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Dual Enrollment: Breaking the Mold for College Readiness and Persistence in an Urban Charter School

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DUAL ENROLLMENT: BREAKING THE MOLD FOR COLLEGE READINESS

AND PERSISTENCE IN AN URBAN CHARTER SCHOOL

by

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DEDICATION

There are many levels of devotion that I must consider in the completion of this dissertation. Although such considerations include a bevy of people, it is the finite detail of individual contributions that I must give most consideration in this humble dedication that acknowledges those whom have provided me with the things I needed to arrive at this conclusion to another facet of my life's work.

As a child, both my grandmothers (Mattie L. Wright and Eddie Mae Doss) provided me with a rich understanding of who I was—a child of God. That understanding gave me further access to a version of myself that is still years beyond my reach. Today, I remain steadfast in knowing that an opportunity such as this, is one of my life's blessings that constantly provides me with enriching experiences and opportunities of visions— many of which I dare not attempt to understand.

Throughout my life, there have been several women who have believed in me and motivated me to reach for heights restricted by my limited vision and yet to manifest in my life. My mother (Estella Harriet Mayhue-Greer) was the first woman to offer this motivation. However, Momma did not merely give me life, but her love, constantly displayed through her words and accompanying actions, pushed me in ways I would have never imagined. However, my mother's baby sister, my Aunt Elaine (Katherine E. Hunt), was the epitome of the unconditional love exhibited by the women in my family. She guided me in places that my mother could not reach and at times could not understand— every man-child desires an "outlet," and Aunt Elaine often was mine. Beyond the loving support extended by my mother's youngest sister, I also shared one of her eldest resources, my (great) Aunt Jo (Josephine Bridges). Having a great impact on my

mother's life, she has also assisted me in building my own, assisting me in realizing my purpose and helping to clear my vision. She has been a constant source of knowledge by sharing her wisdom.

Often confused by my desires, which sometimes grapple my vision, I trust not my own understanding but await guidance when it is needed. This guidance often leads me directly where I need to be. In 2004, such a need for guidance occurred along with a vision that completely conflicted with my dreams—City University School of Liberal Arts. I will forever believe this to be my life's greatest work and will always be indebted to the class of 2008 (and their parents). My love for the body of scholars as a whole is immeasurable, but nothing can ever compare to the reciprocity between the first class and me—they knew me when and I will be connected to them forever.

As children, our parents determine our playmates. As teenagers, our circumstances determine our associates. As adults, the paths we choose determine our friends. I will be forever grateful for the winding roads in my life's path because they have allowed me to experience real friendship, which I have found in a best friend, Felicia P. Hartsfield. Since my first day at the University of Tennessee at Martin, our lives have been placed on parallel routes. Although she may deny the measures of support, motivation, and understanding she constantly brings to my life, I will never refute the impact she has had.

The paths of life often place us squarely in the path of others with the intent to have some impact on your own life. We know not the velocity or meaning of such an impact until the time comes for this to be revealed. My life and its direction have been greatly altered by what I once considered chance. Because of Dr. Beverly E. Cross, I now

realize that there are no true chances in life—only real circumstances. I will forever be grateful for the circumstance that she has brought into my life. As an agent of change, Dr. Cross has truly transformed my life and will forever be considered a giant that towers over life's detractors.

Finally, even after you believe that you have everything figured out, your route is considered squared and your vision is aligned, but you are taken off course only long enough to realize the true significance of your path. Oftentimes, it is not a distraction or a dead end but merely a realization of the importance of remaining focused and steadfast. I am indebted to the opportunity by which life may have stumbled upon the greatest reciprocity of circumstances. The genesis of this work will forever be contributable to the silent sustenance offered by Tariq J. Smith, as I truly appreciated his sacrifice—then and now.

I dedicate this measure of my life to all of you, as you all have continuously provided me with enrichment—mind, body, and soul. I am the man I am today because you all were placed in one of the winding pathways of my life. Thank you all and I love you, always.

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all to mutually grow. For that growth, I have been made better and everything seems possible.

I believe that the measure of a man is found not only in his own accomplishments but also in the evaluation of the friends who support him, such as the support that I have frequently found in the Boogie Twins. I truly love them both and thank them for seeing me long before I saw myself.

Many years have passed since I began this journey, but the starting point was initiated by Dr. Karen Bowyer. Her support is not forgotten, despite time lapsed. I will always treasure the tutelage and professional guidance that she extended to me.

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ABSTRACT

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In the later part of the twentieth century, the continued growth in high school and college dropout rates led to the development of educational reform measures that would address an education model that was seen as applicable to a disproportionate percentage of the nation's students, thereby leaving the majority of schools and their students to struggle (Simmons, 2008).

Efforts to increase matriculation between secondary and postsecondary institutions must be connected at all levels of education, which is critical to educational reform—worldwide (Zhou, 2008). Due to its ability to increase the rigor of high school curriculum, an increasingly favored measure of educational reform is the opportunity to allow high school students to enroll in college courses—dual enrollment (Bradley, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the academic experiences of a marginalized population of students that were participants in a dual enrollment program in order to identify the precollegiate experiences that may have influenced their college readiness and persistence. To gauge the perspective of program participants, a qualitative case study was employed using phenomenological theory.

Participants shared their academic experiences through an open-ended survey, focus group sessions, and interviews. The results demonstrated the ways dual enrollment may affect the college readiness and persistence of marginalized students by not only encouraging them to participate in dual enrollment programs but also by giving program

participants full access to the college experience while enrolled in high school, including use of college resources, access to additional courses, and inclusion of currently enrolled college undergraduates in classes with dual enrollment students.

In addition, dual enrollment assists participants thought to be "at-risk" by helping them understand their academic preferences pertaining to collegiate educational development, making them more confident in their college-selection efforts, and also motivating their integration in both the academic and social aspects of college life.

Considering that all of the participants in this study were accepted into four-year institutions and over 95% of them are still actively enrolled in college, this study demonstrates that dual enrollment programs also assist marginalized students in their college readiness and persistence, just as previous research demonstrates it has for White and "advanced" students.

With the support of dual enrollment programs, many marginalized and at-risk students, who in the past would have not considered reaching beyond their gazes, can be afforded greater opportunities.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Former Secretary of State, General Colin Powell, and his wife Alma J. Powell declared, "The United States is turning a corner in meeting the high school dropout epidemic" (Balfanz et al., 2010. p. 2). This declaration came after the nation's graduation rate was observed to be on a continuous decline during the latter part of the 20th century and after researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported that more than 2,000 of the nation's high schools were deemed "dropout factories" (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

America's Promise Alliance, a nonprofit organization founded by Colin and Alma Powell, released a report (Balfanz et al., 2010) highlighting the fact that the number of dropout factories in the US had decreased by 261. Although this was a noticeable decline, nationally, there still were more than 1,700 schools that had more students to drop out of high school than they had to graduate. Such a statistic leaves one to think of the students remaining in these schools and their progress toward graduation—are these students actually prepared for the rigor of college?

However, not all news is grim. According to the US Department of Education, the national graduation rate increased by the 3% (from 72% to 75%) between 2001 and 2008 (Balfanz et al., 2010). This increase equates to 120,000 more students earning high school diplomas in 2008 than in 2001 (Balfanz et al., 2010).

