions of intensive courses were reflected in the findings of existing research on college and university student perceptions. Third, the low SES student experience, as interpreted from the voice of low SES students at SWCC, was also reflected in the literature on socioeconomic status and low SES student college and university experience. These three areas of congruence, or similarity, are outlined below.

This study found that students at SWCC generally perform as well in intensive courses as they do in traditional format courses. Findings from this study support that student performance overall is comparable in both course formats. Furthermore, most pertinent to present study, findings indicate that low SES students perform as well in intensive courses as they do in traditional format courses. A study that evaluated the

academic performance of low SES community college students in intensive courses was not located; however, the body of literature on intensive courses in colleges and universities supports, and aligns with, this finding. The seminal work of Scott and Conrad (1991) supported this finding through a critical lens, arriving at the conclusion that "intensive courses seem to be effective alternatives to traditional-length classes, regardless of format, degree of intensity, or field of study". More recent studies by Austin and Gustafson (2006) and Boeding (2016) arrived at similar findings, with support that students perform as well or better in intensive courses as they do in traditional format courses.

Within the literature on academic performance in intensive courses, frequent reference is made to the viability of programs comprised of intensive courses supporting the success of adult learners (Jonas et al., 2001; Wlodkowski et al., 2001; Wlodkowski & Westover, 1999). Adult learner experience, can be reflective of that of low SES students in their likelihood of having a commitment to family and work. Adult learners may also be low SES students themselves. Due to these constraints on their time, an accelerated program is often designed to facilitate learning while balancing multiple demands on students' time. This study did not specifically evaluate the efficacy of accelerated programs; however, the experience of adult learners was voiced in the perceptions of low SES students. Perceptions of accelerated programs comprised of intensive courses varied along the continuum though most seemed indicated that while they lacked experience in an accelerated program, such a program could benefit the right candidate, whether an adult learner or a traditional student.

Low SES student perceptions gleaned from the qualitative findings of this study, were echoed in some respects within the existing literature on student perceptions of intensive courses. For example, time management was identified as a principal theme from the findings, indicative of an increased workload that requires more time to dedicate to studies as a result of the compressed timeframe. The body of literature suggests that some students may anticipate a lighter workload as a result of an intensive course being in a reduced timeframe (Kretovics et al., 2005; Lee & Horsfall, 2010; Lutes & Davies, 2013, 2018). This expectation was not observed in the perceptions expressed by the present study's participants, rather their expectations in retrospect were of a substantially heavier workload, though these perceptions were observed after having completed their first intensive course and not prior to beginning one. Student perceptions were consistently of the view that intensive courses were by no means easier or a lighter workload, which is consistent with findings from Kucsera and Zimmaro's (2010) study that surveyed students at a large public university.

Low SES students interviewed exhibited a heightened sense of personal responsibility for their coursework in intensive courses, which is consistent with findings from a study conducted by Johnson (2009) that interviewed faculty teaching both traditional format and intensive courses. Faculty were perceived by students to have an increased pivotal role in their experience and success in the course, which is supported by Henebry's (1997) study of the impact of teaching style on financial management student performance. Conversely, Carrington (2010) found that that the impact of the instructor on student performance of intermediate accounting students was diminished. Communication with the instructor was expressed as an important factor, especially in

online courses, which is consistent with Ferguson and DeFelice's (2010) study that found students viewed timely instructor communication to be of increased importance due to the shorter duration of an intensive course.

The low SES student experience captured in the present study's participant responses are reflective of findings in the existing literature. The perceived relationship between educational attainment and economic mobility was demonstrated by participants in this study. Participants indicated that their career prospects would be enhanced through education or that education would provide a path to gaining employment in their chosen field. This perception is consistent with the literature on socioeconomic status where education is viewed as a "pathway of social mobility" (Walpole, 2003, p. 46). This view is not always held by low SES students' families, in particular for first generation students whose families may not share the perceived value of a higher education. Low SES students in this study expressed a positive perception of family support, which Roksa and Kinsley (2019) found to be beneficial for academic outcomes in a survey of Wisconsin college students receiving financial aid. Parents of first generation students are often at a disadvantage to advising their children on navigating the unfamiliar environs of college (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 245). While not all participants in this study were first-generation, the transmission of this disadvantage was observed in the responses of some first-generation low SES student participants.

