

A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC
PREPARATION AND COLLEGE
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When economic and employment issues arise in society, education becomes a focal point of debate. What content should be taught in schools to prepare students adequately to meet post-secondary education demands, what constitutes acceptable standards for instruction, and who should set those standards become points for consideration. Education, government, and private sectors seek to influence decisions about what is believed best for students and society. For the most part, debate has centered on the high school curriculum. Statistics indicate many students are not preparing adequately for postsecondary education. The United States Department of Education finds only half of all students who enter high school ever enroll in a postsecondary institution and seven out of ten high school graduates have not completed coursework necessary for college (as cited in ACT, 2005). These statistics indicate a lack of student preparation for the changing society of the 21st century and reinforce concerns about high school academic preparation and its effect on college success.

Two recent national studies report a “disconnect” between the American high school diploma and what it takes to compete successfully beyond high school. Both ACT (2005) *Crisis at the Core* and Achieve, Inc. (2005) *American Diploma Project* recommend stronger coursework requirements and rigor in instructional practices for

high school classrooms to prepare students for post-secondary success. Momentum seems to be building for change in high school academic preparation (ACE, 2005; Education Grants Alert, 2005).

At the core of these change efforts are curriculum content requirements, especially core academic courses and content required for high school graduation. Controversy regarding what subjects and content should be required of high school students began in Colonial America and continues today (ACT, 2006; Education Grants Alert, 2005; Houston, 2006; Kristen, 2005; Moses, 2006; Shapiro, 2003; Spelling, 2005). Significant studies (e.g. Eight-Year Study, ACT Crisis at the Core, American Diploma Project) and the historical pendulum swing of educational movements have not clarified the answer, and questions regarding high school curriculum continue to be asked. There is a need to understand better how high school academic preparation affects college performance and graduation.

Statement of the Problem

Within legislated parameters, the Oklahoma Constitution delegates to local boards of education and administrators the responsibility to determine the most appropriate course of study for their students (OSDE, 2006). Assuming this responsibility should conclude with students prepared to succeed in post-secondary efforts and goals. Determining what coursework and instruction are needed by students to be academically prepared for college should be, in part, the result of an examination of high school and college data.

Concern about the United States' ability to compete in the global economy is resulting in more legislative pressure and mandates on high schools to change their curriculum requirements (ACE, 2005; Achieve, Inc., 2005; ACT, 2005). Educators are expected to offer appropriate courses of high quality and rigor resulting in all students being prepared for college and the 21st century workplace. However, Houston (2006) and Moses (2006) believe it is necessary first to understand better and reach a consensus about what is needed by students before additional reform efforts are implemented.

Local boards of education have the responsibility to provide an appropriate program of study for students that falls within legislated parameters. In Oklahoma, a structured system of learning and teaching exists through Priority Academic Student Skills, commonly known as PASS (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2006). This mandatory curriculum provides a set of learning objectives in academic areas that are to be taught and mastered by Oklahoma students. Given that communities, students, and faculties are different, it is reasonable to question if a focus on one specific curriculum meets the needs of all students. "Schools...are replete with different and divergent purposes" (Shapiro, 2003, p. 314).

While data have been gathered in large studies on quantitative, measurable aspects of the relationship between high school academic preparation and college success (e.g. ACT Crisis at the Core, College Board studies, American Diploma Project), what has not received sufficient attention is exploration of student academic records and lived experiences as these relate to high school preparation and its effects on college success. Case study research is needed by practitioners in education who must understand what is needed by students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the high school and college academic performance of a cohort of students and their perceptions as young adults regarding beliefs about their high school academic preparation and its effect on college academic success. The research attempted to gain the participants' perceptions about their high school and college experiences.

In 2006, the Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education (OSRHE) reported that while Oklahoma college graduation rates are improving, only 40.1 percent of college students graduate within a six-year period. This study examined the high school and college academic experiences of a cohort of students to determine what connections exist between their high school courses of study and later success in college. It focused on members of a 1999 Oklahoma suburban high school graduating class who subsequently attended Oklahoma public colleges and universities. Information and data were obtained to determine what patterns exist that may have affected the academic success of students within this group. The 1999 class was selected based on a recommendation from OSRHE. Statistics indicate that a time period of at least six years after high school graduation is needed for valid research involving college graduation rates.

Theoretical Lens

“The overwhelming consensus as the twentieth century closed has been that knowledge is constructed” (Phillips, 2000, p. 2). Experts in cognition generally agree with this constructive character of learning. While the theoretical framework varies, generally all concur that learners are the builders of their own knowledge (Evans, 1994).

People actively receive information and construct knowledge as “they strive to make sense of their world” (Cobb, 1994, p. 1049).

Constructivism is the theoretical lens guiding the study. It is based on the premise that “we all construct our own perspective of the world through individual experiences and schema” (Mergell, 2007, p. 2). “In constructivism, the learner is the active agent, internalizing, reshaping, or transforming information and constructing meaning or understanding” (English, 2006, p. 606). Constructivism was important to this study as the researcher sought to determine, through data reflecting the perceptions of participants, what connections may exist between high school academic preparation and college success.

Constructivism as a theoretical lens guided the examination of statistical data and the stories of students as they have constructed their knowledge and beliefs about their educational experiences. Constructivism suggests that those who have achieved sufficiently in high school, attended college, and subsequently graduated would be able to describe and explain their experiences. Participants would be capable of assessing how well their high school academic performance prepared them for college and sharing those perceptions. In addition, through constructivism, the researcher constructs meaning from the data.

Research Questions

The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success?
2. What factors seem to contribute to college success?

Significance of the Study

This case study was designed to examine high school academic preparation and the connections and factors perceived by a cohort of students to have contributed to their college success. The researcher sought to understand better what young adults believe was important in their high school academic experiences that may have influenced college success.

Further, the case study uses OSHRE databases that provide information linking high school and college progress. Oklahoma school districts previously had limited access to post-secondary data about their students. High schools provided at least a state minimum curriculum for graduation and hoped it met the needs of their graduates. Today, information systems and technology through OSHRE create post-secondary academic data available to assist districts in decision making and school improvement. Use of these systems has the potential to provide beneficial information to high schools regarding their student's academic preparation for college.

Limitations of the Study

The case study was designed to gather statistical data, stories, and experiences of individuals within the cohort. A limitation of this type of study is that one cannot create an empirical finding from a single case study or small sample. However, one can learn from such a case. This study was confined to the examination of some students from a single graduating class. While the hope is that the findings will provide insights for other groups of students, the study is not applicable to all students in all high schools; rather, the study speaks to the experiences of this specific cohort of students.

An additional limitation to the case study is that only students within the cohort who subsequently attended Oklahoma public colleges and universities were included. Data were available for these students, but not for those who may have attended in- or out-of-state private or out-of-state public universities.

Important to recognize is that multiple factors impact a student's success in college. Those factors include student maturation, intellect, motivation, and a student's financial resources. This study looked only at the academic experience of students as it may have affected their college endeavors knowing that other factors can have a significant impact on student success.

Mertens (1998) stated that it is impossible to design and conduct the perfect research study. Because of this, the benefits of a small case study as well as its limitations are acknowledged.

Definition of Terms

American College Testing (ACT): A non-profit organization providing assessment, research, information, and professional development for education (ACT, 2006).

ACT Exam: America's most widely accepted college entrance exam assessing general educational development and ability to complete college-level work. The exam covers four skills areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science (ACT, 2006).

Advanced Placement (AP) Program: A cooperative educational endeavor between secondary schools and colleges and universities. It allows high school students to undertake college-level academic learning in AP courses and gives them the

opportunity to show that they have mastered the advanced material by taking AP Exams (College Board, 1998).

Cohort: Research participants from the high school's 1999 graduating class who subsequently attended Oklahoma public colleges and universities.

College Board: A non-profit membership organization whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunities (College Board, 2006).

College Success Rates: The number of students in the cohort attending an Oklahoma public university, percentage of those returning for their second year (retention rate), percentage graduating within a four- to six-year time period, grade point averages at the end of their first year and at graduation, and the percentage of students continuing to graduate school at Oklahoma public universities.

Grade Point Average (GPA): The mean of the total grades of a student within a subject; or the mean of the grade point averages of a cohort of students.

Graduating Class: The high school's 1999 senior class of 87 students (consisting of 52 males and 35 females).

Interview Participants of the Study: A subgroup of the cohort of students being studied who participated in interviews.

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE): The coordinating board for Oklahoma's public colleges and universities. The state system was created in 1941 and is currently comprised of 25 colleges and universities, 10 constituent agencies, and one higher education center with a current enrollment of more than 238,000 students (OSRHE, 2006).

Retention Rate: Percentage of students returning to the university for the second consecutive year of instruction.

Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT): A college entrance exam sponsored by College Board (College Board, 2006).

Traditional Curriculum: Curriculum that includes four English courses, three or four mathematics courses, three or four science courses, three or four courses in the social studies required for high school graduation. This is often termed a college preparatory curriculum.

Unitized Data System (UDS): The data collection process in existence since 1977 used by OSRHE for collecting information from Oklahoma colleges and universities. Each semester a minimum of 75 discrete data elements is gathered for every student in the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education (OSRHE, 2006).

Dissertation Format

The literature reviewed as background and support for the study is presented and discussed in Chapter II. Methodology for the study is described in Chapter III. Chapter IV has the data presented, while they are discussed and analyzed in Chapter V. Chapter VI concludes the dissertation with a summary, conclusion, recommendations, and a final thought.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This case study focused on high school academic preparation and college academic success experienced by a cohort of graduates from an Oklahoma accredited high school who attended Oklahoma public colleges and universities. To understand the issues surrounding this topic, a historical review of the development of American high schools, a description of current high school curriculum reform efforts, and an examination of related research are required. Directly and indirectly, each of these areas gives insight into the development of curriculum and instructional practices of American high schools and into the research on this topic.

The following literature review through background and support is a foundation for this study. The first section, a review of the development of American high schools is a perspective of the longevity of concerns regarding what curriculum and instruction are needed at this level of education. The next is an examination of current high school curriculum reform efforts which is relevant to the study's topic as it focuses on an examination of high schools' curricular needs. The literature review concludes with an examination of related research.

Historical Review of the Development of American High Schools

To understand the development of public education in the United States, particularly American high schools, is to understand the history that has influenced our school systems. What curriculum should be offered to high school students to ensure their post-secondary success has been frequently questioned and once again is receiving significant re-examination. Goodson (1997) stated “one of the striking trends within educational theory during recent years has been the growing interest in the history of the secondary school curriculum” (p. 61).

As settlers established colonies in what was later to become the United States, they questioned how to best educate students. What should be taught in American schools was an important question then and continues to be relevant almost four centuries later. Through the years, pendulum swings concerning pedagogy in American schools have advocated both an emphasis on traditional education as curriculum best for both college preparation and life in general and, in an opposite direction, an emphasis on curriculum that provides a broader option of class choices and life skills for students. During the country’s history, when Americans repeatedly turned to secondary education to solve profound economic, social, and political problems, they differed in their diagnoses and solutions. Specifically, they differed in their beliefs of what coursework should be required of all high school graduates (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

During the Colonial Era, the assumption among colonists was that few children needed schooling, and education was limited primarily to those who studied law, medicine, and the ministry. The purpose of formal education was based on a European

view of education and directed at bringing conformity to the idea of what constituted an educated person (Marsh & Willis, 2003). As early as 1642, Harvard College, the first higher education institution in the colonies, set a secondary school curriculum titled *The Harvard Curriculum*. Its primary emphasis was on religion and literary studies, with lesser emphasis on logic, physics, history, botany, arithmetic, geometry, and astrology (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

In 1749, Benjamin Franklin opened the Franklin Academy challenging the exclusivity and narrowness of classical education. The Academy proposed that classical studies be taught, but not required of all children. Instead, a student's prospective profession would determine his studies (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Franklin also advocated active inquiry as a primary strategy for instruction, rather than limiting learning to the traditional lecture style of teaching (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Similar educational philosophies concerning traditional studies and broader options for meeting educational needs would continued to battle each other in the decades to follow (Aiken, 2000; Eisner, 2002).

During the nineteenth century, the idea that larger numbers of students should be educated to protect democracy gained acceptance. The common school movement of this time period was an important contribution to American school structure (Marsh & Willis, 2003). Toward the end of that century, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization were changing the nature of the country. Beyond the common school level, only ten percent of secondary school age children attended high school, but three-fourths of those students subsequently attended the university. High school curriculum continued to be driven by the idea of classical studies (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

As the Industrial Revolution began and the need to examine high school curriculum for this new society became apparent, American communities began changing. In 1893, the Committee of Ten was organized by the National Education Association (NEA) as a task force to study secondary curriculum. The *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary Schools* was issued. This was the first major national study on the high school (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and advocated a subject-centered curriculum based on classical curriculum studies. While it included more modern subjects, particularly modern languages, it clearly advocated a college-preparatory curriculum as best for both success at the university and life in general (Marsh & Willis, 2003). The Committee of Ten “accepted without question that the purpose of education was mental discipline and held that all recommended subjects were of equal value in building sound mental habits” (Brown, 2004, p. 1).

During the twentieth century, a notable movement to broaden the programs and the function of American schools developed. Similar in philosophy to the Franklin Academy of the Colonies, the Progressive Education Movement sought to offer students a broader choice of courses beyond traditional subject matter that would best serve individual students in their post-secondary school efforts. Between 1880 and 1930, educators pursued reform of the secondary school curriculum by introducing technical subjects such as industrial education, commercial studies, and domestic science (Goodson, 1994).

The Progressive Education Movement advocated for a new study of high school curriculum. As a result of the work of the Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education, seven main objectives for the education of all United States students were

created. These Cardinal Principles included health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character (Marsh & Willis, 2003). This effort laid a foundation for choice in American schools that can be seen today as practical, and vocational subjects are evident in class choices. It is also believed to have laid the foundation for the tracking of many high school students into career paths which some think reinforced gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities (Galston, 2005; Goodson, 1994).