Highlighting the positive efforts of public education and the gains that some have made in efforts to increase the levels of academic achievement, *Building a Grad Nation* (Balfanz et al., 2010) also reported that:

Tennessee and New York led the nation in boosting high school graduation rates, with breakthrough gains of 15 and 10 percentage-points, respectively. Ten other states had gains ranging from about 4 to 7 percentage-points. These gains were in states that had graduation rates in 2002 that were above, near, and below the national graduation rate, indicating that improvement is possible regardless of starting point. (p. 7)

The *Building a Grad Nation* report allowed a cross-sector of those concerned about public education to see a snapshot of the gains in this arena and to view realistic opportunities toward educational reform. In the report (Balfanz et al., 2010), there were several opportunities that specifically addressed both southern and urban school districts—both locales of which contain populations for which studies relevant to public education are often deficient or without positive measures or methods that may possibly motivate academic success (Morris & Monroe, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education (Adelman, 2006) specifically addressed the need for quality high schools and student experiences to ensure college degree attainment. In outlining obtainable objectives for high schools, Adelman (2006) stated that:

> Of the three traditional measures of precollegiate educational history—curriculum configuration, academic performance (on a scale that combines class rank and GPA), and assessed general learned abilities (a senior year mini-SAT)—the intensity and quality of one's secondary school curriculum was the strongest influence not merely on college entrance, but more importantly, on bachelor's degree completion for students who attended a four-year college at any time. (p. 5)

These measures define a more purposeful path by which high school students are able to matriculate as better-prepared college students and eventually become college graduates. The basis of such is rooted in the fact that high school curriculum is the foundational

predecessor to a student's ability to effectively face the rigors of college and persist until graduation.

Unfortunately, in addition to high school dropouts and high school graduates that do not attend college, there remains a body of students that transition to American colleges and universities that are underprepared for the intensity of postsecondary education due to high schools not ensuring the quality of their respective curriculum. Roper (2009) outlined that issues in remedial education at the postsecondary level were relative to many students being academically underprepared. Oftentimes, these underprepared students are predominately from minority groups and find themselves enrolled in remedial courses; it takes these students more than four years to graduate, they incur greater debt for their educations, and they transition between four-year institutions or become dissatisfied with the college experience altogether (Morris & Monroe, 2009; Roper, 2009).

In the later part of the twentieth century, due to the growth of high school and college dropout rates, educational reform measures were necessary to address a high school design model that was seen to be applicable to only a disproportionate percentage of the nation's students, thereby leaving the majority to struggle academically (Simmons, 2008). Such reform measures included options that aided student success in educational attainment at both the secondary and postsecondary level.

According to Greene and Foster (2003),"students who fail to graduate high school prepared to attend a four-year college are much less likely to gain full access to our country's economic, political, and social opportunities" (p. 1). Despite the increase high

school graduation rates over the past decade, the majority of high school graduates remain unprepared for the academic rigors of the college transition (Balfanz et al., 2010).

To increase matriculation between secondary and postsecondary institutions, there must be efforts to connect all levels of education, which is critical to educational reform—worldwide (Zhou, 2008). Benson and Harkavy (2001) stated that partnerships among communities, higher education institutions, and schools were essential—such partnerships should be the core strategy for change. Although higher education institutions have a major stake in determining the futures of their graduates, educational reform must involve elementary and secondary education as well, as all students that matriculate within the system must be equally prepared. Ultimately, each level of education is part of a single, unified educational system (Benson & Harkavy, 2001).

An increasingly favored measure of educational reform that connects multiple levels of education is the ability to allow high school students to enroll in college courses (Bradley, 2007). This option has gained national favor due to its capacity to motivate students and to increase the intensity and quality of the high school curriculum. This measure is offered in many variations, but all formats allow high school students to actively engage in college courses. Such format options include advanced placement (AP) courses, dual enrollment, middle and early college high schools, and Tech Prep (Lerner & Brand, 2006).

All of these programs share common elements that are important to the preparation, graduation, and matriculation of high school students into college (Bradley, 2007). At the core of these elements is a strong academic foundation that is essential to

postsecondary standards, increased student engagement and participation by acknowledging students' different learning styles, and exposure to college expectations and responsibilities (Lerner & Brand, 2006).

Background Information

Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009) noted that there are many ways to increase high school graduation rates as well as place more students on an academic track that leads to college. Most states are attempting to do so by increasing the academic rigor of the curriculum offered in their high schools. Opportunities for exposure to college can increase academic rigor at the high school level and help motivate students to enroll in higher education institutions after graduating from high school (Hoffman et al.). Dual enrollment is a leading accelerated learning program option for increasing academic rigor and encouraging college matriculation.

Accelerated learning programs allow participants access to college courses; upon completion of these programs, participants receive college credit as well as corresponding high school credit. Dual enrollment participants remain formally enrolled in high school but take college courses taught by high school or college faculty in classrooms located either at the high school or on a college campus (Kim, 2008).

More and more community colleges are developing ways to accelerate high school students' college enrollment by enrolling them in college courses (Hoffman, 2003). In addition to community colleges offering such opportunities, many 4-year institutions (both public and private) are also partnering with high schools to offer dual

enrollment programs. Due to their ability to address learning differences, these programs have become a popular tool for educational reform and achievement (Bradley, 2007).

By definition, dual enrollment serves as a reciprocally responsible agent in both intensifying the high school curriculum and improving the matriculation and persistence rates of college students (Kim, 2008). The introduction of the rigor of postsecondary work to students during their high school years makes dual enrollment students better prepared for college and better equipped to handle the challenges of college than their counterparts who are not enrolled in such programs (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Due to their early introduction to college-level coursework, these students begin preparing for the postsecondary process while still in high school, therefore, making them more likely to enroll in and complete the university or college of their choice (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

Purpose of Study

Adelman (2006) strongly supports dual enrollment programs as a tool to ensure that high school students are prepared for college. Pennington and Vargas (2004) highlighted the need to further research the effects (of a charter school population) of at-risk and marginalized students within a large urban school district as it relates to their transition to college and their persistence beyond the first year. In this study, an in-depth review was conducted among a sample of college students, all of whom were formerly enrolled in a dual enrollment program (hereafter referred to as the Aquinas Scholars Program) while in high school.

More specifically, the object of the current study was to examine the effects of the comprehensive dual enrollment program between a charter school (River Charter

Academy) in a large urban school district (referred to as Urban County Schools) and a small, predominately Caucasian, religious-based private university (St. Aquinas University) by examining college readiness and persistence, including academic and social experiences.

Research Purpose and Questions

The number of dual enrollment program participants in the state of Tennessee has increased from 3,104 in 2002 to 12,377 in 2008 (O'hara, 2008). Although Tennessee does not have a state outlined dual enrollment system, dual enrollment is recognized as an existing program by the Tennessee Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) (Bond, Whitney, Mills, Jones, & Rinard, 2004). Beyond the ceremonial recognition and meteoric growth of dual enrollment programs in Tennessee, the state's educational objectives continue to examine means to address educational gaps and fill these openings with programs that support educational attainment for its citizenry—especially for those considered marginalized or at-risk (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2005).

One way the state can address the issue of low degree attainment among its citizens is to encourage more high school students to graduate and attend higher learning institutions located in Tennessee. The THEC's 2005–2010 Statewide Master Plan (2005) identified the need to increase the percentage of high school graduates who successfully transition to postsecondary education. Nationally, dual enrollment programs have been shown to have the ability to motivate students to graduate from high school and enroll in college (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

This study examines college matriculation numbers, academic persistence, and social engagement among former dually enrolled students from River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University. This study also provides detailed student perspectives on this particular dual enrollment program in efforts to provide a broader understanding of student matriculation into higher learning institutions.

More specifically, this study addresses the following problem: In what ways does participation in a dual enrollment program enhance the college readiness and persistence of marginalized students attending an urban charter school? The proposed study's objectives are to examine participating students' perceptions and its influence on them as it relates to: (1) college readiness, (2) college persistence, and (3) their academic and social experiences as high school students and later as full-time college students.