Lastly, in their conceptual framework for thinking about pedagogy, Gale et al. (2017) "argue for a new framing of socially just practice that specifically tackles *economic* inequality, as the central site to intervene" (p. 346). While identity can be multilayered and complex, this study centered socioeconomic status as a principal aspect

of identity to gain insight into the perspectives of low SES community college students. Participants acknowledged this aspect of their identity in diverse ways and to varying degrees, some not at all, while others seemed proudly forthright about the economic adversity they face. Low SES students are more highly concentrated in community colleges, than in colleges and universities (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011), which research suggests is a result of barriers to access to colleges and universities (Alon, 2009; Bastedo et al., 2018). This was not clearly reflected in participant responses, which may be attributed to the extensive history and reputation of SWCC in the community in which it is situated and the availability of free tuition for qualified students.

**Research Reflection**

Throughout the research process of this study, the researcher remained aware of how researcher subjectivity impacted the research as discussed in Chapter I. During the research process, positive, unanticipated, and sometimes challenging aspects were encountered. Whether as a result of the research design itself or findings as a result of the study, these aspects are reflected herein. The positive aspects of the study included the mixed-methods research design which provided a roadmap for the study from concept and idea development to the writing of the study as a dissertation report. The utilization of a dataset generated by SWCC proved beneficial in that quantitative data collection was expeditious, and subsequent analysis more effective and efficient than would have been possible had the researcher collected quantitative data in the form of a sample. Furthermore, the size of the dataset garnered was robust which better supports the statistical significance of findings. Although the quantitative data did not support as strong of a relationship between low SES student performance and intensive courses

when compared to their more affluent peers, the data suggested that low SES students nevertheless perform essentially as well in either course format, traditional or intensive.

A significant challenge was recruiting participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Potential participants would frequently respond in the affirmative to express their interest in participating in a one-on-one interview, and then cease to respond in spite of multiple follow-up efforts. Some potential participants would correspond over multiple email messages confirming their day and time of interview, yet not attend the interview and cease to respond over email in spite of multiple follow-up efforts. Garnering willing participants that reliably arrived for their scheduled interview day and time proved to be the most challenging aspect of conducting the study. While challenging, this was also unexpected and constituted multiple weeks of efforts to schedule and reschedule, while soliciting multiple iterations of participants through recruitment efforts. This challenge ultimately prolonged the study by multiple weeks; however, the qualitative data captured by those who did participate yielded a robust collection of qualitative data to support the study and present the voices of a diverse representation of low SES students.

**Limitations of the Study**

This mixed-methods study was conducted and the findings were interpreted within the context of limitations. Limitations were due to the metric utilized as an identifier of low SES, the metric utilized to indicate course success, and the lack of research participants who were not successful in an intensive course. First, the metric utilized to signify low SES was Federal Pell Grant (Pell) eligibility which was an imperfect metric. Pell eligibility requirements were designed for those undergraduate students with "exceptional financial need" (Federal Student Aid: An Office of the U.S.

Department of Education, 2021), but utilizing Pell eligibility as a proxy for low SES for purposes of this study did not take into account the diverse levels of income represented within this group. Second, the metric utilized to signify success within an intensive or traditional course was also imperfect. An earned letter grade of A, B, or C was considered successful, while an earned letter grade of D or F was considered unsuccessful. The earned letter grade metric did not take into account other factors such as students' retention of the material or their understanding of the material, which may not have been reflected in their final letter grade for a given course.