Despite the efforts of the Progressive Education Movement to broaden course work choice for high school graduation, curricula remained subject centered in most American schools during the early twentieth century. Although more practical and vocational subjects were added, the new ideas about individual-centered courses of study seemed outside the ideas of mainstream American education. In 1930, an effort was initiated to validate the development of these new progressive ideas about curricula and to examine whether curriculum other than the traditional sixteen Carnegie Units required at that time could serve as satisfactory preparation for college. A study was organized by the Progressive Education Committee for two basic purposes. First, it sought to establish a relationship between the school and college that could permit and encourage reconstruction of the secondary school. Second, through exploration and experimentation, it was to find how high schools could serve their students more effectively. The study, now known as the Eight-Year Study, is considered comprehensive and credible as it was a large, well-documented example of individual-centered curricula and research (Aiken, 2000).

The purpose of the Eight-Year Study was to engage in a long-term study of the relevance of high school curriculum and education and its impact on success or failure in college admissions and success (Kreider, 2002). The results of the study seemed to demonstrate that individual-centered curricula were at least as good preparation for college as was the traditional subject-centered curriculum and an even better preparation for life in general. In fact, the more experimental and individually oriented the secondary curriculum was, the better off students seemed. However, the significance of the study was not acknowledged as its results were published in 1942 as the United States plunged into World War II. The Eight-Year Study did have some long-term effect as it demonstrated the benefits of progressive curriculum practices that would continue to become an influential approach to curriculum planning and development in the decades following World War II (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

Progressive Education efforts were significant throughout the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1930s when the hardships of the Great Depression caused dissatisfaction with the status quo, discontent with education grew. Later, the Cold War and the growing belief in the power of science and technology to solve national problems caused the country to turn against progressive education in general and again toward traditional academic education. On the heels of the launching of Sputnik in 1957, the perceived threat to national security caused education reform to center on math and science. It also resulted in the growing idea that a single curriculum for all schools was not only desirable, but feasible (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

Since the mid-1950s, prominent scholars have consistently addressed the idea of a national curriculum. Multiple ideas and definitions regarding curriculum exists (Marsh &

Willis, 2003). Scholars point to the lack of one set of clearly defined aims for America's schools and speak to the need for stability in education as they call for scholars to use their voice for change (Eisner, 1997; Goodlad, 1964; Hirsch, 1999; Jennings, 1997). The idea of a national curriculum continues to be discussed and is gaining momentum as some researchers advocate a college-preparatory curriculum for both college and today's changing workforce.

In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson sought to institute programs to counter the societal problems of the decade. He declared war on poverty and sought to build the Great Society. He asserted that "the answer to all our national problems comes down to a single word: education" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2). Courses to address problems in society were implemented in schools across the country. These included alcohol and drug prevention instruction, sex and human development education, home economics, driver's education, and vocational courses (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

By the 1970s, in a period of recession and inflation, growing discontent again led people to be unsure about what schools should be doing. Expectations of accountability grew. This era was marked by a significant period of curriculum studies development and practice (Goodson, 1994). By the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), appointed by the Reagan administration to study the effectiveness of American schools, issued its report, *A Nation at Risk*. This report identified a crisis in public schools, claiming that the nation was being threatened by "a rising tide of mediocrity" in education (NCEE, 1983, p. 1). While the report stated that the "average citizen today is better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago—more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature,

and science,” it also reported that the “average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 to 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school and college” (NCEE, 1983, p. 4). The inclusion of a statement that the average 1983 citizen was “better educated and more knowledgeable” than in the past could be interpreted as an indicator of the improving quality of education (NCEE, 1983, p. 4). Instead, *A Nation at Risk* was used as a negative force against United States public schools and created a kind of hysteria and atmosphere of crisis. It recommended the “Five New Basics,” defined as four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, and one-half year of computer science for all students. Additionally, two years of foreign language were recommended for college-bound students. It could be noted that this recommendation bears a significant resemblance to the high school curriculum recommended almost a century earlier by the Committee of Ten in 1893 and to those proposed today by other current research projects including Crisis at the Core and the American Diploma Project (Achieve, 2005; ACT, 2005; Marsh & Willis, 2003). Other recommendations of the NCEE and *A Nation at Risk* included the adoption of more rigorous and measurable standards by schools, colleges, and universities, lengthening the school day and school year, improved salaries and working conditions in order to attract and retain better-quality teachers, and responsibility for leadership and fiscal support of these initiatives (NCEE, 1983).

During the past two decades, the country has seen a trend toward a standards-based curriculum. While *A Nation at Risk* authors advocated the setting of minimum standards in education, the 1990s saw a trend toward setting quality standards for

education in the academic subjects. Those standards became a foundation for the expectation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Each student would receive an education allowing him or her to achieve each standard. This act, aimed at grades three through eight, has gathered momentum for expansion to the high school level. Our country's educational and legislative leaders debate this issue and wait to see what action may be taken in the next phase of our country's educational history (Education Grants Alert, 2005).

This brief historical review of literature is important to this study as it demonstrates a repeating pattern of efforts to determine what curriculum should be taught in American high schools to prepare students for postsecondary education and workforce and to meet the needs of a changing society. Curriculum leadership has experienced reoccurring trends that ranged from a traditional curriculum to one with broader choices, usually in an attempt to meet the perceived needs of society. Gross (1998) stated "that our era had many of the same qualities faced by our ancestors ... They too lived through the transition from an older economy to a new one. They had to reconcile themselves to a future that was hard to predict, and they approached the problem with varied and often conflicting belief systems" (p. xi). This pattern continues as Americans examine current needs and the academic content and skills that should be taught to today's high school graduates. This research project looks at these same ideas through a case study.

Current High School Curriculum Reform Efforts

The call for change in American high schools is at the center of curriculum reform efforts at the federal, state, and local levels of education, in the private sector, and among

educational organizations. While the study is not about high school reform, there is a connection in that it examines beliefs about the quality of high school preparation and postsecondary experiences in an effort to learn more about what curriculum and instruction might be important for high school graduates who matriculate to college.

Some scholars believe that high schools should proceed cautiously as they reinvent themselves. Though most would agree that the quest to provide high quality public education should be ongoing, less clear is how the attainment of that goal should be achieved. In 2002, Eisner wrote about the lack of vision in efforts to reform schools. “We are not clear about what we are after. Aside from literacy and numeracy, what do we want to achieve? What are our aims? What is important? What kind of educational culture do we want our children to experience? In short, what kind of schools do we need?” (p. 577). Moses (2006) called America’s high schools “the emerging battleground of education reform, portending both promise and peril” (p. 20). A recent report by the National High School Alliance, *Crisis or Possibility? Conversation About the American High School* (Harvey & Housman, 2004), makes the case that “powerful voices are backing the proposition that the time has come to rethink and reinvent the American high school” (p. 3). Houston (2006) suggested that it is necessary for the discussion on high school reform to be reframed by first reaching a consensus on what high schools are supposed to do.

In 2004, 30 high schools identified as successful by national organizations or state education commissioners participated in the “Bringing Best Practices to Scale” initiative, co-sponsored by the International Center for Leadership in Education and Council of Chief State School Offices, with financial support from the Gates Foundation. The

findings revealed that a school usually needs to progress through three consecutive stages in order to implement change successfully and achieve high academic standards for all students. One, it is important to have conversations to convince educators, parents, and community members why the school needs to change. Second, good data should be used to determine what needs to change. Last, decisions should be made determining how to change the school once people embrace the why and the what. Regrettably, at every level, many begin their improvement efforts in the reverse order—they find a solution without articulating the need (International Center for Leadership in Education and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2005). As efforts to promote high school improvement continue, it is important to have quality discussion among the stakeholders is important.

The media provided information regarding reform initiatives. Some examples relate to this study. In 2004, the Gallup Poll showed 78 percent of the public favored a required four years of English, mathematics, and science for graduation (Rose & Gallup, 2005). Margaret Spellings, United States Secretary of Education, in a recent interview with *Scholastic Administrator* (2005) spoke of reform in high schools as a needed component for improvement of the No Child Left Behind legislation. *Education Grants Alert* (2005) quoted Representative John Boehner, R-Ohio, Chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, and Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman, Mike Castle, R-Delaware, as saying “they support in principle the administration’s ideas to reform high schools, but it was too early to expand the No Child Left Behind Act into high schools” (p. 2). They further commented that while there was not a high school initiative in 2005 because of inappropriate timing, the committee will hold future

hearings that may result in future legislation. This national picture becomes significant for this study as these are all indicative of continued efforts to reexamine and engage in comprehensive curriculum reform of the nation's high schools.

In Oklahoma, legislation, the direction of the State Department of Education and university requirements are directing change in the functioning of high schools. The Oklahoma Spring 2005 legislative session brought about the passage of Senate Bill 982, Achieving Classroom Excellence Act (ACE). Several sections of this new law deal specifically with high school course work and graduation requirements and their relationship to college success. ACE requires three years of math in high school (grades 9-12) for graduation, requires students to take a college preparatory curriculum unless their parents sign a statement opting out of such a plan of study, and requires students to master four out of six end-of-instruction examinations. Mastery of Algebra I and English II end-of-instruction exams are required to receive a high school diploma as well as mastery of two other exams including Biology, American History, Geometry, and Algebra II (ACE, 2005).

As representatives at the federal, state, and local levels of government strive to determine appropriate curriculum for today's high schools, private organizations are strengthening their positions and gaining support for their own initiatives. Today's high schools continue to function according to the "grammar of schooling," a notion that has remained stable over time. Three fundamental resources in secondary education have formed the traditional foundation of high school structure: instructional time, specialized subjects, and academic credits (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). However, the way high schools function is being challenged (Harvey & Housman, 2004).

One example of a private organization effort aimed at changing this “grammar of schooling” is a growing high school curriculum reform effort centered on The New Three Rs in Education: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. This framework for reform, led by Bill Gates, co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has allocated \$500,000,000 toward high school reform efforts. At the National Education Summit on High Schools, Gates (2005) stated, “One single issue worth your focused attention is the state of America’s high schools” (p. 2). His conclusion was that American high schools are obsolete and not capable of teaching students what they need to know. He pointed to high schools as designed to meet the needs of the students of 50 years ago—not today. States and local districts across the country have posted documents on the World Wide Web revealing plans for school improvement through policy and practice that are based on The New Three Rs. States included are: Iowa, Wisconsin, California, Florida, Maryland, New York, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Oregon, and Kentucky. “While research may never point to a specific and distinct set of proven strategies for improving high schools, experts in education, philanthropy, and research communities are converging around the idea that The New Three Rs are critical components of successful schools and should help guide change efforts” (Forum for Youth Investment, 2006).

“The Gates Foundation is working with its partners across the country to support the creation of high schools based on existing models of high-performing schools. These schools may emphasize different subjects, following different educational philosophies, or build different school cultures, but they share the 3 Rs: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. They engage all students in a rigorous curriculum, offer coursework that is

relevant to their lives and aspirations, and foster strong relationships between students and adults” (Gates Foundation, 2006, p. 1). Rigor is defined as the component to ensure that all students are presented with a challenging curriculum and high expectations that prepares them for college. Relevance provides a meaningful course of study with real-life applications and clear pathways to college and work. It is the component that advocates courses and projects that relate to students’ lives and goals. The relationship component is defined as powerful, sustained involvement with caring adults who teach, mentor, advise, and support students throughout their high school careers. It supports the idea that students have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve (Texas High School Project, 2006).

In 2000, another private organization, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, stated the following in *Creating a New Vision of the Urban High School*:

America’s high schools must be designed to become communities that provide a high level of academic rigor for all youngsters so that they will be prepared to pursue postsecondary education. To preserve democracy, we must educate all students so that they will be able to participate as voters and members of groups or organizations that form the basis of our democracy. Schools must teach students to be self-motivated learners, and be places where students gain social and civic competencies as well as academic skills. In order to achieve these goals, schools have to become more personalized and offer a purpose to students by demonstrating a connection between the world of work and their lives.

(Forum for Youth Investment, 2006)

Other philanthropic organizations such as the Henry Ford Learning Institute and the Kellogg Foundation support the philosophies of the Carnegie and Gates organizations (Harvey & Housman, 2004).

High schools face significant challenges preparing students for a meaningful adulthood, ready for college, work, and citizenship. Across the nation, there is a growing consensus that redesign of high schools is essential to prepare students to be participating, engaged citizens (Dimensions by Design, 2005). Reform efforts at the federal, state, and local levels of government, as well as support from the private sector, provide a context to this study. Knowledge surrounding comprehensive high school curriculum reform provides a background for this research.

Related Research Studies

Two major studies inform reform efforts. The ACT *Crisis at the Core* study and the Achieve, Inc. *American Diploma Project* are currently receiving national attention in this area. In fact, the influence of these two research projects on Oklahoma's Achieving Classroom Excellence Act (2005) was significant. These studies assert that while the answer is multidimensional, at its center is the fact that too many students are not taking the right kinds of courses in high school to prepare them for college. Often, even when the right courses are taken, many are likely not sufficiently rigorous or focused on the higher level course content that students need to learn. Additionally, too many students arrive in high school without the foundational skills to take challenging courses.

ACT (2005) reported a disconnect between high school graduation and college readiness. The 2004 ACT report, *Crisis at the Core*, urged educational leaders to

strengthen core curriculum. From that report, an executive summary specific for Oklahoma was prepared. Highlights of the report included the following data:

1. Although most students will go on to some form of postsecondary education, not enough of them are ready for college-level coursework based on ACT's national readiness indicators.
2. Students who reported taking at least the minimum ACT recommended core curriculum scored higher on the ACT Assessment than those who reported taking less than core.
3. Only 58% of the students who took the ACT reported they took the minimum core curriculum, four years of English and three years each of math (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), science, and social studies.
4. Approximately 1 of 5 students is ready for college and work. Nineteen percent of the ACT-tested students met or exceeded all three College Readiness Benchmarks. These students likely entered high school with the requisite foundational skills, took rigorous courses, worked hard in those courses, and are now ready to enter college and work.
5. Just over half of the students are nearly ready for college and work. About 51% of the ACT-tested students met one or two of the benchmarks but did not meet all three. By doing just a little bit more—taking an additional math course beyond Algebra II and taking Chemistry and Physics in addition to Biology—they will be much better prepared to succeed in college or work.
6. Approximately 3 of 10 students are not yet, but could be, ready for college and work. ACT estimates that there are still at least 30% of the students who took the

ACT and did not meet any of the benchmarks who are not ready for college or work. These students likely lack the foundational skills when they enter high school and need to be identified for intervention much earlier, certainly before middle school, so that they can strengthen their foundational skills (ACT, 2005).