A case-study design was employed in the current study. An open-ended survey, focus group sessions, and interviews were used to collect data on the participants' perceptions and the program's influence on college readiness, persistence, and experience. In addition, participants' high school senior portfolios were viewed to further support the data collected while simultaneously answering the research questions and the outlined objectives.

Significance of the Problem

Dual enrollment has become a growing trend in higher education at two-year colleges and four-year universities alike (Kim, 2008). This trend is fueled by studies showing that high school students' access to college-level courses help prepare them for the rigors of college. A few researchers have also found the same positive results for

students who may have been considered "average" or at-risk (Cunningham &
Wagonlander, 2000; DiPuma, 2002; Greenberg, 1991; Stoel, 1988). Due to the varying
levels of the success of these programs, more students are recognizing accelerated
learning programs as viable opportunities, and enrollment is continually increasing
(Hoffman et al. 2009). The growth of such programs throughout the American education
system has made dual enrollment a significant tool in promoting college readiness and
degree completion.

Due to dual enrollment's growth and significance, the demand for a "model
program" that meets measures of accountability (i.e., academic rigor, college readiness,
matriculation, and persistence) will be a priority for colleges and universities that seek to
partner with high schools to offer accelerated learning programs to secondary school
populations.

Offered within this study is an examination of college readiness, persistence, and
lived academic experiences of students who were former participants in a comprehensive
accelerated learning program. The dual enrollment program between River Charter
Academy and St. Aquinas University was selected for this study due to the oversight and
collaboration among institutional campuses as well as students' ability to participate in
dual enrollment programs without costs. Further, these program sites were also selected
because all of the program's courses are taught by St. Aquinas University faculty on the
university's campus.

Since Hebert (2001) outlined transferability of credit between postsecondary
institutions as a key concern, the St. Aquinas University faculty involvement in this

program was critical to its selection due to some institutions discriminating between credits earned in courses taught by college faculty and those by high school teachers. This was a critical choice because there are other dual enrollment programs that exist in the same city and state; however, a majority of the other programs offer college professors and adjunct faculty members (credentialed high school teachers) an opportunity to teach college courses on high school campuses.

Finally, the current study's examination of this phenomenon can possibly serve as a foundation for the development of a "model dual enrollment program," in which St. Aquinas University and more charter schools or traditional public schools can partner for dual enrollment. Extending beyond the individual schools, this research may also serve as a model for dual enrollment programs for other schools in the district as well as other school districts and institutions of higher education.

Assumptions

Due to recent research, it was assumed that a relatively high percentage of Aquinas Scholars Program participants were successful in dual enrollment programs and in turn appeared to satisfactorily progress through and complete college (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; DiPuma, 2002; Greenberg, 1991; Stoel, 1988). It was also assumed that further understanding of the students and their engagement in the program is needed by all parties involved to improve the dual enrollment experience for future program participants. Making such improvements in the program to promote more positive experiences may further motivate the persistence of students once they are enrolled in

college. A final assumption was that interviewing student participants would provide useful information that is more representative of the students' experience and needs.

Limitations

All studies have limitations, as does the current study. One limitation is that the current study only involves former participants in the dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University in the fall semester of 2007, 2008, and 2009. Although there was a cohort for the fall semester of 2010, these students were not selected for this study, as they were not going to be enrolled as full-time college students until the fall of 2011; this is why they were not included in this study. Due to the limitations that include schools, students, and the state, the findings of this study should not be used to equally compare or generalize other dual enrollment programs or students.

In addition, the Aquinas Scholars Program has only been in existence for four years and is considered a fairly new program for the University; River Charter Academy has only been in existence for less than eight years. Consequently, neither the dual enrollment program nor the partnering high school has the historical perspective necessary to generalize findings.

Methodology

The qualitative paradigm offers an understanding of the social world from the viewpoint of the respondents through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behavior (Wildemuth, 1993). The goals of this study are directly aligned with the aim of the qualitative paradigm; therefore, the qualitative mode of inquiry was employed in this

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research. Since this is the first study examining River Charter Academy students enrolled in the dual enrollment program at St. Aquinas University, nothing can be presumed about the experiences of these participants—who are all now college-age students.

To progress beyond assumptions that can be gathered from previous studies of dual enrollment programs, a qualitative research approach allowed the results of the current study to be germane to this case rather than be easily generalized to the experiences of other individuals or the results of other studies. Qualitative research helps to avoid such pitfalls by uncovering patterns of relationships among the voices of participants within the community of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In turn, the use of a qualitative research design eased the discovery of themes, patterns, and codes that served as significant markers in this research.

Key to this effort is that the cornerstone to the qualitative paradigm are the beliefs that people assign meaning to the objective world, that their valued experiences are situated within a historical and social context, and that there can be multiple realities (Tesch, 1990). Due to this, the phenomena must be carefully explored through the perspectives of the individual participants.

Qualitative researchers desire a holistic understanding of the ways in which participants construct meaning and use this newly created framework in a practical manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To assure careful exploration and prepare for the possible depth of the participants' contexts, the research questions were addressed by conducting interviews, analyzing data relevant to program pre-enrollment (community

service hours and related social and academic activities), and viewing documents relevant to program post-enrollment (open-ended surveys and senior portfolios).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the study, including the study's purpose, guiding research questions, and the framework used to conduct the study. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the related literature that provides background information and relevant research regarding dual enrollment. Chapter 3 further expounds upon the methodology that was implemented to conduct the study. Study design and specific systematic research methods used to delve this phenomenon are also discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Also in this chapter is a detailed review of data collection, formatting, and filtering to draw reasonable conclusions (presented in Chapter 5) based on the findings. This chapter is replete with the multilayered perspectives of the participants regarding their experiences with dual enrollment. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions drawn from the implications of the findings presented in Chapter 4. In addition to providing a scope of the possible implications, Chapter 5 also offers recommendations for future areas of research that may be relevant to dual enrollment programs and the college readiness and persistence of students in urban areas.

Definitions of Terms

Some of the terms used in the current study may not be easily familiar or recognized. These terms, which may have varying definitions, are as follows:

Advanced student: A student that is considered intellectually or academically gifted with a high school GPA above 3.0 (on a 4.0 unweighted scale). An advanced

student is likely to attend a four-year college or university after graduating from high school.

Aquinas Scholars program: The dual enrollment program partnership between St. Aquinas University and River Charter Academy that allows eligible high school seniors to enroll in college courses offered on the St. Aquinas University campus.

Average student: A student that is considered "at-risk" with a high school GPA below 2.5 (on a 4.0 unweighted scale). An average student is more unlikely than advanced and elite students to attend a postsecondary institution after graduating from high school.

Dual enrollment: Student enrollment in college courses while still in high school in which students are able to earn credit from both institutions.

Marginalized students: A population of historically underrepresented students in education.

Urban County Schools: The largest public school district in the state in which the current study was conducted with more than 100,000 students in grades K−12.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined information that is critical for the development of the current study. Information regarding the state of public education as well as statistical figures related to high school dropout rates and other facts pertaining to college persistence were presented to offer further understanding and insight. In addition, the current state of the "K−16" education system was better defined when K−12 and post-secondary institutions were discussed in tangent to one another rather than as separate

entities. Dual enrollment was introduced in this chapter as a viable option that motivates

high school graduation, college matriculation, and persistence. These dual enrollment

programs were identified as the basis of inquiry for the current study. Finally, this chapter

has outlined the significance of this study, providing an opportunity to gain more

narrowed perspectives (via individual experiences) of a broad topic (the influence of dual

enrollment programs). Limitations that accompany the gain of such perspectives were

also addressed.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an in-depth review of extant literature to aid the

understanding of dual enrollment and its effects on student matriculation and persistence.