Lastly, participants with an earned letter grade of D or F in an intensive course did not volunteer to participate in the study. As a result, all participants interviewed for the qualitative phase of this study were those students who were successful in their attempts to complete one or more intensive course(s), having earned a letter grade of A, B, or C. Therefore, the perspective and perceptions of those students who were unsuccessful in their attempt to complete an intensive course were not able to be incorporated into the study. While this study sought to glean insight into experience of low SES students in intensive courses, the experience of those low SES students who did not succeed in an intensive course, which may have offered a different or contrasting set of perceptions, was not available for analysis and interpretation.

**Implications**

This study found that low SES students at SWCC perform as well in intensive courses as they do in courses of the traditional format. Participants perceived intensive courses favorably though most participants indicated that a fully intensive course program seemed like it would be too stressful, suggesting that while the intensive course

format could serve to support the academic success of this demographic, there were limitations. Participants enrolled in a mix of both intensive and traditional courses or were enrolled in one or two intensive courses during the summer months, so their experience was based on having been enrolled in a limited number of intensive courses at any one given time. A practical implication was that community colleges should consider making a course schedule available to students that includes both intensive and traditional courses. This implication could extend to department heads, faculty, and administrators involved with scheduling decisions at community colleges. In addition to the availability of intensive course offerings, professional development for faculty and administrators in the development of curriculum and practices specific to the intensive course format could enhance the intensive course format offering at community colleges.

Furthermore, the intensive course format was viewed favorably by participants in this study and served as a motivator to persist in order to more quickly attain a sense of accomplishment and achievement at the conclusion of an intensive course. This motivating factor could be extrapolated to traditional format courses through the integration of more substantially acknowledged milestones, such as embedded micro-credentials where appropriate. Although this would likely not be comparable to the same level of satisfaction from having completed a course, it may serve to provide a more readily attainable achievement and further motivation to persist for the duration of a traditional course format semester. Faculty and staff development and training on developments and research in micro-credentials (Wilson et al., 2016) could serve to foster adoption at the course, program, or institutional level.

Lastly, the impacts of the trauma experienced across the globe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to unfold into the future, and likewise will impact community college students. In particular, those already in challenging and vulnerable situations, such as low SES students will likely be impacted in ways not yet fully understood. Professional development and training in trauma-informed pedagogy (Carello & Butler, 2015; Paceley et al., 2022; Tietjen, 2022) could prove beneficial to all students, but especially to those with marginalized identities, including low SES. For many, this would represent a significant paradigm shift in teaching practice for instructors, who themselves have also endured trauma. So, while practical in its implication, adoption of trauma-informed pedagogical practices could be far-reaching in scope for many instructors, their students, and their institutions.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study demonstrated that SWCC students, whether low SES or otherwise, performed as well in their intensive courses as they did in their traditional format courses. The robust sample size and three-year timeframe of the dataset analyzed for the quantitative analysis and the statistical significance found suggest that intensive courses have benefitted students at SWCC. Notably, low SES students did not perform as well as their more affluent peers. While this disparity is consistent with the body of literature on low SES college students, further study into the root causes specific to low SES students at SWCC is warranted. Further study within the context of the unique circumstances of the students at SWCC, and of the community in which it is situated, may provide unique insights and information. This could serve to guide faculty and administration at SWCC to tailor curriculum and support services to foster success for this demographic.

Further study of intensive and traditional course formats within the context of specific disciplines, majors, and fields of study would further enrich the body of literature on intensive courses and glean additional information for SWCC faculty and administration. This current study did not evaluate the success of low SES students in specific courses or disciplines as part of its quantitative analysis; however, participant responses during the qualitative phase suggested that perceptions of the impact and significance of certain courses varied along a continuum. Further quantitative study might glean insight into the success rates of low SES students within certain courses and disciplines. Similarly, further study of how low SES student success is impacted by course modality, whether online, on-campus, or a hybrid of the two, would also enrich the body of knowledge on intensive courses. The online modality can provide the ability to better balance the demands on low SES students' time that is often complicated by the constraints of family and work commitments.