Achieve Initiatives *American Diploma Project* and the National Governors

Association partnered in a second national study for the purpose of developing specific recommendations for creating a high school diploma that is meaningful. During 2004 and 2005, Achieve, Inc. commissioned a national survey designed to answer the research question, “How prepared are public high school graduates?” Students, instructors, and employers were included in the survey sample. The following key points regarding high school preparation were developed from the survey data:

1. As many as four of ten graduates are not prepared:
 - 35% of college students say they have large gaps in preparation in at least one crucial skill area while others also say they have some gaps.
 - College instructors estimate that 42% of their students are not adequately prepared. More specifically, college instructors say that 50% of their students have an inability to do math and that 50% of their students’ quality of writing is below expectations. Sixty-five percent of the instructors surveyed said that high schools do not adequately prepare graduates with 70% of them saying they must spend class time reviewing material that should have been mastered in high school.

2. All groups call for higher standards:

- Only 24% of high school graduates say they faced high expectations and were challenged in high school. Those who did are much more likely to feel prepared.
- Knowing what they know today, 65% of college students say they would have worked harder in high school.
- 62% of college students would have taken at least one more difficult course.
- High school graduates, college instructors, and employers strongly embrace reforms that raise standards and requirements for graduation.

To close these education gaps, Achieve (2005) through the *American Diploma Project* recommended that states put in place the following requirements and procedures:

- Require all students to take a common college- and work-preparatory curriculum in math and English.
- Pay attention to content, not just course titles.
- Align academic standards in high school with the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success.
- Provide clear guidance on essential courses and allow flexibility for instructional approaches.
- Encourage students to go beyond the core.
- Monitor results.

In addition to these two prominent national research projects, several smaller studies related to high school preparation and their relationships to university success

were conducted to better understand the factors that may influence this success. These case studies speak to specific needs or questions of individual organizations and in that regard are similar to the problem posed in this study.

Haberl (1996), Hay (2005), Oliveras (2001), and Taylor (2003) sought to determine correlations between academic preparation at the high school level in relationship to success at the university level by examining specific groups of students. Results have varied as studies were only similar in goals and did not specifically answer the same research questions.

For example, Haberl (1996) examined a 1989 high school graduating class to determine successful completion of their intended goal, a baccalaureate degree, in relationship to the graduates' feelings regarding their academic, social, and personal preparation for college life. Qualitative data were gathered in regard to curriculum, co-curricular activities, personnel, and values and life lessons. Results of the study indicated these students felt well prepared for college.

Hay (2005) sought to determine the academic preparation of a high school graduating class as they entered college. Quantitative and qualitative data were used as high school transcripts were analyzed along with college statistics and personal interviews with graduates were conducted. The results indicated that students who took math during their senior year in high school tended to have greater success in college. Students also identified a perceived gap between academic requirements of the high school curriculum and those of college. This case study relates to this research project as it seeks to determine if high school academic studies prepared students for success in college.

Olivares (2000) took an opposite approach as he examined the factors related to under-preparedness for beginning college students and their effect on academic achievement. First-time college freshmen were tested to determine under-preparedness for college in different academic areas. Correlations in this quantitative study demonstrated a weak relationship between biographical characteristics and high school grades and performance on placement tests. Taylor (2003) addressed the prediction of college student academic performance and persistence. Persistence could also be defined as retention. High school GPA was found in this study to be the strongest predictor of performance. These case studies investigated different factors that may influence high school academic preparation and college success within specific groups of students.

Several case studies exist that are related to the topic of high school academic preparation and college success. However, no case study was found that directly aligned with this study examining a cohort of student's high school academic preparation and college success through use of statistical data and interviews.

Summary of Research Literature

The review of literature provided an understanding of the persistence of high school curriculum concerns related to preparation for college. Today, the belief that high schools may not adequately prepare students for college and the 21st century workforce

has created a sense of urgency for curriculum changes. It is a concern at the national, state, and local levels of government, as well as in the private sector and educational organizations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the high school and college academic performance of a cohort of students and their perceptions as young adults regarding beliefs about their high school academic preparation and its effect on college academic success. Through a constructivism lens that acknowledges that people construct their knowledge through personal learning and experiences, the researcher heard the stories of graduates sharing their educational experiences.

The case study was designed to better understand the relationship between high school academic preparation and college experiences and answer the research questions:

1. What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success?
2. What factors seem to contribute to college success?

Qualitative research allows a researcher to “collect open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). A primary characteristic of this type of research is that it is emergent as aspects of the study develop. It is interpretive as the researcher gathers data and attempts to make sense of the topic being studied. Qualitative designs are naturalistic in that the researcher allows

the data to speak for itself and does not manipulate the program or its participants for the purpose of evaluation. This study's focus matched this design as it sought to inquire about people's experiences and make meaning of those experiences as they relate to the research questions. The researcher sought to uncover the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the participants regarding their high school academic experience and its relationship to college success.

Document analysis and interviews provided data for this cohort of students. High school and college academic statistics informed and guided the study as well as validated the stories behind those numbers. "Well-crafted case studies can tell the stories behind the numbers, capture unintended impacts and ripple effects, and illuminate dimensions of desired outcomes...such qualitative data can add significantly to statistical reporting to create a more comprehensive accountability system" (Patton, 2002, p. 152).

Participants

The perceptions of a cohort of students bounded by time and activity regarding their beliefs about high school academic experiences and college success were explored. From a 1999 Oklahoma high school graduating class of 87, fifty-four students subsequently attended an Oklahoma public college or university in Fall 1999. These 54 students fit the criteria for the research and comprise the cohort studied. Within the cohort, 25 successful students were identified with success defined as having completed an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree within seven years of high school graduation. School directories exist that provided the last available student contact information. Cohort members whose success stories might provide rich information for the study and

were believed to be able to contribute to the purpose of the study were contacted in an effort to recruit participants for the study. Seven of the 25 graduates were found and interviewed.

In addition to the participating graduates, nine high school faculty members were interviewed. The purpose was to provide background and insight into the climate of the high school and create a context to understand better the experiences of students.

Anonymity of participants was protected as names were deleted and participants assigned a number and/or alias at every level of data collection. Participants were given the benefit of informed consent as a means to ensure better understanding of the research project and participation rights (Appendix F). Internal Review Board requirements were met (Appendix G).

Success Case Method

The success case method is built on the idea that researchers can learn from those who have found a measure of success and find the means to benefit from positive characteristics of the program (Posavac & Carey, 2007). This method allows the researcher to analyze the data for patterns and themes believed to have impacted student success. It is believed we can learn from those who have completed academic programs of study and gain insights from those who have done well.

While many research studies are planned to gather information from all or a random selection of participants, it can sometimes be beneficial to gather information from a specific population. In this case study, information was sought through a success

case method from cohort students regarding their high school academic preparation and its effect on their college success.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative and qualitative data collected through documents, databases, and interviews were used to understand the problem being studied and answer the research questions: (1) What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success? (2) What factors seem to contribute to college success?

Data were gathered from high school records and OSRHE databases (Appendix A). The students' school district board of education gave permission for the researcher to access school records. A partnership was established between the researcher and OSRHE that provided access to database information on cohort members.

A description of the high school and community was created first through a variety of document sources that provided demographic and academic information (Appendix A). To provide an additional context to understand the high school, faculty members during 1995-1999 were interviewed. The counselor and gifted education coordinator were interviewed individually. Seven teachers participated in a focus group interview at the high school media center. Current teachers at the high school or those continuing to live in the area with known contact information were invited to participate. Predetermined sets of questions guided the discussion for the interviews (Appendix C and D).

Following the creation of a high school and community description, college information was collected through the OSRHE databases (Appendix E) and interviews

with cohort members. OSRHE collects extensive demographic and college academic performance data on students attending Oklahoma's public colleges and universities as a part of their Unitized Data System (UDS). Because the UDS collects information on new college students' high schools (where they earned their high school diploma), this data provides information concerning the progress of Oklahoma high school students as they enroll and attend Oklahoma public colleges and universities. Data were requested for this study on cohort students from one high school who attended an Oklahoma public college or university: freshman GPA, retention rate, students graduating within a six-year period, graduation GPA, and students in graduate programs. This data request was determined by the researcher to be most helpful in ascertaining academic preparation of students for college.

School directories exist that provide the last available contact information for the student participants. Cohort members whose success stories might provide rich information for the study and were believed to be able to contribute to the purpose of the study were contacted in an effort to recruit participants for the study. Seven respondents were a part of the OSHRE database and interviewed for this study.

While closed- and open-ended questions were asked of participants, the intent was to conduct a less formal structure of interview protocol. "The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). A set of interview questions guided the process (Appendix B). Questions were developed that were believed to possibly elicit thoughts and stories that could help answer the research questions. Interview notes and audio recordings were used to document data.

In an effort to develop appropriate interview questions and to hone interview skills, a pre-ethnography was conducted. Two young adults graduating from high schools similar to the one studied and also attending an Oklahoma public college during the same time frame as the cohort were interviewed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Patton (1987) stated that analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. There is an inductive logic to analysis in this qualitative research study. Patton described inductive approaches to analysis as attempts to make sense of the situation without imposing pre-existing expectations. Inductive designs begin with specific observations and build toward general patterns. This type of analysis involves discovering patterns, trends, and categories in one's data (Patton, 2002). Inductive analysis within the study sought to become immersed in the "details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships" (Patton, 2002, p. 41).

Pattern analysis as defined by Patton (2002) guided this process as it allowed the researcher to identify repetitions within the data and through those connections create themes and categories that informed or answered the research questions. Patton (2002) states that pattern analysis provides explanations that develop during naturalistic or qualitative research. The basic construct is that interconnected sets of concepts and relationships exist that allow systems of ideas to be developed. These interconnections are expected to exist within the documents and databases and within the interviews.

Patton (2002) provided a concrete example of pattern analysis: “The content analysis revealed a pattern of participants reporting...” (p. 453). This example provided a framework that allowed the researcher to examine data for patterns of information. The researcher investigated statistical data through documents and databases and participants’ perceptions through interviews to determine if patterns formed about high school academic preparation and its affect on college success. It is this type of consistency among the data that could be found to validate current curriculum and instruction of the school or lead to a reexamination of those academic practices.

The recommendations of Patton (2002) and Creswell (2003) were combined to create the analytic steps for this research project. The goal for analysis was to recognize patterns in the data and develop those patterns into meaningful categories and themes that answered the research questions and allowed for findings and interpretation. Information about high school academic preparation and college success was collected using a variety of data collection procedures. The intent was to form categories of information into patterns, to identify possible connections or influencing factors that high school preparation may have on college success, and to conclude with a summary of interpretation.

Case records for the cohort individuals were established to organize data. Patton (2002) described a case record as a means of pulling together raw data and organizing it into one primary resource package. The case record contains information used in data presentation and analysis: statistical information gathered through documents and databases and the stories and examples gained through interview dialogue.

Content analysis identified coherent and important examples, themes, and patterns in the data (Patton, 1987). Analysis of data within each case record identified these components through a coding system. In an initial reading of the data, the researcher generated and color-coded a list of apparent themes and patterns. In a second reading of the data, the researcher highlighted portions dealing with a specific theme in the corresponding color assisting with discovery of evidence for the theme or pattern. Patterns that most directly related to the research questions were examined and included in the data analysis. A file for each pattern was created with transferred portions of case record data incorporated into each one. The coding system assisted with this process.

Interpretation involved attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships among the descriptions (Patton, 1987). This approach enabled the researcher to create findings from the patterns and from those findings, reach conclusions.

Simply put, the researcher makes sense of the data collected through document analysis and interviews by categorizing the information through the organization of the cohort member case records. Data were examined, and descriptions developed. By recognizing patterns within the data, the researcher established categories and themes that help answer the research questions and allow for interpretation.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Within the ideal of scholarly research there is a required trustworthiness. Patton (2002) wrote of connecting voice and perspective to praxis as “acting in the world with an appreciation for and recognition of how those actions inherently express social,

political, and moral values and to personalize evaluation both by owning our own perspective and by taking seriously the responsibility to communicate authentically the perspectives of those we encounter in our inquiry” (p. 65). Similar issues of quality and credibility affect research and intended inquiry purposes.

From the ideals of quality and credibility in research, the researcher sought a means for validating findings. Triangulation through multiple data sources provided the primary means to accomplish this task. This technique built a check and balance system into the research design and added credibility by strengthening confidence in the research and its conclusions (Patton, 2002). A combination of quantitative and qualitative data gained through documents, databases, and interviews provided a complementary method to explore the information needed to better understand and answer the research questions. Qualitative and quantitative data together supported the intended purpose of the study. Where the two types of data converge, there is a strengthening of the findings. Where they diverge, an opportunity exists to better understand the complexity of the research.

A second type of triangulation was used where multiple analysts provided an expert audit review. Because this study is for the purpose of completing a dissertation, the doctoral committee provided a safeguard for oversight of the study. The Institutional Review Board also protected research integrity through secure procedures.

Ethical Issues

The confidentiality of the participants was a concern. None was placed at risk through the research project. The purpose of the inquiry was explained in an accurate and understandable way prior to gaining informed consent. Anonymity was achieved

through disassociating names from statistics and responses. Data will be discarded three months after the conclusion of the research and dissertation defense. No identifiable data from records, databases, or interviews were included in the study. Halcolm's *Fieldwork Laws* states, "The evaluator's scientific observation is some person's real-life experience. Respect for the latter must precede respect for the former" (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 207).