The chapter, divided into sections, provides a historical viewpoint of dual enrollment and

also explores its perceived benefits, by also reviewing areas of concern related to the

implementation of such programs. Although it is important to understand dual enrollment

from a national perspective, the current study examines an approach to dual enrollment

between colleges and charter schools; therefore, the last sections in this chapter are

Tennessee Legislation and Dual Enrollment and Tennessee Legislation and River Charter

Academy.

Historical Perspective of Dual Enrollment

Accelerated learning opportunities have been around in some form for years. *The*

College Ladder outlined these varying forms to include Advanced Placement (AP)

courses, International Baccalaureate (IB), Tech Prep, and middle and early college high

schools. Due to these varying forms, associated programs have been given a variety of

names such as concurrent enrollment, dual credit, and dual enrollment (Lerner & Brand,

2006). Despite the names, all of these programs have one thing in common: they allow

high school students to earn college credits and they provide accelerated learning

opportunities.

Wilbur and Chapman stated there are four general models that reflect the

implementation of dual enrollment programs. The four models, as cited in Greenberg

(1988), are:

1. The model in which regular college faculty teach regular college courses on campus or at the partnering high school;

2. The model in which regular college faculty teach adapted college courses on the college campus or at the partnering high school;

3. The model in which adapted college courses are taught by high school faculty at the high school; and

4. The model in which regular college courses are taught by high school faculty at the high school.

A review of these four general models provides a broader perspective of each, which further supports the idea that dual enrollment programs are not a new addition to the national education system.

The history of dual enrollment can be traced back more than century ago, when a three-year collegiate program was established by Johns Hopkins University in 1876 (Greenberg, 1991). In 1892, Dr. William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago contributed to accelerated learning programs when he led the restructuring of the institution in a "2 + 2 programming format" that included the development of a two-year junior college and a two-year senior college (Stoel, 1988). "Advanced" students could complete the junior program while still enrolled in high school, but "average" students could only enroll after their 11th-grade year. This approach, as defined by the University of Chicago, highlights the demarcation of program access at the development of

concurrent enrollment more than 100 years ago—the labeling of "advanced" and "average" students.

In 1959, with the creation of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and examinations, The College Board provided high school students another access point to earning college credit (Boswell, 2001). Five years after the introduction of AP courses, Elizabeth B. Hall founded Simon's Rock Early College, which was created for high school students that were interested in early college admission (Stoel, 1988). Simon's Rock and other alternatives to dual enrollment were attractive alternatives for the less "advanced" students, as AP was mostly available to students from a more "elite" social class.

In the 1970s, New York City emerged as a trailblazer in the development and implementation of dual enrollment programs. Founded as an alternative to New York City public high school in 1972, City-As-School was created to allow high school students to attend while taking college courses taught by college faculty alongside college students (Greenberg, 1991).

Beyond the predefined models of dual enrollment programs that naturally attracted the "advanced" or seemingly elite students was an opportunity to develop a hybrid that could capture the attention of the average to at-risk and marginalized student—the Middle College High School concept, introduced in 1972 by Janet Lieberman. Within a year, New York City's LaGuardia Community College housed the first Middle College High School on its campus (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000).

Lieberman (2004) stated that "Middle College is what Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, U.S.

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Commissioner of Education, and Chancellor of the State University of New York, called a hybrid: it is a high school on a college campus" (p. 2). This hybrid exists because the school covers the academic years of grades 9–12, employs secondary school teachers, functions primarily on a board of education budget, and fulfills high school curriculum requirements (Lieberman, 2004).

Unlike pre-existing dual enrollment programs and AP courses, the Middle College High School concept aimed to provide educational access and opportunities to marginalized students or those with a greater chance of dropping out of high school altogether (Lieberman, 2004). The Middle College High School concept had a proven record of success that afforded marginalized and average students an opportunity to matriculate from high school to college (Stoel, 1988).

In 1984, "College Now" opened on Kingsborough Community College's campus. Although similar to Middle College, high school teachers in the College Now program were employed as adjunct faculty members for Kingsborough and taught public high schools students (Greenberg, 1991).

Through the expansion of technology and student accessibility to such, dual enrollment courses today are also being taught online and through other distance education formats, including interactive television (Krueger, 2006). Access to these new technologies coupled with the diversity of teaching further allows greater numbers of students to enroll in college courses while in high school.

Dual Enrollment Benefits

The U.S. Department of Education has continually reviewed college enrollment

and persistence in efforts to better understand high school diploma/college degree attainment and its relationship to the nation's labor force. In Adelman (2006), it is noted that the world is moving quantitatively as it relates to business, geography, criminal justice, history, and also allied health. This shift demonstrates to (high school and college) students that there is a full range of disciplines and job-related tasks that require math, making math no longer an abstract school exercise but more of a core component to academic/professional achievement (Adelman, 2006).

Further, mathematics ability serves as one of the critical markers that denote a student's ability to graduate from high school, enroll in college, remain persistent while in college, and eventually obtain a college degree. With the introduction of No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001 (signed into law in 2002 by former President George W. Bush), mathematics and English became the core subjects used to determine the success or failure of school systems, individual schools, and also students. When students are assessed in these subject areas, relevant scores are combined with a school's attendance and graduation rates to calculate the school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). In July 2002, then Secretary of Education Roderick Page issued a letter stating:

> Accountability is central to the success of the No Child Left Behind Act: States need to set high standards for improving academic achievement in order to improve the quality of education for all students. Under the NCLBA, each State establishes a definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school. The new definition of AYP is diagnostic in nature, and intended to highlight where schools need improvement and should focus their resources. The statute gives States and local educational agencies significant flexibility in how they direct resources and tailor interventions to the needs of individual schools identified for improvement. Under the NCLBA, schools are held accountable for the achievement of all students, not just average student performance. Ensuring that schools are held accountable for all students' meeting State standards represents the core of the bipartisan Act's

goal of ensuring that no child is left behind. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, para. 2)

Although mathematics is essential to the basic credit system for US secondary schools (the credit system that refers to "Carnegie units"), Adelman (2006) views academic intensity of the overall curriculum as critical in determining a high school student's ability to obtain a Bachelor's degree. Due to the increased intensity of high school curriculum, a freshmen student is more likely complete a freshmen year gaining an applicable amount of college credits and then return for the sophomore year to continue in the same efforts of achievement (Adelman, 2006).

Adelman (2006) also highlighted that fewer than 20 completed college credits by the end of a student's first year of college tends to serve as a weight on the completion of the college degree. With dual enrollment, students are able to officially begin college with credits that apply toward their academic progress while the student's chances of persistence and completion for future academic years are bolstered. Due to the bolstering effect, Adelman (2006) states:

> It is all the more reason to begin the transition process in high school with expanded dual enrollment programs offering true postsecondary course work so that students enter higher education with a minimum of 6 additive credits to help them cross that 20-credit line. Six is good, 9 is better, and 12 is a guarantee of momentum. (p. xx)

Since program inception, accelerated learning opportunities have been reciprocally beneficial to all stakeholders—students and their parents as well as high schools and their college partners. Hale (2001) outlined that the enactment of accelerated learning programs is encouraged, as such programs save students both time and future expense and promotes a rigorous academic environment and curriculum. Dual enrollment

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programs aim to provide program participants with a range of courses (that may not be available at high school setting) and a broader depth of study and also shorten the time needed to fulfill high school diploma requirements and students' later pursuits of a college degree (Hale).

For parents, dual enrollment is as equally beneficial to them as it is to their child(ren). The opportunity for students to complete college courses while in high school not only better prepares an individual for college, but once a student is enrolled in college, dual enrollment credits transfer and equate to fewer subjects for the student to enroll and less time and money to be spent doing otherwise (Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Hoffman, 2005). Such an opportunity lessens the economic burden of the parents as each class the student takes while participating in dual enrollment is equivalent to less college courses needed while a fulltime college student.