Lastly, further study into the role that age, race, and gender play in the success of low SES students in intensive courses could yield insights of potential value to SWCC faculty and administration while adding to the body of knowledge on intensive courses. In the current study, the number of White and a race other than White were nearly equal, which is consistent with SWCC's institutional data indicating that it is nearing the threshold of becoming a majority minority serving institution. As continuing demographic changes in the community in which SWCC is situated take place, interventions and innovations in the curriculum and support services that foster the success of low SES students in that demographic is likely to be of increasing importance. Furthermore, while a statistically significant relationship between the success of low SES

women and intensive courses was not observed in the quantitative analysis, the experience of low SES women in the qualitative phase suggested that the intensive course format better supported them in balancing their work, school, and family commitments. This was especially pronounced in those low SES women of a nontraditional student age. While the benefit of intensive courses and accelerated programs is well researched (Wlodkowski, 2003; Wlodkowski et al., 2001; Wlodkowski & Westover, 1999), further investigation of low SES adult learners would further enrich the existing body of literature and inform curriculum and support services for that demographic as well.

**Summary**

This study investigated the relationship between intensive courses and low SES students at SWCC. Quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that low SES community college students perform as well in intensive courses as they do in traditional format courses. Furthermore, low SES community college students who participated in this study perceived intensive courses favorably, suggesting that the format supports their success in these courses. Moreover, through the skills attained in adapting to the shorter timeframe of an intensive course, suggesting that the format may contribute to some degree to supporting their overall academic success. Nontraditional low SES students, over the age of twenty-four, performed better in intensive courses than in traditional courses, as did low SES students of a race other than White. Further investigation into the relationship of age and race of low SES students and academic success would further enrich the body of literature on intensive courses.

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# APPENDIX A

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your familiarity with the intensive course format.
2. Describe your experience with intensive course(s).
3. Why did you choose to take an intensive course?
4. In what ways was the intensive course format more helpful?
5. In what ways was the intensive course format less helpful?
6. What are some things that you like about intensive courses?
7. What are some things that you dislike about intensive courses?
8. What advice would you give a friend planning to take an intensive course?
9. In what ways did the format help or hinder your learning?
10. In what ways did the format support successful course completion?
11. In what ways did the format hinder successful course completion?
12. In what ways did the format help you to balance the demands placed on you in your academic, personal, and professional life.
13. In what ways did the format hinder your ability to balance the demands placed on you in your academic, personal, and professional life.
14. Do you plan to enroll in another intensive course?
15. What would you think about completing a degree program comprised only of intensive courses?

16. How do you perceive intensive courses overall?

# APPENDIX B

# INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION APPROVAL

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | 05/13/2022 |
| Application Number: | IRB-22-221 |
| Proposal Title: | Intensive courses: A Mixed-methods approach to examining student perceptions |
| Principal Investigator: | Travis White |
| Co-Investigator(s): | |
| Faculty Adviser: | Hongyu Wang |
| Project Coordinator: | |
| Research Assistant(s): | |
| Processed as: | Exempt |
| Exempt Category: | |

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved**

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

**This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.**

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Travis White

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: INTENSIVE COURSES: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH TO EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS OF LOW SES COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical: Travis White is an education professional with experience serving a diverse population of students in a variety of settings including Mexico, Peru, South Korea, and his native United States. Prior to his current role as an academic dean, he served as faculty department chair and professor, teaching Introductory Business and Intercultural Communication courses with an emphasis on the intersection of culture and commerce.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2023.

Completed the requirements for the Graduate Certificate in College Teaching at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, Missouri in May, 2002.

Experience:

Community College Professor, Department Chair, and Dean
Courses Taught: Introduction to Business, Intercultural Communication