It should also be noted that the researcher has a significant role in the setting of the high school studied. While not in a supervisory position during the 1995-1999 school years addressed in this study, this role does exist during the research period. No coercion or abuse of this position occurred, as a professional, collaborative role was maintained.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION

The purpose of the research was to examine the high school and college academic performance of a student cohort and their perceptions as young adults regarding their high school academic preparation and its effect on college academic success. “Case studies become particularly useful where one needs to understand some particular problem or situation in great depth and where one can identify cases rich in information—rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question” (Patton, 1987, p. 19). Through a constructivist lens that allows the perceptions of the participants to be heard, the researcher sought to answer these questions:

1. What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success?
2. What factors seem to contribute to college success?

Of the 87 members of the 1999 York High School graduating class, 54 enrolled in an Oklahoma public college or university immediately following graduation. The remaining class members were not accounted for through the UDS databases and were excluded from the study (OSRHE, 2006). Data about the 54 students were intended to provide insight into their college successes; also important was what the young adults

who obtained a college degree believed about their high school academic experiences and college successes.

High School and Community Description

To understand the background of this cohort of students better, a description of the high school and its community is offered. The 1998-1999 High School Report Card (Education Oversight Office of Accountability) provided demographic information for this community. The suburban location of York High School retained a rural atmosphere in 1999 with a large portion of district land used for farming and ranching. Eighty-seven students (52 males and 35 females) comprised the graduating class. Table 1 displays the ethnicity of the state and York School District.

Table 1

1999 Ethnicity of Oklahoma and York School District

Ethnicity	District Percent	State Percent
Caucasian	91	67
Black	2	11
Asian	2	1
Hispanic	2	5
Native American	3	16
Total	100	100

Demographic data indicated that the York High School community was generally higher than the state average in income and percentage of adults with a college degree. The average household income was \$45,790 compared to the state's average, \$24,088. The mean value of houses was \$9,156 greater than the state average. Forty percent of the community's adults age 20+ had a college degree compared to a 17% average statewide. More homes reported a two-parent family than the state average. No student in this cohort received either free or reduced lunches. Mobility for the cohort is considered low in that only 10 of the 87 class members are considered mobile with 77 students completing three or more years of education at York High School.

York High School is of interest because its academic success, as measured by the Academic Performance Index (API), was the state's highest since this measurement index was implemented. The index is based primarily on state academic assessment results. York High School's average GPA of 3.5 compared favorably to the state average of 3.0 (Education Oversight Oklahoma Office of Accountability, 2006).

ACT (2006) records verify that students of this graduating class scored higher (22.9) than the national (21.0) or state (20.6) average on the composite ACT. All of the subscore means, as shown in Table 2, were higher for York's students than the national average. A testing participation rate of 84.3% was higher than the state average.

Table 2

1999 ACT Mean Scores

Examination Component	National Mean	State Mean	School Mean
Composite Scores	21.0	20.6	22.9
English	20.5	Nor Available	22.2
Reading	21.4	Nor Available	23.4
Mathematics	20.7	Nor Available	22.4
Science Reasoning	21.0	Nor Available	22.6

Thirteen of the 87 class members (15%) had SAT scores available with verbal scores ranging from 540 to 760 and mathematics scores from 370 to 700. The percentage of York High School and Oklahoma students taking the SAT is lower than the national average.

Table 3

1999 SAT Mean Scores

	Verbal	Mathematics
National	505	511
Oklahoma	567	560
York High School	642	589

Source: College Board, 2006

The York High School 1999 Course Description Book's requirements for graduation included a three-tiered diploma system for students. This system comprised a standard diploma based on the state requirements for high school graduation, an honors diploma considered to be a 4 X 3 curriculum, and a cum laude diploma based on a 4 X 4 curriculum with the exception of a social studies requirement of three units (See Table 4). Nineteen students received the Cum Laude Diploma, 25 the Honor Diploma, and 43 students the Standard Diploma.

Table 4

Course Requirements for York High School Graduation

	Standard Diploma	Honors Diploma	Cum Laude Diploma
English	4	4	4
Mathematics	2	3 or 4	4
Lab Science	2	3 or 4	4
Social Studies	3	3	3
Foreign Language	0	2	2
Computer Science	0	1	1
Electives	13	9	10
Total	24	26	28

The Standard Diploma did not have a required G.P.A. However, the Honor Diploma G.P.A. requirement was 3.2, and the Cum Laude Diploma requirement was 4.0. Grading at York High School used a 4.0 grading scale. 1.0 additional credit was given to Advanced Placement course grades.

The College Board offered 31 Advanced Placement (AP) courses to high schools during the years the cohort attended high school (College Board, 1998). However, York High School offered only nine AP courses, and its participation rates were lower than the state average. The Oklahoma AP participation rate for 1999 seniors was 6.3% with only

4.7% in this class participating. Of those, 61.5% received college credit, while the state average was 61.8% (Education Oversight Oklahoma Office of Accountability, 2006). Both statistics are unusual given other academic data for the class reflected higher than average achievement areas. Advanced Placement offerings at the high school were somewhat new as the first four courses were implemented in 1995 with other courses added in 1996 and 1997 when state grants were awarded.

Table 5

Advanced Placement Program Participation

Advanced Placement Course	Number of York High School Students Receiving AP Course High School Credit
Studio Art-General Portfolio	4
Biology	19
Computer Science AB	4
Economics-Microeconomics	1
English Language and Composition	13
English Literature and Composition	4
French Language	3
History-European	4
History-United States	8
Total	60

In addition to the Advanced Placement courses offered were other higher-level or honors courses: chemistry (36), physics (7), Math Concepts and Trigonometry (22), Trigonometry (8), and Pre-Calculus (5). (Parentheses indicate number of high school graduates receiving credit for the course.) Three students completed four years of French, and five students completed four years of Spanish.

College remediation rates were significantly lower for this class of students than the state average. In a comparison of Oklahoma college freshmen taking at least one remedial course in math, English, science, or reading, 13.4% of the class enrolled in such a course compared to 37.5% at the state level (Education Oversight Oklahoma Office of Accountability, 2006).

York High School and the York community data seem to indicate that college success for the York High School graduating class would be achievable. Demographic information indicates a possible advantage of stability within the home, and academic records indicate an achievement level higher than most state and national academic indices.

Statistical Presentation of College Data

Through an analysis of the OSRHE (2006) UDS data, a statistical record of York High School student success in Oklahoma colleges and universities emerged. The following set of tables presents a picture of state college attendance and achievement for the cohort. Table 6 and Table 7 contain data reflecting the number of students who subsequently enrolled in Oklahoma public colleges and universities and the colleges and universities in which they enrolled. Sixty-two percent of the graduating class members

attended Oklahoma public colleges and universities as freshmen in fall, 1999. What is unknown is how many of the other 38 percent attended a private university in Oklahoma or an out-of-state college or university. Seventy-nine percent of the cohort returned to these or other Oklahoma public colleges and universities in Fall 2000 for their second year.

Table 6

Attendance at an Oklahoma Public College/University

	Frequency	Percent
Attended an Oklahoma Public College/University	33	38
Did not attend an Oklahoma Public College/University	54	62
Total	87	100

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Table 7

College or University Enrolled as Freshmen, Fall 1999

School	Frequency	Percent
Carl Albert State College	1	1.85
Northeastern State University	1	1.85
Oklahoma City Community College	4	7.41
Oklahoma State University - Oklahoma City	5	9.26
Oklahoma State University - Okmulgee	1	1.85
Oklahoma State University – Stillwater	7	12.96
Redlands Community College	1	1.85
Rose State College	2	3.70
Rogers State College	3	5.56
University of Central Oklahoma	23	42.60
University of Oklahoma	6	11.11
Total	54	100.00

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Table 8

Second-Year Retention in Oklahoma Colleges and Universities

	Frequency	Percent
Retained	43	79.63
Not Retained	11	20.37
Total	54	100.00

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Cohort members attended a number of Oklahoma public colleges and universities with a freshman mean G.P.A. of 2.76 (OSRHE, 2006). The OSRHE (2006) UDS, as well as the student stories relayed later in the chapter, indicate this cohort to be mobile among colleges and universities with some students transferring among schools for a variety of reasons during the seven-year period examined (Fall 1999 through Spring 2006). Of the 25 graduates of the cohort, 15 were mobile among college and universities. The mobile students entered two-year colleges and Division I and II universities; however, they transferred during their college career to different Oklahoma public universities. Ten of the cohort members began as freshmen at their graduating university.

The amount of time required by cohort members to reach graduation varied from three to seven years. Six years was the minimal amount of time determined as reasonable for statistical studies by OSRHE. A time frame of seven years is used in this research. At the end of seven years, 25 (46%) of the 54 students within the cohort had reached graduation, while 54% of the students had yet to attain that goal.

Table 9

Time of Graduation

Year of Graduation	Frequency	Percent
2001-2002 (after 3 years)	1	1.85
2002-2003 (after 4 years)	5	9.26
2003-2004 (after 5 years)	9	16.67
2004-2005 (after 6 years)	4	7.41
2005-2006 (after 7 years)	6	11.11
No graduation	29	53.70
Total	54	100.00

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Table 10

College Degree Awarded

Degree	Frequency	Percent
Associate Degree	1	1.85
Bachelor's Degree	22	40.74
Bachelor/Master's Degree	2	3.71
No Degree Awarded	29	53.70
Total	54	100.00

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Despite the almost 80% second-year retention rate of students, only approximately 46% of the cohort graduated with either an Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree at the end of seven years. At only slightly above the Oklahoma average graduation rate of 40.1% (OSRHE, 2006), this percentage is lower than expected.

Table 11

Colleges/Universities Students Graduated From

University	Frequency	Percent
Northeastern State University	2	8
Oklahoma State University	9	36
Southwestern Oklahoma State University	2	8
University of Central Oklahoma	8	32
University of Oklahoma	3	12
Oklahoma City Community College	1	4
Total	25	100

Source: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2006

Faculty Perspectives

High school faculty members during 1995-1999 were identified and interviewed to develop a more complete picture of the students' high school experience. Both individual and focus group interviews were used. The school counselor and gifted education coordinator were interviewed individually. Seven teachers participated in a focus group interview.

Mrs. Smith

One counselor served the students of York High School. Mrs. Smith came to the school from a neighboring school district in the fall of 1993 as an experienced counselor of eight years. Her teaching background was in special education with more than 20 years in education.

Mrs. Smith's Story

The York High School guidance and counseling program emphasized academic guidance through activities such as annual parent meetings, pre-enrollment, master schedule input with principal, annual monitoring of graduation credit checks, high school transcript oversight, testing coordination, college information, scholarship assistance, and school awards. Because only one person was responsible for these tasks, counseling opportunities for students were limited and based on individual situations and student and faculty referrals.

Mrs. Smith described the program as being “paper-oriented” because of the number of school tasks that fell within the guidance and counseling department. One consistent way she ensured individual communication with each student was through annual four-year planning and graduation check process. Each year, Mrs. Smith set appointments with students and parents to review the students’ progress toward graduation and plan for enrollment in appropriate courses. During this time, she could work with students, counsel them, and help students move toward their goals.

When asked about the instructional program of the late 1990s, Mrs. Smith described instruction as “excellent for the most part.” “Teachers helped kids to high standards. They (teachers) were well-organized, prepared, with clear course descriptions.” She expressed that while the programs for high-achieving students were excellent, opportunities for average or lower students were not as well developed. Students generally selected courses based on the high school diploma they were seeking. “The diploma levels were big at the school. Students and parents were usually very clear

about what level of high school diploma they were seeking at graduation, and the requirements for the diploma drove course selection for students.”

Guidance opportunities for college selection were available through the counselor’s office. Mrs. Smith coordinated school visits from college recruitment officials, college night opportunities for students, and college information available through resources located in the library as some of the ways students could learn more about different schools. Mrs. Smith also provided scholarship information and assistance.

Mrs. Smith described the York High School population in general as a “homogenous group with very little diversity.” There was “tremendous parental involvement.” Because the class was small, “students received individual attention; they were not lost in the shuffle.” She also described the class as “accepting of each other.” Mrs. Smith believed there while “there was not a broad amount of extracurricular opportunities, there were outstanding programs in athletics and drama that allowed students opportunities to excel.”

Mrs. Wilson

Mrs. Wilson was the coordinator of gifted education at York High School. The gifted and talented program was constructed as a school wide enrichment program with services offered not only to students formally identified as gifted, but to all students wishing to access its opportunities. Mrs. Wilson’s primary responsibilities included coordination of the Advanced Placement Program, parent education, and four-year planning with students. She also coordinated gifted education for the district, including

their middle school and two elementary schools. Mrs. Wilson had taught 19 years, four in gifted education, when she joined the York High School faculty in 1997.

Mrs. Wilson's Story

Mrs. Wilson described the purpose of the York High School gifted program as one designed to strengthen academic and enrichment opportunities for all students. Different aspects of the high school curriculum were included and organized under one administrative umbrella. The Advanced Placement (AP) Program was new to York High School in the mid- to late-1990s and considered by Mrs. Wilson to be the primary component of the gifted education program. English Literature and English Language were the first courses added to the school curriculum in 1995, with AP American History, European History and Biology added the following year. Other courses followed as state grants were secured to assist with implementation of these classes. Enrollment in Advanced Placement courses in 1998-1999 was low, with all having fewer than 10 students with the exception of 12 students enrolled in AP American History.

York High School staff believed Advanced Placement courses provided the rigorous curriculum needed by many of its students. In an effort to improve enrollment in AP courses, parent and student meetings were held to provide information about the AP program, courses, and benefits. "We wanted to share with parents the benefits to their children if they engaged in coursework that was rigorous in content and skills. Not only does AP offer college-level content in its classes, it also provides teachers with opportunities to strengthen student writing, research, and study skills. Learning to organize and present information through their writing is a skill that should be honed in

all AP classes.” Mrs. Wilson consistently advised parents, if their children were college-bound, that enrollment in at least one AP course in high school would better prepare their children for college.