For colleges, dual enrollment may serve as a recruitment tool and in turn attracts a population of students that are better prepared to succeed in college. These programs also generate a positive image and brand for the college, and if high school facilities are used, dual enrollment programs may make space available at the college to meet campus demands of full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Further, such programs build better ties between colleges and their communities, assist students with accelerated progression, and provide improved opportunities of college access for program participants, all of which result in higher rates of degree attainment (Adelman, 2006; Ashburn, 2007; Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Hoffman, 2005; Krueger, 2006).

At the high school level, dual enrollment provides a more rigorously enhanced curriculum while capturing and maintaining the attention of participants, fosters a positive and academically rigorous image of the school, promotes student academic achievement, and boosts high school graduation rates as well as increases the rate of students matriculating to college. It further provides greater academic challenges and prepares a student for the rigors of college (Adelman, 2006; Ashburn, 2007; Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Hoffman, 2005; Krueger, 2006).

The reciprocal benefits for secondary and post secondary institutions are heightened as dual enrollment programs build ongoing connections for later opportunities of cross collaborations between institutions, lessen inefficiencies between high school and college curriculum, and improve student transition by lessening anxiety often experienced from high school to college, thereby enriching the student experience and the experiences of the faculty (Clark, 2001; Greenberg, 1991; Krueger, 2006).

Despite the outlined benefits, there remains a demand to balance the desires of increasing program access to a more diverse body of students while safeguarding the standards of academic rigor by only allowing students to participate that are competent for college-level expectations to partake in dual enrollment programs (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004). Studies demonstrate that a more diverse population of students may also gain from dual enrollment programs instead of the majority of "advanced" students being currently served by the program.

Unfortunately, dual enrollment programs often fall prey to the same approaches by which education systems allow certain access to "advanced" and elite scholars while

overlooking "average" and marginalized students without understanding the possible success of both (Greenberg, 1991). McLaren (2003) attempted to better understand the failure of schools to serve a more diverse population of needs, as well as, the need for more critical pedagogy at multiple levels of education. McLaren outlines:

> This kind of logic works as a form of purity rite, a social mechanism that protects the educational system by projecting the myth of minority inferiority onto those who in some way are perceived to threaten or jeopardize the system. Within the capitalist class, many doyens of the establishment believe that in order to accommodate "inferior races" the schools must lower standards, an act which is disastrous for society as a whole. Eventually the myth of the inferiority of minorities and working-class groups becomes part of the social heredity of the transitional capitalist elite. Such a perspective, which carries with it the shame of racism, prevails in many mainstream theories of schooling. (p. 236)

Counter-research demonstrates that "average" and marginalized high school students may also garner success in dual enrollment courses, particularly having the necessary support structures to enable and empower student success (Greenberg, 1991). Kim, Kirby, and Bragg (2006) reported that more than 75% of graduating seniors indicate interest in pursuing higher education, yet more than half will abandon their studies before completion. Dual enrollment programs and college access can be increased without diminishing quality by challenging a broader base of high school students with more rigorous coursework during high school, while simultaneously promoting an understanding of the expectations required at the collegiate level (Hoffman, 2005; Karp et al., 2004; Vargas, 2005).

Studies of individual dual enrollment programs have demonstrated that dual enrollment adds to the educational experience of program participants (Robertson, Chapman, & Gaskin, 2001). These programs promote both college and high school

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collaboration so that program participants are prepared for the academic rigor that is required at the post secondary level (Karp et al., 2004).

Nationally, community colleges remain at the forefront in offering dual enrollment programs. High school and community college dual enrollment partnerships have consistently provided students with the most opportunities to access to college courses (Boswell, 2001). These partnerships are afforded by a community college's ability to have new courses and support programs that are more readily implemented in order to meet the immediate demands of student-specific areas of need.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, the Middle College High School concept has also consistently shown results of positive outcomes credited to dual enrollment. These results vary but include increased student GPA, improved school attendance and graduation rates, increase in college matriculation, and eventual increase in employment rates (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; Lieberman, 2004).

Dual Enrollment Criticisms

Over the years, the diverse formats of accelerated learning programs have each had some level of success. Unfortunately, these programs have also been riddled with the struggle of gaining the trust of community stakeholders on both sides of the issue of education and politics. Those that challenge dual enrollment cite problems with state budgets and the perception of educational funding woes on the heels of the "double-dipping" effect on tax-payers (Boswell, 2001).

Supporters of dual enrollment programs believe that dual enrollment saves taxpayers money while reducing tuition costs for students and families. Some dual

enrollment programs allow students to earn as much as two years of high school and two years of college simultaneously, with only one expense (Greenberg, 1991; Krueger, 2006). An example of the economic savings is found in a dual enrollment program in the state of Washington called the Running Start Program.

The Running Start Program (1997) allows students in the eleventh and twelfth grades to take college courses at no cost at any of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges as well as at three state universities (i.e., Washington State University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University).

The 1990 Washington State Legislature created Running Start as a part of the state's "Learning by Choice" Law, which was specifically designed to expand educational opportunities for high school students. According to the Board of Governors for Higher Education (2006), the program has been credited with reducing the amount of time students spend in school as well as reducing college-related costs for students and their families.

In the 2000–2001 academic year, Running Start had 8,189 full-time equivalent students. During that same academic year, the program saved Washington taxpayers almost $29 million in education-related costs. In addition to the savings afforded to the taxpayers, due to the program not charging tuition, both students and parents saved more than $14 million in tuition costs (Board of Governors for Higher Education, 2006).

Beyond the success of the Running Start program, since the inception of concurrent enrollment, these programs have always been continually criticized. Another basis of dual enrollment program criticism is that many high school faculty believe that these

programs remove the best students from the traditional classroom and cause a vacuum effect among the remaining "average" students. Some college faculty are even concerned with the lessening of academic rigor to meet the needs of high school students.

The misgiving that somehow the quality of the instruction in dual enrollment programs is less than that of traditional college courses perpetuates a relatively ongoing issue connected to dual enrollment. This is due to the perceived lessening of the academic rigor of college courses being taught to high school students in order to accommodate the possible student inefficiencies and inabilities (Krueger, 2006).

Dougan (2005) discussed her distaste with Oregon's legislature for passing a bill endorsing a fast-track college-graduation "scheme"—simply, the bill called for the creation of a state-wide system of dual enrollment. Dougan argued that these programs could unduly burden college faculty by forcing them to teach "younger, less mature, and underprepared students" while fostering a "diminished learning experience for the entire class" (p. B20).

Dougan's (2005) lambasting of the State of Oregon and consequently all supporters of dual enrollment in a periodical (The Chronicle of Higher Education) that is read by a large number of higher education faculty and administrators was only an echo to earlier criticisms by other college educators whose states had moved to state-supported and mandated dual enrollment systems. These earlier criticisms included the idea that dual enrollment courses were simply "watered down" versions of regular college courses, and many college faculty members believed that too many high school students were

enrolling in college courses, and therefore should be receiving the same level of college rigor as a full-time college student (Meyers, 2004).

The most resistance to dual enrollment programs has been found at selective colleges where administrators believe the quality of the course is relevant to place and teacher. Hebert (2001) reflected on the resistance of selective colleges, sharing that:

> The sentiment of many university officials, however, was summed up by Gary Ripple, Lafayette College's director of admissions. "We believe a college-level course should be offered on a college campus, taught by a college professor, with college students in the room. That's the fundamental reason we do not recognize some of these gypsy courses" (Reisberg, 1998, p. A40). Lafayette College is one of a number of private institutions that refuse to accept credits earned in dual enrollment courses taught by high school teachers. (para. 6)

Unfortunately, this belief is often shared by many selective institutions that in turn refuse to accept course credits that were acquired by students formerly enrolled in an accelerated learning program. This is simply the result of poor perception of these programs and no tolerance for such. Much of this is due to the lack of information about program quality as it relates to the quality of dual enrollment programs, which includes teachers meeting specific requirements to teach such courses as well as these teachers' capability to deliver high quality instruction (Boswell, 2000).