Four-year planning sessions were offered to students and families through the gifted program. These sessions typically consisted of a review of student goals, different diplomas that could be attained at York High School, and discussion of courses or programs that could prepare students for success and help them reach their goals after high school. Mrs. Wilson helped prepare a schedule of classes that would be taken by the students during the four years of high school (or whatever portion of that time frame remained for the student). “Four-year plans are beneficial because they provide a focus for students. We plan as much as is possible including academic courses to be taken each year, elective choices, and extra-curricular activities. However, the plans were fluid and could be amended as needed.” Mrs. Wilson generally met with students formally identified as gifted for this component of the program, while the York High School counselor met with all students for this type of four-year planning.

The Teachers

In a focus group setting, seven teachers were interviewed. These teachers taught a variety of subjects including special education, social studies, business, foreign language, technology, and mathematics. All were tenured teachers during 1995-1999, each with several years of teaching experience. Armed with a class roster and yearbooks, they recalled the school, students, and faculty during this time. A pattern of beliefs about the school and class emerged.

The Teachers' Stories

Teacher conversation focused on the students and size of the graduating class and the school from 1995 to 1999 rather than on the academic and instruction program.

When asked to describe the school, several responded quickly, "Small." Teachers felt the smallness of the school was reflected in the closeness of the students and staff. "Because the school was small, we knew each other much better." One teacher spoke of the class as "very united, close to each other." Another described them as a "cohesive group."

Teachers also described themselves as a close group and commented that they knew many parents of this group of students as they regularly attended school events and activities.

Academically, the teachers ranked the Class of 1999 as average in ability and motivation. "Other classes before and after this group often tended to perform at a higher level than this class overall. There were some academic standouts as in every graduating class...but overall I would rate these students as average in ability." While not described as an academically-oriented class of students, the group overall was described as "above average in the classroom."

When asked to describe the academic program of the high school, teachers described their different departments as strong. Particularly important for this group was the "experienced faculty" at the school. It was noted that not many electives were offered, and an expectation existed that students would enroll in core academic courses each year. An example of this was a rule that a student could enroll in only one athletic or physical education class each semester.

In an effort to learn more about the academic program for students, additional questions were asked by the researcher about rigor and instructional practices. Some believed that the academic expectations were higher for students in 1999, while others believed they were less rigorous. Most teachers agreed that instructional practices were more traditional with structured classes. Textbooks served as a primary resource with lecture and written assignments more prevalent. That compared to the teachers' descriptions of today's increased use of different types of media for instruction (e.g. Smart Boards, computer labs, software programs).

Another characteristic of these students was their school spirit and involvement. The students were described as "active" and "ornery, but good-hearted." Teachers reminisced about building floats, auctions, dances, homecomings, and classroom pranks. One described a positive school spirit with examples of students "cheering" at events, "attending games," and "backing each other up." The class of 1999 was described as involved in extra-curricular activities. One teacher recalled, "Lots of kids showed up" for activities. Athletics was important, and both teams and individual students were successful. School plays were supported with many students participating. Several clubs were mentioned as having good participation and success. Examples discussed were debate, academic team, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Foreign Language Club, Medieval Club, and Student Council.

The teachers' close connections with the class of 1999 continue today. While reviewing the class roster, several teachers stated that they maintain contact with students and could share information regarding education, work, and/or family. The focus group spent a great deal of time sharing information about students and their accomplishments

and seemed to enjoy this time to recall former students and memories. While the focus of the interview was intended to be the academic curriculum, the teachers reflected more on the personal aspects of their work with the students.

One teacher summed up the general feeling of the group by speaking of 1995-1999 as a period of York High School's history when there were fewer students and teachers, when they "knew each other well" and "all did our part." Another commented, "We were kid-friendly – tutored, sponsored clubs. We were small and united."

Table 12

Student Profiles

Name	Class Rank	H.S. GPA	ACT Composite	College Degree	Major	College GPA
Denise	16	3.60	19, 18	B.S. M.S.	HHP Occ. Th.	NA
Elaine	19	3.49	18, 21, 23	B.S.	Bus. Mgt.	2.55
Jane	49	3.11	18, 16	B.S.	Bus. Adm.	2.82
Jim	50	3.08	21	B.S.	Business	3.66
Tad	14	3.76	24, 28	B.S.	Pre-Med.	NA
Louise	13	3.70	24, 26	B.S.	FRCO	NA
Richard	20	3.48	32	B.F.A.	Theatre	3.48

Table 13

Honors or Higher Level High School Coursework Completed

Subject	Lisa	Denise	Jim	Tad	Elaine	Jane	Richard
Honors English I		X					X
Honors Algebra I	X						X
Honors Geometry				X			X
Algebra II	X	X	X		X	X	X
Honors Algebra II				X			
Con/Trig	X		X				X
Honors Biology	X						
AP Biology		X		X			
Chemistry					X		
Honors Chemistry	X			X			X
Botany/Zoology		X	X			X	
AP American History	X						
Spanish I	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spanish II	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Student Participants

The York High School Graduating Class of 1999 had 87 members. Fifty-four were found in the OSRHE databases meaning they entered an Oklahoma public college or university in Fall 1999. This group became the cohort of students studied. At the end of seven years, by May, 2006, twenty-five had received an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree from an Oklahoma public college or university. Of these, seven were interviewed.

Much of the value of success method case studies lies in the telling of the stories. The stories share the qualitative data that help answer the research questions. While the quantitative information tells "what," the qualitative data has the ability to tell "why." Following are the descriptions of these seven cohort members' high school and college academic experiences. The participants have a variety of experiences in education, academic fields, and careers.

Louise

Louise graduated 13th in this high school class of 87 students, earning a G.P.A. of 3.79. Her high school coursework included a rigorous math program with five years of math when only two were required for graduation. Classes taken were Honors Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Math Concepts and Trigonometry, and Conceptual Mathematics. Louise also enrolled in Honors Biology, Honors Chemistry, Honors Art, and Advanced Placement American History. She took the ACT twice, once in the spring of her junior year and again during the fall of her senior year, and achieved composite scores of 24 and 26 respectively. Other subtest scores were: English, 24 and 24; Mathematics, 23 and 27; Reading, 25 and 29; Science Reasoning, 25 and 25.

Louise enrolled at a local community college in 1999, earning a freshman G.P.A. of 3.0 and continuing at the school for her second year. In 2001, Louise transferred to a comprehensive state university, graduating in December, 2002, after 3.5 years with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Family Relations and Child Development.

Elaine

Elaine graduated from high school ranked 19th, earning a G.P.A. of 3.49. She completed traditional coursework, including four years of English and three years of mathematics, science, and social studies classes. She also enrolled in several elective courses in the arts, including band, art, crafts, photography, and drama. Elaine took the ACT three times during her junior and senior years with composite scores of 18, 21, and 23 respectively. Subtests scores were: English, 18, 22, and 24; Mathematics, 19, 24, and 25; Reading, 15, 14, and 21; and Science Reasoning, 21, 22, and 20.

Elaine entered a small Oklahoma university earning a freshman G.P.A. of 2.56. She transferred to a comprehensive university after her second year and received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management with a minor in Human Resources Management in May, 2003.

Tad

Tad graduated 14th with a G.P.A. of 3.76. He received an Honor Diploma and was a member of National Honor Society. Upper-level coursework included Spanish I and II, Honors Chemistry, Honors Algebra II, and Advanced Placement Biology. Tad took the ACT five times during his junior and senior years with composite scores ranging

from 24 to 28 consecutively. Scores in sub-tests included these ranges: English, 25 to 32; Mathematics, 24 to 30; Reading, 21 to 27; and Science Reasoning, 24 to 28.

Tad was mobile among universities. In Fall 1999, he entered a small state university earning a freshman G.P.A. of 2.35. At the beginning of his second year, Tad transferred to a comprehensive university. During his junior year, he again transferred to the state's second comprehensive university graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Pre-Medicine in 2003. Tad is currently in his third year of medical school.

Jim

Jim graduated from high school 50th in his class, earning a graduation G.P.A. of 3.08. He completed four years of English, four mathematics courses, three science courses, and two social studies classes. He also completed Spanish I and II. Jim took the ACT once during his junior year, earning a composite score of 21. Subtest scores were English, 18; Mathematics, 23; Reading, 21; and Science Reasoning, 20.

Jim attended a small college earning a freshman G.P.A. of 3.18. He later transferred to a larger university completing a Business Degree in 2004.

Denise

Denise graduated from high school ranked 16th with a G.P.A. of 3.6. She completed required coursework and received an Honor Diploma. Denise enrolled in Algebra II and Math Concepts math courses beyond the two math classes required for high school graduation. She also took the required Biology and Physical Science courses as well as Botany/Zoology and Advanced Placement Biology. Denise took the ACT once

during her junior year and again in her senior year, earning composite scores of 19 and 18 respectively. Scores of subtests were: English, 15 and 16; Math, 21 and 18; Reading, 19 and 18; and Science Reasoning, 22 and 18.

Denise entered a two-year college, earned a freshman G.P.A. of 3.0 and continued at the school for her second year. At the beginning of her junior year, Denise transferred to a small four-year university graduating in May, 2004, with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Health and Human Performance. She continued her education at one of the state's comprehensive universities, earning a Master's Degree in Occupational Therapy in May, 2006.

Jane

Jane graduated 49th in her class with a G.P.A. of 3.11. She took four years of English and mathematics, three years of science, and two years of social studies. Jane took the ACT once during her junior year and again in her senior year. Scores were: Composite, 18 and 16; English, 18 and 19; mathematics, 17 and 17; reading, 17 and 13; and science reasoning, 18 and 16.

Jane entered a small four-year university earning a 2.42 freshman G.P.A. She graduated four years later, in 2003, with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with an emphasis on entrepreneurship. Jane's graduation G.P.A. was 2.82. She is currently working toward a Master's Degree in Gerontology.

Richard

Richard graduated high school 20th in his class, with a G.P.A. of 3.48. He completed four years of English, mathematics, and science, and two years of social studies. Richard took the ACT once during his senior year, earning a composite score of 32. Subtest scores were English, 32; mathematics, 31; reading, 34; and science reasoning, 31. He also took the SAT in the fall of his senior year earning a verbal score of 750 and mathematics score of 650.

Richard was named National Merit Scholar his senior year. The school newspaper editor said, “[Richard] is the most intelligent person I have ever come in contact with. He easily defines everything a National Merit Scholar represents.”

Richard entered one of the state’s two comprehensive universities in fall, 1999. He earned a freshman G.P.A. of 3.20. Richard graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Theatre, with a G.P.A. of 3.46.

Student Participants’ Stories

In an effort to answer the research questions, a series of guiding interview questions were asked of the participants (Appendix B). Four of those questions tended to generate the majority of the interview conversation and provided insight into the research questions.

Question 1

What courses did you take in high school that best prepared you for college? Can you give some examples of how those courses prepared you for college?

Louise, Jim, Jane, Elaine, Tad and Richard felt most prepared for college in English. High school courses were described as rigorous with a “teacher expectation to do well on assignments.” Readings assigned were at a higher level and were followed by writing assignments that required analysis of what was read. Louise said that English teachers “held high expectations for our work. Knowing that I was expected to perform to that higher standard made me work harder and put more effort into my papers.” Louise and Richard both described expectations that grammar and the mechanics of writing would be applied correctly, as well as being able to write in depth about a given topic. Tad spoke of the demand by teachers to produce well-written papers and of the teachers’ efforts to help students improve their writing. “I used what I learned in high school English all through college and in medical school.” Jane commented that her ability to “write papers and use proper citation” was good. Because she acquired these strong writing skills in high school, the requirements for writing in both her undergraduate and graduate work was not a concern for her. Elaine echoed this same sentiment as she always believed she could “produce the papers required for her college courses.”

Richard credited his junior and senior English teachers as ones who “deserve honorable mention.” He described his junior English teacher as one who “pushed good books, strong writing skills, and was always willing to volunteer her time to any student in need.” His senior English teacher was described as a teacher he did not like, but will “freely admit the fact that she was an excellent teacher. Her methods were designed to see that everyone not only learned the required standardized necessities, but also included life-enriching lessons that spanned beyond simple English.” Themes embedded in their reading and writing were applicable to life and discussed within the classroom. Richard

believed that the strength of the academic program at York High School was its English department. “[The school’s] focus on writing gives its students an immeasurable leg-up in the college environment.”

Louise, Denise, and Richard believed that high school science courses prepared them for college. Louise and Denise spoke of science courses focused not only on content knowledge, but also on teaching students how to study. High school science classes “taught me how to study for a test by actually learning the concepts, not just memorizing facts that were contained in the textbook.... It was not a class where you just repeated the facts but used them in practical application.” Denise added that concepts were taught thoroughly. “This in-depth coverage and outlining of biology concepts provided a strong background for college classes.” Richard praised a science teacher who “always demanded college levels of commitment in her students.” He went on to say, “She, perhaps more than anyone, prepared us for the responsibilities of college work and study with a no-nonsense, no-excuses approach to the work.”

Jim, Richard, and Jane described their high school math courses as the ones that prepared them for college. Jim described one teacher as “tough, but also available to help students before and after school, as well as during lunch period.” Math assignments for the class were described as having to “try to figure out how to work the problem and the correct answer first, then [the teacher] teaching the lesson and reviewing the problems.” While this was frustrating at times, Jim believes now that it made him a stronger math student and helped him succeed in college math classes.

Jane said she “felt prepared” in the area of mathematics in college. She took college algebra and found she was able to be successful, even though this subject area is

generally more difficult for her. Jane stated that her math concepts course benefitted her in a practical manner in college. This course taught her practical math skills applicable in everyday life. She learned how to balance a checkbook, read billing statements, determine interest on credit card and loan accounts, and budget money. Richard admitted that he did not recall much about his math courses, but knew that he “must have been properly educated...for I found myself leaps and bounds ahead of most incoming freshmen.”

High school technology courses and experiences were important for Richard and Jane as they entered college. Both agreed that they were taught basic computer skills including keyboarding and application of Microsoft software programs and believed these were valuable skills in college.