Over the years, dual enrollment programs have dispelled many negative beliefs with increasing awareness and proven success. College professors have now experienced that their best classes may be those filled with high school students eager to learn and prove themselves. This sort of experience is more likely than its negative counter, as research has proven that high school students are more likely to mimic the images of their college peers and, in turn, rise to the appropriate level of maturity (McCabe, 2000). Due

to dual enrollment participants stepping up, college professors and college-level peers often do not realize the status of high school students participating in the dual enrollment program.

Previous Studies of Dual Enrollment

Due to No Child Left Behind legislation and other educational reform measures, educational expectations of all students are constantly changing. Despite such changes, the majority of students in dual enrollment programs are considered "advanced" and remain in the upper echelon of student achievement and motivation (Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2005). To this effect, research on the outcomes of such programs remains extremely limited, partially due to the unofficial selection process as it relates to the types of students who have access to dual enrollment programs (Bailey et al., 2002).

Karp et al. (2004) summarized dual enrollment policies for all 50 states. In their report, it was noted that 33 states had policies that addressed student eligibility requirements for participation in dual enrollment. Eleven states' policies mandate that dual enrollment programs can only be targeted towards high schools students that are academically advanced (policy in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, Virginia, Washington) or proficient (policy in Michigan and Texas) (Karp et al., 2004).

In a 2005 report by The National Center for Education Statistics noted that only 5% of all dual enrollment opportunities were specifically geared toward at-risk high school students (Karp et al., 2004; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). Although many states (e.g., New York, Iowa, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Florida, California) are now offering dual

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enrollment programs to a broader academic range of students, including low-income and minority students in urban areas, these State efforts still fail to compare to the overwhelming effects of limited access (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Hugo, 2001).

The State of California recently partnered with The James Irvine Foundation to fund the *Concurrent Course Initiative: Pathways to College and Careers.* The initiative funds eight partnerships between school districts and colleges to strengthen college and career pathways for marginalized students. These partnerships are defined by developing, enhancing, and expanding career-focused dual enrollment opportunities for a target population of low-income youth who are struggling academically or who are within populations historically underrepresented in higher education (Golann & Hughes, 2008).

Research also reveals that graduates of the College Now program in New York City, which provides a modified college curriculum to qualifying high school students based on scores from City University of New York (CUNY) entrance exams, have higher rates of on-time college graduation and need less remediation than other CUNY students (Kleiman, 2001). Another study (Puyear, Thor, & Mills, 2001) shows that 90% of dually enrolled students in the Maricopa Community College district in Arizona graduated from high school as compared to the district's 49% high school graduation rate.

The increasing popularity of dual enrollment has prompted additional studies. These studies on dual enrollment have focused on access, participation requirements, effectiveness, as well as student satisfaction and outcomes (Adelman, 2004; Ashburn, 2007; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Windham & Perkins, 2001).

Adelman (2004) reviewed the use of credit-by-examination (Advanced Placement College Level Examination Program) and college credits acquired by coursework (dual enrollment) before graduation from high school and examined its effects on accelerating student advancement toward degree completion, as well as, lessening time toward acquiring a degree. The study revealed that participants who received at an undergraduate degree and had earned credits by an accelerated learning program did lessen their time-toward acquiring a degree. On the other hand, students who had not earned credits through an accelerated learning program, it took them an average 4.65 years to complete a bachelor's degree while those who earned at least 9 credits prior to high school graduation averaged 4.25 years for degree completion (Adelman, 2004). This study "encourages research that would split out the dual enrollment portion of acceleration credits and whether dual enrollment prepares students for postsecondary coursework" (Adelman, 2004, p. 55).

In addition to those positive results of Adelman (2004), a correlating report by the National Center for Education Statistics discussed accelerated learning programs in high schools including Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and International Baccalaureate (Waits et al., 2005). It was found that some form of dual credit was being offered in 71% of all public high schools in the 2002–2003 school year, thereby allowing 1.2 million students an opportunity to earn college credit. The study also revealed that more than 74% of dual enrollment courses were being taught on high school campuses (Waits et al., 2005).

The National Center for Education Statistics provided data from accelerated learning programs that used information gathered from the Postsecondary Education Quick Information System (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). The results found that 98% of all public community colleges had high school students enrolled in courses for dual credit (Kleiner & Lewis). Further, Kleiner and Lewis noted that was about 680,000 students nationally enrolled in college level classes within an accelerated learning format.

A report issued by the U. S. Department of Education, provided a review of individual state's approaches to support and supervision of accelerated programs are considered aspects by which states may motivate or impede the growth of these programs. The study (Karp et al., 2004) also recommended increasing access to dual enrollment programs for "average" students. The report identified 12 states with no regulation addressing dual enrollment. On the other hand, states addressing dual enrollment have policies ranging from detailed regulations to minimal guidance.

More recently, Karp et al. (2007) found that taking dual enrollment courses was associated with higher rates of high school graduation and enrollment in college, as well as stronger academic performance while in college. According to the report, Floridians who participated in dual enrollment programs while enrolled in high schools had higher GPAs and earned more college credits three years after graduating from high school as compared to their peers who had not enrolled in accelerated learning programs while in high school (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong & Bailey).

Juxtaposed to these positive results is the limited research that exists in examining the effects accelerated learning programs on college-related outcomes for its participants

as well as program cost-effectiveness. Hagedorn (2010) defined that there is a need for additional research that accounted for student background characteristics prior to determining true outcomes for students, but due to the limitation of program access, such a review would be limited at best. As educational reform continues to widen access to certain opportunities, it is believed that reviewing the effects of dual enrollment using a broader sample of students will provide greater insight.

DiPuma (2002) went into more depth than the typically "advanced" student by examining a dual enrollment program that specifically targeted at-risk students that were not considered "college-ready." The program's participants were provided an opportunity to enroll in college courses while still in high school. The study found that despite the previous labels attached to these students, those in this particular program performed similarly to the high school students that were considered college-bound. These "at-risk" students also performed slightly better than the traditional college students that would have been considered within their peer group (first-time and first-term college students) (DiPuma, 2002).

Although dual enrollment programs are mostly provided to "advanced" students who make good grades throughout their high school years, dual enrollment has also been examined for academic performance measures. Outlined within a review of indicators of student success are additional measures, which include: student GPAs, retention rates, and student success in subsequent college coursework.

Peng (2003), using the baseline measures above, compared the first two years of Texas college students attending public four-year universities who had participated in

dual enrollment programs as opposed to those who had not. Peng found that participants in dual enrollment programs had higher GPAs and retention rates overall.

Although results of the studies on accelerated learning programs mentioned above are positive, they are limited in the measurement of success pertaining only to academic performance in relation to dual enrollment programs. To go beyond student success indicators, these programs have been reviewed using elements other than academic performance. Some other studies have used factors such as student motivation, parental concerns, student perceptions, and student satisfaction to determine the viability of dual enrollment programs.

Despite most studies finding that dual enrollment students are highly motivated, McConnaha (1996) found dual enrollment students that had been influenced by others to participate in the program were also more likely to have been adversely influenced by the program in their behavior and social lives. A study by Crooks (1998) also echoed students' feelings through an analysis of parental concerns about dual enrollment. The study revealed that parents thought that participation in the program may have adverse influences on the students, including students being away from high school peers, insufficient advising, and absence from high school events and social activities (Crooks).

Burns and Lewis (2000), using qualitative measures, outlined participants in accelerated learning programs in which courses were taught on the college campus enjoyed more academic freedom as compared to those taking such classes at their high schools. Despite the independence of students taking classes on the college campus, Burns and Lewis found that all program participants were satisfied with their respective

dual enrollment programs and experiences to such an extent that they all desired to take additional courses.

Midcap (2002) studied a population of students participating in a dual enrollment program at a rural community college. As shown in previous studies of dual enrollment programs, he found that participants perceived the program as beneficial. In addition to discussing benefits, participants shared their views on perceived barriers to the program that should be addressed to improve the opportunity and its process (Midcap).

The mixed results revealed by the previously outlined studies of dual enrollment programs, further suggest that academic and social experiences of program participants must remain mutually aligned for the interest of a broader study of students participating in dual enrollment programs. This alignment will ensure that researchers can truly explore the advantages and disadvantages of dual enrollment programs from a broader perspective.

Unfortunately, current research appears to lack the depth necessary to thoroughly view students' social experiences, which may provide much-needed insight. The lack of such studies is recognized by Bailey and Karp (2003) and Kim (2005) along with a few other studies concluding that there is little research on dual enrollment programs and the impact on student outcomes. Methodological flaws have been detected in all previous studies reviewed for the current project, since the majority of students enrolled in these programs were "advanced" students and previous studies have failed to account for differences that may emerge from a more diverse spectrum of participants.

The Student Experience

Due to the variety of dual enrollment program formats (e.g., high school participants enrolled in class at the college, participants taking courses at their high schools, participants taking college courses online), understanding the level of student engagement in the college experience can be difficult. Although academically aligned for students' educational success, high school students enrolled in accelerated learning programs often miss participating in extracurricular activities and events that are a part of the traditional high school experience (Lewis, 2009). Further, as high school students, dual enrollment participants cannot fully engage in the college experience either—at least not until enrolled as full-time college students. These students often feel caught between two different places at one time point in their lives—stuck between high school and college.

Student development researchers have found that a critical component of a student's ability to learn and achieve academic success in higher education is student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Student engagement is deemed important to such an extent that colleges and universities use assessment tools to gauge the levels found on their campuses. Four-year colleges and universities use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to gauge such. In direct relationship, community colleges use the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) to understand student experiences both inside and outside the classroom, thereby, adjusting campus policies and practices to meet the changes and needs of students (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011).

Although student engagement is critical, there are limited studies that focus on the experiences of participants in dual enrollment programs as high school dual enrollment students and later as full-time college students. However, a doctoral study (Lewis, 2009), offered some insight to dual enrollment students' perceptions of student engagement. According to Lewis:

> Students who have participated in dual enrollment and subsequently matriculated to a university were provided an opportunity to give voice to their experiences, which were fairly positive. They also described characteristics that would be desirable of potential dual enrollment students and offered recommendations for students who are considering the dual enrollment experience. The findings of the research resulted in several recommendations for practice to those who make critical decisions in regards to these programs. These recommendations include further consideration of orientation sessions for students who are considering dual enrollment, developing or enhancing quality assurance measures for instruction and student outcomes, and establishing a network for dual enrollment students that will help bridge gaps in their collegiate experience. (p. ix)

Lewis's work serves as catalyst to drive additional study to better understand this phenomenon.

Vincent Tinto, a professor at Syracuse University, developed a model that is often cited as one of the best-defined theories relevant to student retention. Although published in 1975, this theory has remained relevant and has been widely assessed by throughout the academy. The Tinto Model of Student Retention (1975) states that college students have pre-entry attributes that include family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. Those attributes influence goals and commitments that are decided during a student's academic experience. These academic experiences often intermingle with students' goals and commitments, many of which were set prior to the student's enrollment in college. It is this continual interaction that determines whether a student

will persist throughout college or not, as a student's decision to withdraw from college is mostly the result of the extent to which a student connects with the college—academically and socially (Tinto, 1975).

The opportunity of connectedness is critical for dual enrollment students and full-time college students alike, as this opportunity allows students to find ways that they can better integrate both academically and socially, at an institution. Through such integration students, are afforded instances of balance, which later serves as a catalyst in campus engagement.

Tennessee Legislation and Dual Enrollment

The Education Commission of the States (ECOS, 2001) identified state programs for dual enrollment as those with articulation agreements (written agreements between high schools and postsecondary schools through which students may be eligible to receive postsecondary credit while in high school), funding arrangements, and course criteria. The ECOS (2001) sanctioned programs with at least one of the following criteria as comprehensive: participants pay minimal or no fees, have few course restrictions, and have liberal credit-granting policies. On the other hand, limited programs are those in which participants may have to pay fees to include tuition, there are restrictions, or strict criteria are outlined for participation or program access (ECOS, 2001).

The report (ECOS, 2001) found that 21 of the 50 states had policies that could be categorized as "comprehensive." Twenty-six states fell in the limited category, meaning that the states do not cover student tuition and have more restrictions on students earning college credits and obtaining access to the programs.

The report also outlined program incentives, for students, such as the elimination of

fees (including tuition), the ease of transferring class credits, and fewer restrictions to

program participation. Such incentives work to promote greater student access to dual

enrollment programs for students to earn high school and college credit. These incentives

allow more seamless bridging of the gap between high school and college while other

policies (e.g., students being required to pay tuition) often are impediments for (low

income) students who may have considered dual enrollment (ECOS, 2001).

In 2005, the Tennessee Lottery (created in 2003 by the Tennessee General

Assembly and run by Tennessee Education Lottery Corporation) began funding the

Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant (see Walters State Office Distance Education, 2011) to

provide financial assistance to qualified high school students pursuing postsecondary

education at an eligible Tennessee institution. The Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant

program, administered by the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC), allows

eligible students an opportunity to begin earning college credits while enrolled in high

school at minimal to no cost, depending on the college or university.

Over the last few years, Tennessee legislators have developed laws that seem to

effectively address high school dropout rates and accelerated academic instruction, which

includes dual enrollment. In 2007, Tennessee statute T.C.A. § 49-15-101 was enacted to

support public postsecondary institutions and public school systems in establishing

partnerships. The two-fold intent of the law was to establish innovative programs that

would specifically address high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school

before attaining a high school diploma or students who would benefit from accelerated

academic instruction (105th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, P.C. 459, Tennessee Code Annotated, 49-15-101, p. 1).

Although not considered a state system of dual enrollment programs, Tennessee statute T.C.A. § 49-15-101 fulfilled criteria that outlined comprehensive dual enrollment programs as defined in the ECOS's 2001 report. Also due to the double intent of T.C.A. § 49-15-101, the state further defined the two types of accelerated learning programs for Tennessee high school students as (1) dual credit programs and (2) dual enrollment programs. As defined by T.C.A. § 49-15-102:

> Dual credit program means a program of high school courses in which a course qualifies through a curriculum alignment agreement for postsecondary credit towards a postsecondary diploma or certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree; provided, that the student applying for the postsecondary credit satisfies the requirements of the postsecondary institution for receipt of postsecondary credit; and
> Dual enrollment program means a program in which a secondary student is enrolled in a postsecondary course creditable toward high school completion and a postsecondary diploma or certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree. (p. 5)

Further, to ensure that gifted students have access to dual enrollment programs, T.C.A. § 49-6-3111 gives gifted students with a documented IEP and a GPA of 3.2 or higher a limited right to enroll in college and receive high school credit while in grades 9 through 12—unlike previous legislation that enabled only students in grades 11 and 12 to be dually enrolled in high school and college.