Question 2

Based on your experiences, what would you say are the strengths of the academic program at the high school?

Denise believed that the strength of the high school academic program was “encouragement on academics and good grades.” The York High School grading scale did not allow any grade below 70 to be considered passing. This expectation kept Denise focused on the quality of her work because earning good grades was important. Denise believed the tiered diploma system was also motivational in its requirement for course work and G.P.A. Many students, including Denise, set academic goals based on the diploma they sought. She believes these high expectations were important for her own academic motivation and that teachers helped students achieve.

Louise, Elaine, Tad, Jim, and Richard expressed a similar idea regarding academic encouragement, but their discussions focused on the strength of the high school that made a difference in their own success as being “excellent teachers requiring a high level of thinking.” Louise said of her teachers, “They helped me learn to think and that doing my best was important. They also taught me that quality work was important.” Elaine also talked about “teachers who loved teaching” being most important. Tad referred to teachers who set demanding standards for their classes. “[They] refused to accept mediocre work, accepting only work that met the standards set for the assignment.” Tad believed strong teachers who demanded high quality of work was most important. Another science teacher was described by Tad as a teacher “who taught and, in her class, students learned. Rigor developed work ethic and study skills....their [teachers] encouragement” was important.

Question 3

What high school activities did you participate in that made you feel a part of the school and/or contributed to your success?

Elaine expressed the general sentiment of the interviewees regarding extracurricular activities with her comment that she “felt a part of the school” and that “any activities that linked her to school were special. These various activities gave me that chance to interact and get to know people outside of my circle of friends.” All interviewees participated and enjoyed the York High School extracurricular program to some degree.

Many of the interviewees were a part of the York High School athletic program. Jim enjoyed football and was especially successful in baseball. He was a competitive player and part of a team that consistently went to the state championship playoff system. Jim went on to play baseball in college. In fact, his love for the game drove his college choice. Richard also enjoyed playing football and baseball and spoke of athletics as one of the “big ones” that helped make him feel a part of the school. Tad participated on the basketball and soccer athletic teams and was considered a “better than average” member of the tennis team. Elaine also played tennis and was on the softball team. Louise and Denise were part of the soccer team at York High School. This team consistently qualified for participation in the state championship playoff seasons, winning state runner-up in 1996, 1997, and 1999. Denise also played basketball and tennis. Louise ran cross country and believed both sports laid a foundation for healthy exercise habits later in life.

The York High School drama program was important to the students. All of the interviewees participated in this extracurricular program in some way. Richard spoke extensively of the importance of stage production during high school for him. As a high school freshman, Richard was shy and quiet. A good friend active in the school’s drama program encouraged him to “give it a try.” Stage production fostered a love of drama in Richard that later directed his college and work choices. “Stage has prepared me for the future by helping me overcome my fear of speaking to an audience. I have also learned about the kind of person I hope to become some day from [the teacher], who is the epitome of a kind and wonderful person.” He described the teacher further by saying, “Her hands-on approach and realistic attitude toward students made stage the most sought

after class at [the high school] during my time there. She succeeded in bringing many students out of their shells and empowered us with the ability to take risks in front of the entire school.” He described his experience in the drama program as a “cool thing to do at [the school].”

Louise, Elaine, Tad, Jim, Dennis, and Jane all participated in stage production to some degree and expressed its importance in high school. Tad was considered a “ham” on stage. Favorite productions were mentioned by different participants and included *Grease*, *The Outsiders*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Participants were active in a range of other extra-curricular activities at York High School. History Club, Science Club, Future Business Leaders of America, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Student Council, Spanish Club, Masque and Gavel, and Model Arab League were cited as activities many of the students enjoyed. Louise, Richard, and Tad were members of National Honor Society. Participants spoke of these activities as important in developing relationships with students and teacher sponsors. Friendships were important to Richard at York High School. “All of my best experiences at...have been due to my friends. I will miss them all, and I will never forget them.” Denise expressed similar beliefs as she formed many friendships with other students through these activities and formed relationships with coaches and teacher sponsors. She described these activities as ones that are associated with her happiest memories of high school.

Question 4

Can you share some things you value deeply; specifically, things you value about your high school?

Most participants spoke of the value of their relationships. A feeling of community at York High School built through relationships among students and teachers was cited through examples from five interviewees. Elaine, Jim, Denise, Richard, and Jane spoke at length of this personal aspect of the school.

Richard valued the “feeling of community” at York High School most. “We all knew each other and, for high school kids, treated each other extraordinarily well. I remember a profound lack of bullies, fights, and the general meanness and posturing that so often typifies high school behavior. We genuinely had the feeling that this place was special, and that it was ours, and that we were lucky to be there.” Richard’s wish for the school is that “the sense of community and fellowship that I experienced there continues to this day and far into the future. It really was a wonderful place to go to high school.”

When asked about his time in high school and what he valued most, Jim spoke of relationships and people as important. “I enjoyed the small classes and the personal interaction with teachers. The friends that I made at [the high school] are my lifelong friends.” Jim’s wish for this school that could heighten its effectiveness for future students is “to continue to strive for excellence and to keep a small school feeling.” For him, teachers and coaches who cared about him and his success, along with good friends, were most important.

For Denise, equally important for success, along with academic content, were “the personal friendships built with teachers and staff.” Extra-curricular activities were

important to Denise while in high school. She formed many friendships with other students through these activities and formed relationships with coaches and teacher sponsors. When asked when she felt most fulfilled or happiest in high school, Denise replied, “When I was playing soccer and cheering at football and basketball games.” Knowing those she worked with every day was encouraging to her, and her wish for the school was that it continues a focus on “building friendships and relationships.”

Summary

Data for the study included quantitative and qualitative information. Through several sources (Appendix A), high school, community, and college data were gathered to provide a context for understanding better the students’ perspectives shared through interviews.

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the research was to examine the high school and college academic performance of a cohort of students and their perceptions as young adults about their high school academic preparation and its effect on college success. In doing so, the case study sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success?
2. What factors seem to contribute to college success?

The analysis of data was based on the identification of themes built through examples that demonstrate connections and factors that may have contributed to the college success of some cohort members. These themes evolved into the five findings of the study. Themes were rigorous coursework and expectations of quality work, relevant learning, positive relationship, academic skills, and extra-curricular participation.

The case study examined the academic records and beliefs of a cohort of students from York High School's 1999 graduating class to see if their academic records and interviews revealed any connections or contributing factors between high school academic preparation and success in college. Through constructivism, a picture of what students believe contributed to their successful completion of a college degree was created. The data led to the importance of rigorous coursework and high expectations for

producing quality work, relevant assignments related to real-world experiences and future goals, positive student-teacher relationships, academic skills, and belonging through involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Findings

Finding #1

Rigorous coursework and the expectation of quality work is a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Rigorous high schools are committed to higher standards and measurable outcomes that demonstrate content mastery and application of skills for all students. Students are provided with high-level assignments in every subject and are encouraged to become engaged learners who actively and responsibly participate in the learning process. Learning that is built on a deep understanding of content, application of knowledge, problem solving, and analysis provides the rigor that is needed by students of the 21st century (Bottoms, 2006; Dimensions by Design, 2005; Kristin, 2005; Texas High School Project, 2006).

Rigor ensures all students are given a challenging curriculum that helps prepare them for college. Demanding curriculum, setting high standards and an expectation of quality work are cornerstones of rigor (Bottoms, 2006; Dimensions by Design, 2005; Kristin, 2005; Texas High School Project, 2006). The participants referred to the value of rigor in their high school work and communicated the school's high expectations for quality work.

The importance of rigor in high school preparation that aids the development of a strong work ethic was a theme that continued through the students' stories. Denise referred to the high expectations of the school in general when she spoke of the importance of a demanding grading scale that allowed no grade below 70% to be considered passing. She commented on the importance of rigor as a motivator to work hard. "I tended to rise or lower my work to the expectations that were required."

The overall importance of rigor for students can be demonstrated in the fact that most of the interviewees who had successfully completed college received at least an Honors Diploma at York High School. The more rigorous diplomas required additional core academic courses to be taken during high school in mathematics, science, foreign language, and computer science. A minimum G.P.A. of 3.2 was required for the Honors Diploma and a 4.0 G.P.A. for the Cum Laude Diploma. Most students tended to enroll in courses such as Honors Chemistry, Honors Algebra II, Math Concepts and Trigonometry, and Advanced Placement courses that were beyond those required for a standard high school diploma. The school counselor commented that the leveled diplomas were important to York High School students and guided their goals and selection of coursework.

Rigor in the English Department was important for every participant. Academic confidence developed in students during their English courses was discussed in the interviews. This confidence allowed students to focus on course content in college knowing they could produce the quality of written work required. Louise commented, "Because of my senior English class, I knew how to write papers so in college I only had to focus on gathering the proper research, not how to write the paper, which was

extremely helpful.” Elaine talked about skills she learned in English classes that she carried with her to college. She believed she could produce the papers required for her college courses. Tad referred to confidence in being able to produce well-written papers in different college courses as important for him. Richard described the strength of the academic program at the high school as “English, English, English. [The school’s] focus on writing gives its students an immeasurable leg-up in the college environment.”

High teacher expectations in the classroom were important in developing rigor in both course content and in student work ethic. Tad and Louise supported this idea and spoke of teacher expectations for quality work. Louise believed English courses prepared her for college and shared examples of teachers who challenged her to read at a higher level, analyze what she had read, and produce grammatically correct and well-written papers. She described the instruction as “rigorous with a teacher expectation to do well on assignments. Knowing that I was expected to perform to that higher standard made me work harder and put more effort into my papers.”

Depth of learning in high school was important for college preparation. Louise referred to a science class that “taught me how to study for a test by actually learning the concepts, not just memorizing facts that were contained in the textbooks.” This level of rigorous content that required not mere memorization, but an understanding of concepts was important learning for her as her major area “used the same approach so I was already preparing for how to study” in college. Tad referred to the same science teacher who set the bar high for learning and taught at an in-depth level that allowed students to understand the concepts being taught.

Teachers believed that rigor was needed in high school coursework for adequate preparation for college. Encouragement was given to both students and parents for participation in Advanced Placement courses. “We wanted to share with parents the benefits to students that were possible if their child engaged in coursework that was rigorous in content and skills. Not only does AP offer college-level content in its classes, it also provides teachers with opportunities to strengthen student writing, research, and study skills. Learning to organize and present information through their writing is a skill that should be honed in all AP classes.” Faculty members discussed the expectation that existed at the school that students would enroll in core academic courses in each subject area each year.

Louise complimented teachers “devoted to making us think for ourselves.” Jim believed that rigorous English and mathematics courses “built a strong foundation for future college courses,” and spoke of the need for the school to continue to “strive for excellence.” These examples demonstrate the strong belief in rigor and high expectations as important in academic preparation for postsecondary success and in the development of the work ethic needed for college completion.

Finding #2

The opportunity for learning activities in high school that are relevant to real-world experiences and future goals connects high school preparation and college success.

Relevance relates to student interests and needs and to real-world situations and contexts. In the classroom, relevance assures that students have courses, instruction, and

projects that relate to their lives and to their current and future learning. Relevance to real-world experiences brings meaning to a high school curriculum. A challenge for high schools is preparing students for both postsecondary education and careers. High-achieving schools not only teach all students a rigorous academic core, but also include instructional activities that show students the relationship between high school studies and future success (Dimensions by Design, 2006). Breaking Ranks II (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004) described relevance as personalized learning that ensures all students not only meet high standards but also acquire the knowledge they need to pursue their own aspirations. “Engagement in learning occurs when students are actively applying what they know.” Cleveland (2006) said that relevance “connects course materials and the learning process to who they (students) are, what they care about, and how they perceive and know.” Relevant curriculum improves academic success and enhances relationships between teachers and students.

Several participants spoke of relevance as important in their preparation for college. Louise commented about the need for “application to the real, not just application.” She talked at length of the need to engage in work and problems that are found in the real world and reflected on the everyday use of technology in the classroom as a tool that would be used in work and life. The International Center for Leadership in Education (2005) addresses this concern about “application to the real, not just application” as it classifies levels of application in increasing terms of knowledge in one discipline, application within one discipline, application across disciplines, application to real-world predictable situations and application to real-world unpredictable situations (McNaulty & Quaglia, 2007; Wisconsin Department of Education, 2006). These levels of

relevance relate to Louise's opinions. Relevant curriculum that she could carry with her to college was a consistent pattern throughout her thoughts.

Related to relevance was the rigor of understanding concepts well enough to apply them to real-world situations. Louise talked about science concepts "...we had to understand and apply...not a class where you just repeated the facts but used them in practical application." Tad referred to assignments that were given to students to explain the concepts and apply that knowledge to a real situation. Richard complimented an English teacher who presented "life-enriching lessons that spanned beyond simple English." In addition, Jim referred to English skills learned in high school and applied in college that he now uses and values in his business. Even in extra-curricular activities such as drama, the teacher was complimented for having a "hands-on approach and realistic attitude" in her style of teaching.

Career education was a common theme within the interviews as well. An awareness of the variety of career possibilities is important to students, particularly in a culture with a rapidly changing workforce. Elaine, Denise, and Jane cited a weakness in the high school in career education and felt ill-equipped to make academic major and college choices because of the lack of awareness of work fields available. An improvement in this area of high school guidance could strengthen relevance in education for students, particularly for students entering college with lower ACT scores and tending to struggle somewhat academically.

Tad, Denise, and Jane referenced the high school's need for a broader variety of quality academic courses that relate to their post-secondary work and goals. Comments such as "need broader, more diverse course selections," "need more diversity and

advanced level classes,” and “not enough diverse classes were offered” were common reflections. Wirtz wrote, “There aren’t two worlds—education and work, there is one world—life” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2006). McNaulty and Quaglia (2007) said, “If students are to enjoy greater academic success, they must believe in themselves, be excited about their learning, and see the link between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow.” This attitude was expressed in participants’ reflections as they expressed the need for the opportunity to select a variety of courses that relate to their future educational and career goals.

Finding #3

Positive relationships between students and teachers is a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Positive relationships results from students having a number of adults within the school who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve. “Relationships do not become a new standard or replace rigor and relevance. They are a way to improve learning” (McNaulty & Quaglia, 2007). It allows a means for every student to be known, respected, and appreciated. Positive student relationships with teachers and other faculty members create caring, student-focused environments that allow students to feel connected, increasing opportunities for each student to succeed. Cleveland (2006) listed as important for building relationships giving a student a sense of belonging, opportunities to be a respected member of a community, opportunities to have one’s voice heard and attended to, giving students useful roles, and allowing students to be with others of similar backgrounds, experiences, and goals. “In these schools, relationships

among students and staff are deliberately nurtured and a key reason for student success” (McNaulty & Quaglia, 2007).

Relationships are created and built by teachers through support systems, through caring about students, by promoting student achievement, by being role models, and by insisting upon successful behaviors for school. These support systems can form networks of relationships (Cleveland, 2006). A key concept for student success is for high school students to have opportunities to form meaningful relationships with instructors and other adults who can help them meet high standards. A pattern indicating the importance of these types of relationships is found consistently in the data of cohort members who achieved a college degree.

A common theme among all interviewees was the importance of the development of relationships with teachers and students. Students believed the York High School staff genuinely cared about them and encouraged them to achieve at high levels. Students responded to these high expectations. Louise spoke of this idea in depth as she described the importance of her “sense of being known. I enjoyed being known as a person and not just another number. There were also a lot of ways to be involved and I enjoyed that.” When asked what she valued deeply about her school, Louise replied, “My relationship with my teachers. I am still in contact years later. They helped me learn to think and that doing my best was important. They also taught me that quality work was important.”

Louise and Richard talked of the strength of the academic program being relationships with teachers. “One strength was some of the excellent teachers. They were devoted to making us think for ourselves. Another was the smaller class size and the sense of being known.” It was clear for her that positive relationships built with high

school teachers provided a personalized learning environment for her that contributed to a foundation of academic confidence in herself and resulted in her future college success. Richard spoke of respect for teachers “always willing to volunteer her time to any student in need” and who “treated me fairly and had my respect as an educator.” He went on to speak about a special teacher from whom he “learned about the kind of person I hope to become some day from [the teacher], who is the epitome of a kind and wonderful person.” The teacher encouraged self confidence in students. She inspired a positive attitude in Richard and influenced his college major and future career choices.

Elaine echoed similar thoughts about the importance of excellent teachers when she commented, “Looking back, there were some teachers who, right off the bat, you knew they loved teaching. It showed through their daily activities, interaction with the students and the creative projects that they assigned. They laughed and had fun. They weren’t intimidating. They knew how to keep the students’ attention. These individuals were the teachers who made learning fun.” Denise also valued her relationships with teachers and coaches and commented on their importance in her education.

Jim is another student who valued relationships developed in high school. “I enjoyed the small classes and the personal interaction with teachers.” Jim believed that positive relationships built between students and teachers were most important. He credits caring teachers and coaches for his success in college and in his successful career today.

Jim currently is employed in a competitive energy-related field within a large corporation. He attributes part of his success there to teachers and coaches who expected his best in the classroom and on the field. Their positive attitude played a role in shaping

his outlook. “There is no doubt that the challenges provided by teachers ... have helped me gain the confidence needed to take on projects and be successful in the corporate world.” He believes his success, at least in part, can be attributed to his good education.

Teachers spoke more of relationships than any other factor in describing the class of 1999 and their educational experience. Important to teachers was the unity between students and themselves. Their continued contact with these students was evidence of caring relationships formed more than seven years ago. The teacher focus group provided many examples of a personalized learning environment as they remembered and described students from the class roster and school yearbook. Teachers felt a part of their students’ lives and reflected fondly on these memories. One teacher’s comment that “we all did our part” gives evidence of a learning environment focused on students by the majority of the students and faculty.

Dr. James Comer is quoted by Cleveland (2006) as saying, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” McNaulty and Quaglia (2007) wrote, “Schools across the country are realizing that rigor and relevance develop most naturally when they are cultivated on firm grounding in relationships.” The participating students and teachers concurred in believing positive relationships and personalized learning environments were important. Participants spoke highly of relationships they developed during these high school years.

Richard may have summed it best when he described the school as having a “feel of community.” The data of this case study support the importance of a personalized learning environment, particularly positive relationships with teachers during the students’ high school years.

Finding #4

Academic skills are important and a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Throughout the interviews, students consistently spoke of academic skills as important in their college success. They referred to the positive impact of strong writing and reading skills in post-secondary class work. These skills were important across the span of coursework taken and important in the different major areas of study. Louise, spoke of knowing “how to write papers so in college I only had to focus on gathering the proper research, not how to write the paper, which was extremely helpful.” Elaine expressed similar beliefs when she spoke of skills she learned in English classes and carried with her to many college courses. Tad, Jim, Jane, and Richard also referred to the importance of writing skills in college coursework and across major fields of study.

Another important skill learned by students in high school and expressed as important in their college success was study skills. Louise and Denise both spoke of high school classes that focused not only on the course content, but also on teaching students how to study. Louise said, “The skills learned in this class carried over to how she studied for other courses in college.”

Finding #5

Positive participation and experiences in extra-curricular activities is a connection that links high school preparation and college success..

Research has long demonstrated the need of a sense of belonging for academic success (Boeree, 2006; Hummer, 2006). All graduates interviewed were active at some

level in extra-curricular activities and programs at York High School. While some students were more involved than others, all expressed the importance of belonging to various teams and organizations.

Students participated in a variety of athletic programs and in clubs and organizations that included artistic, service-oriented, and social qualities. The graduates shared examples of personal satisfaction gained through their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Most common were examples of the friendships made from those interactions and the subsequent sense of belonging. Louise cited “memories of close friends” as important to her. Elaine believed that knowing her teachers and classmates made her feel a part of the school and stated that any activity that linked her to school was special. “These various activities gave me the chance to interact and get to know people outside of my circle of friends.” For Denise, friends and her activities are her “happiest memories of high school. Building friendships and relationships” was most important. Richard said, “All of my best experiences at [the high school] have been due to my friends. I will miss them all, and I will never forget them.”

Extra-curricular activities also fostered self-confidence in students. Through positive experiences in various programs, students believed themselves capable of success. Jim believes that his success in baseball, fostered by encouraging coaches, led to his ability to believe in himself. Described as “better than average,” Tad believes that he is able to succeed in a demanding career field. Louise and Elaine both feel they gained leadership abilities through participation in Model Arab League and participation as a leader on the prom committee. Many of the students were involved in the high school

drama program. Richard described the drama teacher as able to bring “many students out of their shells and empowered us with the ability to take risks.”

Summary of Findings

During the interviews a series of patterns emerged. These patterns became the themes and, ultimately, the findings of this study. Rigorous coursework and the expectation of quality student work, relevant curriculum, positive relationships, academic skills, and opportunities for curricular and extra-curricular participation were important.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

AND FINAL THOUGHT

Summary

Today, only 40.1 percent of college students who enroll in Oklahoma public universities graduate within a six-year period (OSHRE). Achieve, Inc. (2005) found that only 60 percent of the nation's high school graduates report they are prepared adequately to deal with the demands of postsecondary education, putting individual success in jeopardy. Thirty-nine percent of high school graduates enrolled in college reported they had gaps in their high school education. College instructors concurred with students, citing only three in five college students as prepared for college by the education they received in high school. This study sought to understand better the connections between high school preparation and college success.

The research purpose was to examine the high school and college academic performance of a cohort of students and their perceptions as young adults regarding their high school academic preparation and its effect on college academic success. The researcher attempted to learn the participants' perceptions regarding high school and college experiences. Two research questions were formulated:

1. What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success?
2. What factors seem to contribute to college success?

The case study examined the academic records and beliefs of a cohort of students from the York High School class of 1999 to see if a variety of document and database sources (Appendix A) and interviews would reveal any connections between high school academic preparation and college success.

From York High School's 1999 class of 87 students, 54 were identified within the OSHRE databases as having attended an Oklahoma public college or university in Fall 1999. This database provided college statistics regarding student progress and identified 25 of the 54 students as having graduated with either an Associates or Bachelors Degree within a seven-year period (Appendix E). From these 25 students, seven were interviewed with the hope of finding what preparation they received in high school that later assisted them in meeting the requirements to obtain a college degree.

Through a constructivist lens, the researcher sought to determine what these young adults believe was important in their high school academic preparation that may have prepared them for success in college. Constructivism is based on the premise that "we all construct our perspective of the world through individual experiences and schema" (Mergel, 2007, p. 2). "In constructivism, the learner is the active agent, internalizing, reshaping, or transforming information and constructing meaning or understanding. In constructing meaning, the learner connects new learning with existing knowledge and prior experiences" (English, 2006, p. 606). Constructivism would suggest that students have constructed meaning from their own education experiences

and allowed them to share their perspectives with the researcher. The cohort members interviewed were clear as to what they believe was important for them in high school that prepared them for later success in college.

As a result of personal experiences and biases, the researcher expected this research would reveal data that emphasized specific academic content knowledge gained in high school that participants believed important as they completed college. This was not the case. Instead, interviewees consistently revealed broader themes as important including a rigorous curriculum and high expectations for quality work, learning relevant to the real world and future goals, positive relationships with teachers and others, strong academic skills, and positive involvement in curricular and extra-curricular programs. These themes developed into the findings of the study and may point to connections between high school preparation and college success.

Conclusions

In an Oklahoma political culture that emphasizes specific content, Priority Academic Skills for Students, as needed for success for all students, this case study indicates broader findings equally important for participants. Meaning has been gleaned, from each finding.

Finding #1

Rigorous coursework and the expectation of quality work is a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Students who experienced a rigorous curriculum and were held to high expectations in the quality of work they produce benefitted not only from the content knowledge they received from the course, but also from the development of a stronger work ethic. For the seven students interviewed, success in college was connected to work ethic and resolve to reach graduation. The extent that rigor and high expectations might have affected each individual in the development of a strong work ethic is clear, but the extent is unknown.

Finding #2

The opportunity for learning activities in high school that are relevant to real-world experiences and future goals connects high school preparation and college success.

Several students referred to relevance in their education as important for college success. Learning that was relevant captured the students' attention and carried over to their college studies. Relevance in high school curriculum was a motivation for learning and was important for college preparation.

Finding #3

Positive relationships between students and teachers are a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Positive relationships between students and teachers were important to participants. Both groups concurred that these relationships were an important part of the York High School climate. This environment assisted in building academic ability and

confidence in students. Students believed they could be successful, in part because of high school teachers who cared about them and their education. “A teacher said, ‘You can’t motivate a student you don’t know.’ When teachers and students work together to create a common vision and create common learning goals, students can demonstrate their competency and achieve at a higher level” (Dimensions by Design, 2006).

Finding #4

Academic skills are important and a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

Academic skills seem to be as important as academic content for students completing college. Students interviewed referred often to the importance of strong writing and reading skills and the need for acquiring good study skills. Students equipped with strong academic skills were able to conquer college content in a variety of college major fields.

Finding #5

Participation in extra-curricular activities is a connection that links high school preparation and college success.

To some degree, all students participated in extra-curricular activities in high school. Both students and teachers spoke of the importance of these activities to the overall school climate. Students reported that their involvement in extra-curricular programs contributed to their self-confidence, esteem, and sense of belonging.

Competition in extra-curricular activities and outside-of-class relationships with coaches and sponsors provided opportunities for students to gain poise and self-confidence.

As students enter Oklahoma colleges and universities, they find themselves in educational institutions that are less structured and less supervised than the traditional high school setting. Important for high schools to know what is needed by students to prepare them for a successful transition to this new educational environment. An autonomous learner will most likely be prepared best for this experience. The ability of college students to self-govern their learning in a responsible manner is a pre-requisite for success. Work ethic, self-confidence, and academic skills, connected to the findings and conclusions, support students' ability to self-govern their actions. Without sufficient development of this autonomy, it is possible, and perhaps probable, that many students will not successfully transition into a college environment and successfully complete their programs of study.

Recommendations for Practice

Important for York High School students, and probably all students, is the employment of faculty willing to provide a personalized learning environment and engage in offering a rigorous curriculum, setting high expectations for quality of work, presenting relevant assignments, and assisting with the development of academic skills to nurture a strong work ethic and academic confidence. Programs that foster a sense of belonging in students are critical. Awareness of how to implement these components should be part of ongoing dialogue and thought within the school.

Recommendation for Further Research

This case study was designed to obtain the perceptions of some members of the graduating class of 1999 to determine how their academic studies in high school prepared them for college. The study looked only at students who entered and graduated from Oklahoma public colleges and universities, and, therefore, only presents a small portion of the success of this graduating class. Further research could include a study of York High School class of 1999 students who attended private or out-of-state public colleges and universities. To complete the picture and better understand the success of the 1999 York High School Class, research of other class members is needed. It is possible the perceptions of those students may differ from the perceptions of those included in this study as their academic records and experiences may vary.

Further research could also include gaining the perspectives of students regarding their high school preparation at varied points along their education journey. It is plausible to consider that their memories about academic success during their college years could be different from their beliefs as young adults after graduation. It was expected that students interviewed would speak more to the importance of academic content needed for success in college. That was not the case, but this data might present itself at a different point of a student's education experience.

Final Thought

Children born since 1982 have been termed the "Millennial Generation." According to Howe and Strauss (as cited in Harvey & Housman, 2004), this new generation "is as attuned to achievement and performance as any in U.S. history." It is

worth our attention and our efforts to engage in research at the local school level to make decisions regarding the best educational practices for the children of this generation. Rigorous curriculum, high teacher expectations, relevant instruction and assignments, positive relationships with teachers, strong academic skills, and opportunity for positive experiences in extra-curricular activities were themes identified through most of the participants' stories. These concepts, advocated consistently over time by scholars in education, also appear from this case study to be the strategies that could create a quality high school. They provide the basis for developing a strong work ethic and instilling the academic confidence and self esteem needed by students for their development as autonomous learners and their successful transition to college.

The Oregon Department of Education (2006) stated, "A vision for high school improvement is that each and every student completes high school ready for success in life." In today's world, that means preparation for college or some post-high school training for students. For a small group of successful students from a 1999 Oklahoma high school graduating class, their beliefs were that work ethic, academic confidence, and self-esteem were strengthened by rigorous and relevant learning opportunities, positive relationships with teachers who valued them and their learning, strong academic skills, and programs that fostered belonging.

Recently, the Oklahoma Chancellor of Higher Education (Johnson, 2007) listed several important goals for the OSRHE. Increasing the number of Oklahoma college graduates to reach the national average was among the top goals. The high school's partnership in this effort is to better prepare students for success at the university level. A college degree has the ability to improve the lives of students by "opening doors and

building careers” (Johnson, 2007). Local high schools should provide the best course of study and educational practices possible to help ensure post-secondary success for students.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

SOURCES OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

High School Documents:

- Student Transcripts
- Course Description Guide (Including Enrollment and Graduation Information)

Oklahoma Education Oversight Office of Accountability:

- School Report Cards – Provides School Demographic and Achievement Information
- District Report Cards – Provides District Demographic and Achievement Information

American College Testing (ACT):

- Online Databases – ACT National, State, and Local Statistics

College Board:

- Online Databases – SAT National, State, and Local Statistics
- Advanced Placement Publications

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education:

- Unitized Data System
 - Students of Graduating Class Attending Oklahoma Public Universities
 - Freshman Year G.P.A.
 - Second Year Retention
 - Students Graduating Within a Six-Year Period
 - Graduation G.P.A.
 - Graduate Studies

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COHORT PARTICIPANTS

Tell me about yourself since high school. (Work, college, military, other training)

1. Describe yourself as a high school student.
2. What courses did you take in high school that best prepared you for college? Can you give some examples of how those courses prepared you for college?
3. What high school activities did you participate in that made you feel a part of the school and/or contributed to your success? What activities fostered hobbies or interests after high school?
4. Think back to your time in high school. Can you remember a time when you felt most fulfilled or happy?
5. Can you share some things you value deeply; specifically, things you value about your high school?
6. Please rate the following statements:
 - My high school English courses prepared me for success in college and work.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
 - My mathematics courses prepared me for success in college and work.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
 - My science courses prepared me for success in college and work.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
 - My social studies courses prepared me for success in college and work.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
 - My experiences with technology prepared me for success in college and work.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- My experiences in the arts prepared me for success in college and work.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- My received the guidance needed to prepare me for success in college and work.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I noticed you gave a response of _____ on Number _____-- _____.

Can you tell me why?

8. What suggestions do you have to improve any of these areas?

9. Based on your experiences, what would you say are the strengths of the academic program at the high school?

10. What wish(es) would you make for your high school to heighten its effectiveness for future students?

11. What else would you like to tell me or what else should I know about the high school to better help our future students?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COUNSELORS

1. How long were you a counselor at the high school?
2. Tell me about your responsibilities.
3. What was the process for student course selection and enrollment?
4. What guidance activities and opportunities were in place for students to aid course selection and enrollment?
5. What resources were available for college selection, preparation, and transition?
6. What guidance activities and opportunities were in place for students to aid college selection?
7. What guidance activities and opportunities were in place for students to assist with college preparation?
8. What guidance activities and opportunities were in place for students to assist with college transition?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Share your experience and responsibilities at the high school.
2. Thinking back (share class roster) to the time this Graduating Class of 1999 spent in high school, how would you describe the class?
3. How would you describe the school during that time period?
4. Are there any events or students that stand out in your memory?
5. During 1995-1999, how would you rate your department in terms of preparing students for postsecondary education and work?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Can you describe curriculum and instructional practices in the high school during this time period?
7. Have you had any opportunities to visit with members of this class since their graduation? If so, what are some things you learned about their college experiences and successes?
8. What would you like to tell me or what should I know about the school, its students, or faculty?

APPENDIX E

COHORT COLLEGE DATA

Student #	College Entered Fall, 99	Freshman GPA	Second-Year Retention	Graduation Year	Degree Earned	GPA	Graduating College	Graduate Work/ College
1	UCO	2.00	Yes	2006	Bachelor	2.25	OSU	
2	RCC	4.00	Yes					
3	OSU-OKC	3.00	No					
4	OU	3.86	Yes	2003	Bachelor	3.93	UCO	
5	UCO	2.90	Yes					
6	UCO	1.90	Yes					
7	OSU	4.00	Yes					
8	UCO	2.00	Yes					
9	OSU	1.11	Yes	2006	Bachelor	2.75	OSU	
10	OSU-OKM	4.00	Yes					
11	UCO	2.66	Yes					
12	OSU	2.66	Yes	2006	Bachelor	NA	UCO	
13	OSU-OKC	3.00	No					
14	UCO	3.48	Yes	2003	Bachelor	2.88	UCO	
15	UCO	0.00	No					
16	RSC	2.81	No					
17	UCO	2.00	No					
18	UCO	3.40	Yes					
19	UCO	2.33	Yes	2004	Bachelor	2.94	UCO	
20	OSU	3.20	Yes	2004	Bachelor	3.46	OSU	
21	RSC	2.67	Yes					
22	OCCC	3.07	Yes					
23	OCCC	4.00	Yes					
24	NSU	2.42	Yes	2003	Bachelor	2.82	NSU	
25	OSU	3.40	Yes	2005	Bachelor	2.39	UCO	
26	OSU	2.38	Yes	2005	Bachelor	3.27	OSU	
27	CASC	3.19	Yes					
28	UCO	0.00	Yes					
29	OU	4.00	Yes					
30	UCO	2.00	Yes					
31	UCO	4.00	No					
32	UCO	0.00	No					
33	UCO	4.00	Yes	2003	Bachelor	3.91	SWOSU	
34	UCO	0.66	No					
35	OCCC	3.00	Yes	2002	Bachelor	NA	OSU	
36	UCO	2.35	Yes	2003	Bachelor	NA	OU	Currently in third year-OU Medical School
37	UCO	3.18	Yes	2004	Bachelor	3.66	OSU	
38	OSU-	3.60	No					

	OKC							
39	OU	3.19	Yes	2005	Associate	3.20	OCCC	
40	RSU	1.66	Yes					
41	OSU-OKC	2.60	Yes	2004	Bachelor	2.90	UCO	
42	OSU	2.94	Yes	2006	Bachelor	2.74	UCO	
43	UCO	2.77	Yes					
44	OU	4.00	Yes	2005	Bachelor	3.94	OU	
45	UCO	4.00	Yes	2004	Bachelor	3.98	OSU	Masters/ OSU
46	RSU	3.00	Yes	2004	Bachelor	3.27	OSU	
47	UCO	3.00	No					
48	OU	2.76	Yes	2004	Bachelor	2.72	OU	
49	UCO	1.66	Yes	2004	Bachelor	2.50	UCO	
50	OU	1.56	Yes					
51	OSU-OKC	3.33	No					
52	RSU	3.00	Yes	2004	Bachelor	NA	NSU	Masters/ OU
53	UCO	2.56	Yes	2006	Bachelor	2.55	OSU	
54	OCCC	3.31	Yes	2006	Bachelor	3.75	SWOSU	

College and University Codes

Carl Albert State College
 Northeastern State University
 Oklahoma City Community College
 Oklahoma State University
 Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City
 Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee
 Redlands Community College
 Rose State College
 Rogers State University
 Southwestern Oklahoma State University
 University of Central Oklahoma
 University of Oklahoma

CASC
 NSU
 OCCC
 OSU
 OSU-OKC
 OSU-OKM
 RCC
 RSC
 RSU
 SWOSU
 UCO
 OU

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW LETTER

Letter Inviting Participation

Rebecca L. Wilkinson
4109 Old Farm Road
Oklahoma City, OK 73120

OSU	
Institutional Review Board	
Approved	1/22/07
Expires	1/21/08
Initials	dy
E.D. 06217	

(Cohort or Faculty Member)
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear (Member),

I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This spring, I am gathering data for my dissertation research which is a case study investigating high school academic preparation and college academic experience. The case study centers on those students within your high school graduating class who went on to attend Oklahoma public universities in the fall of 1999.

I would like to spend approximately one hour visiting with you to hear more about your experiences in college and what you believe about the academic preparation you received in high school. In an effort to evaluate and improve the high school's academic program, it is important for the school to understand how their students have fared as they have gone on to college and the work force. I am hopeful you will agree this is important for future students at the school and agree to allow me the opportunity to visit with you.

Attached is a brief description of the research and letter of consent—both of which will be given to all participants of the study explaining the research and participants' rights. I can be contacted via e-mail at wilkinsonb@deercreek.k12.ok.us, phone (405-517-9007), or mail (4109 Old Farm Road, OKC, OK 73120).

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Wilkinson

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent

Project Title: A Case Study of High School Academic Preparation and College Academic Experience

Investigator: This doctoral research is being conducted through Oklahoma State University by the primary researcher, a doctoral student, Rebecca L. Wilkinson.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the connections between high school academic preparation and college academic experiences.

Procedures: High school and college academic data will be gathered from a variety of sources including records, databases, and interviews with the intent to analyze the data to see what connections can be found between high school academic preparation and college academic success. Data will include information on coursework, strength of preparation, major fields of study, and academic confidence.

Risks of Participation: Rights to confidentiality and privacy are a concern for this study. Participant information will have all names removed and a number and/or alias assigned in an effort to safeguard subject data. Beyond this right to privacy, no other known risks associated with this project are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: Benefits of this research will include the accessibility of post-secondary student data for the local high school. This type of information could provide direction for school improvement as educators attempt to better prepare students for college.

Confidentiality: Data including records, database information, and interview notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and records destroyed within three months after the completion of the research and dissertation defense. Only the researcher will have access to the data. Confidentiality will be maintained through identifying research subjects by number and by aliases within the text of the dissertation. The OSU Institutional Review Board has the authority to inspect consent records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

Compensation: No compensation will be offered to participants.

Contacts: For further questions or information, contact:

Primary Researcher	Dissertation Advisor	IRB Chairperson
Rebecca L. Wilkinson	Dr. Ken Stern	Dr. Sue Jacobs
4109 Old Farm Road	311 Willard, OSU	415 Whitehurst, OSU
Oklahoma City, Ok 73120	Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078
Home Ph. 405-463-0907	WK Ph. 405-744-8929	WK Ph. 405-744-1617
WK Ph.405-348-6100 X110.		

Participant's Rights: Participation is voluntary and no penalty exists if someone chooses not to participate. Participants may also choose to withdraw their consent and end participation at any time.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent agreement and hereby agree to participate in an interview for the doctoral dissertation titled: A Case Study of High School Academic Preparation and College Academic Experience. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of the consent form has been given to me.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Time

I certify that I have explained all elements of this form before requesting the participant to sign.

Signed: _____ Date _____
Rebecca L. Wilkinson, Researcher

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, January 22, 2007

IRB Application No ED06217

Proposal Title: A Case Study of High School Academic Preparation and College Academic Experience

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 1/21/2008

Principal Investigator(s) ✓

Rebecca Wilkinson
4109 Old Farm Road
Oklahoma City, OK 73120

Ken Stern
311 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

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 section 45 CFR 46.

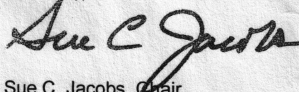
☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

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 submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

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 Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Rebecca L. Wilkinson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND
COLLEGE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Duncan, Oklahoma, August 24, 1955, the daughter
of Travis and Viola Woody.

Education: Graduated from Duncan High School, Duncan, Oklahoma, May
1973; received Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from
Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma, May, 1978; received Master's
Degree in Elementary School Administration from University of Central
Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, May, 1995. Completed the requirements
for the Doctorate of Education at Oklahoma State University, May, 2008.

Experience: Twenty-eight years in education encompassing work as a teacher,
principal, director, and superintendent; employed by Duncan, Oklahoma
City, Putnam City, and Deer Creek school districts, respectively.

Professional Memberships: Association of Supervision and Curriculum
Development, Oklahoma Association of School Administrators,
Oklahoma Commission on Educational Administration, United
Suburban Schools Association

ADVISER'S APPROVAL _____

Name: Rebecca L. Wilkinson

Date of Degree: May, 2008

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: A CASE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC PREPARATION
AND COLLEGE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Pages in Study: 124

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: School Administration

Scope and Method of Study: This qualitative study describes the beliefs of a group of college graduates regarding their high school preparation and its effect on their college successes. High school curriculum has been at the center of educational debate throughout U.S. history, and what academic preparation is needed at the high school level to best prepare students for success in college has been a continuing question. The research questions were as follows: (1) What connections exist between high school academic preparation and college success? (2) What factors seem to contribute to college success? The theoretical lens for this study was constructivism as it allowed the participants the opportunity to share their perspectives of how their high school preparation contributed to their college successes and allowed the researcher the opportunity to establish findings and conclusions from the participants' stories. Seven students from a 1999 Oklahoma graduating class who enrolled in an Oklahoma public college or university in Fall 1999 and graduated by Spring 2005 were interviewed.

Findings and Conclusions: Five themes developed within this study and subsequently became the findings. They are as follows: (1) Rigorous coursework and the expectation of quality work is a connection that links high school preparation and college success; (2) The opportunity for learning activities in high school that are relevant to real-world experiences and future goals connects high school preparation and college success; (3) Positive relationships between students and teachers is a connection that links high school preparation and college success; (4) Academic skills are important and a connection that links high school preparation and college success; and (5) Positive participation and experiences in extra-curricular activities is a connection that links high school preparation and college success. The findings demonstrated the importance of strong high school teachers, instruction, and activities that contributed toward the building of a strong work ethic, self-confidence, esteem, and sense of belonging in students. These attributes fostered autonomy in students that enabled them to attain college graduation.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Kenneth Stern