Four years after the implementation of the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant, Andy Berke, Tennessee Senator and Secretary of the Senate's education committee requested a demographic review of dual enrollment programs, which was responded to in April 2009 via a memorandum (O'Hara, 2008) from the Research Director for Lottery

Scholarship Analysis. O'Hara provided Berke with a detailed analysis of the

demographics of Tennessee high school students enrolled in dual enrollment programs.

Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 (O'Hara, 2008) present the demographic characteristics of all

students enrolled in state-wide dual enrollment programs during the 2005–2006,

2006–2007, and 2007–2008 academic years, as reported for all Tennessee Board of

Regents universities and community colleges as well as all schools within the University

of Tennessee system. Students that received the dual enrollment grant as well as students

who did not are included in the figures; reporting institutions did not separate these

students when reporting (see Table 1).

Table 1

Tennessee Dual Enrollment Student Totals

	Number of Students		
System	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
TBR community colleges	4,692	7,509	9,756
TBR universities	429	589	938
University of Tennessee schools	872	1,381	1,683
Total	5,993	9,479	12,377

Note. TBR = Tennessee Board of Regents.

As the Tennessee Dual Enrollment Grant program was initiated prior to the start of

the Fall 2005-2006 academic year, program growth over the past three years may be

explained by the legislation's redefining of dual enrollment programs across the state as

comprehensive, with little or no cost to students or parents. The number of students

enrolled in dual enrollment programs grew by 58% from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 and

another 31% from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. Overall growth from the 2005–2006

academic year through the 2007–2008 academic year was from 5,993 students to 12,377

students, which was an increase of 107%.

National data reports show that majority of dually enrolled students were served by

community colleges (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). Tennessee's demographics are aligned

with these reports, as community colleges served 79% of the Tennessee's dually enrolled

students over a three-year period. According to the report, four-year institutions served

the remaining 21%. With only 4 college campuses, the University of Tennessee (with

3,936 students) more than doubled the amount of dually enrolled students as compared to

Tennessee Board of Regents universities (with 1,956 students) with 6 campuses.

In addition to the commonality shared with national statistics as related to teaching

sites for dual enrollment courses, Tennessee also mimics national data pertaining to the

participants of dual enrollment programs. Aligned with national data, students from

Tennessee enrolled in dual enrollment programs were predominately White (Table 2).

Table 2

Tennessee Dual Enrollment Students by Race/Ethnicity

	Percentage of Students		
Race/Ethnicity	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
Caucasian	91%	90%	91%
African American	4%	6%	5%
Other	4%	4%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Caucasian students, on average, comprised 91% of the total number of dually enrolled

students over a 3-year period. African American dually enrolled students accounted for

5%, and students of all other ethnicities (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, Native American) represented only 4% of all dually enrolled students.

In comparison, Caucasian students comprised a larger portion of dual enrollment students than first-time freshmen in Tennessee's public higher education system. Among residents of Tennessee that were first-time freshmen, Caucasian students comprised only 76 percent of the incoming class (O'Hara, 2008).

Again mirroring the national demographics, Tennessee's dually enrolled students are predominately female (Table 3).

Table 3

Tennessee Dual Enrollment Students by Gender

	Percentage of Students		
Gender	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
Female	62%	61%	61%
Male	38%	39%	39%
Total	100%	100%	100%

In addition to this national data from Tennessee's dual enrollment programs, the most conclusive evidence concerns Tennessee's at-risk and marginalized students' lack of access to dual enrollment programs.

As noted in previous studies, advanced students dominate dual enrollment programs, and only small opportunities of access are provided to the at-risk student population (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Bragg & Kim, 2005; Hugo, 2001; Karp et al., 2004). Tennessee's demographics show no differences in these patterns (Table 4).

Table 4

Tennessee Dual Enrollment Students by High School GPA

High School GPA	Percentage of Students		
	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
4.0 or better	23%	23%	21%
3.5–3.99	42%	42%	45%
3.0–3.49	29%	28%	28%
2.5–2.99	4%	5%	5%
2.0–2.49	1%	1%	1%
Below 2.0	1%	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Of all students enrolled in dual enrollment programs throughout Tennessee, more than 93% have a 3.0 GPA or higher, with two-thirds (65%) of those students having a 3.5 or better. Students with 2.00–2.99 comprised only 6% of the total number of dually enrolled students, and those with below a 2.0 are only 1% of the total student population. These statistics further support the report, which noted that only 5% of all dual enrollment opportunities were specifically geared toward at-risk high school students (Karp et al., 2004; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005).

Tennessee Legislation and River Charter Academy

In 2002, Tennessee statute T.C.A. § 49-13-101 was enacted to (1) improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap between high and low achieving students, (2) provide options for parents to meet educational needs of students in high priority schools, (3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, and (4) provide greater decision-making authority to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance. The law was also created with the intent to provide local school systems with the option to work in concert with the state's public

higher education institutions to establish charter school "laboratories of teaching and learning" as a means of fostering educational innovations for implementation statewide (State of Tennessee, 2007). Again, the two-fold intent of this law was to establish innovative educational opportunities that would specifically address at-risk students.

The Urban County Schools district approved River Charter Academy, an entity of the educational arm of a local nonprofit organization, in the spring of 2004 to open in the fall of that year. The school was created to meet the demand for public education as well as the demand for an institution committed to postsecondary preparation. Developed as a college preparatory high school with a liberal arts core and operated as a Center of Excellence for Student Development, River Charter Academy serves Memphis and its community of students. This effort is enhanced by the school's collaboration with St. Aquinas University, established to build a foundation to better prepare its students for transition into postsecondary education (Robinson, 2003).

River Charter Academy, since founded, has sought to effectively build an academically rigorous learning environment that supports all students. Students are given opportunities to access learning resources and academic benefits that may have been previously denied. The denial of critical resources is evident in the number of students district-wide that do not have access to AP courses or have not been properly prepared for AP exams.

During the 2002–03 academic year, the number of students enrolling in AP courses at only four high schools in the district was more than double the number of

students enrolling in such at all 18 high schools—combined—listed on the 2002–03 "High Priority List" (see Tables 5 and 6).

Also during that academic year, the number of female students in the AP program at those same four schools was more than 27% percent higher than the number of male students in these programs. At the 18 high priority schools, the number of female students was over 50% more than the number of male students in the same schools. These numbers may become even more profound when viewing the diversity of these students, pertaining to socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and relevant educational background.

Table 5

Optional Schools and Advanced Placement Offerings

High School	Total	Male	Female	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic
Greenville HS	259	102	157	182	31	6
Crenshaw HS	132	46	86	24	93	1
Richmond HS	95	27	68	78	14	0
Carrison HS	65	24	41	36	21	0
Total	551	199	352	320	159	7
Percentages	100%	36.12%	63.88%	58.08%	28.86%	1.27%

Table 6

High Priority Schools and Advanced Placement Offerings

High School	Total	Male	Female	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic
Bakersville HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eastview HS	29	12	17	0	28	0
Fairview HS	12	3	9	0	12	0
Franklin HS	1	0	1	1	0	0
Harrison HS	32	5	27	3	28	0
Hillview HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Knightsbury HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Madison HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middle College	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middleton HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Richardson HS	26	8	18	3	23	0
Stewartfield HS	12	1	11	0	9	2
Sea Side HS	19	3	16	0	19	0
Tidewell HS	0	0	0	0	0	0
Westview HS	18	4	14	1	16	0
West Point HS	20	4	16	0	19	0
Woodrow Wilson HS	59	15	44	4	45	0
Total	228	55	173	12	199	2
Percentages	100%	24.12%	75.88%	5.26%	87.28%	.88%

A review of the High Priority Schools and Advance Placement Offerings data could lead to the prejudicial assessment often attributed to AP and other programs, including the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)—these programs are only for the elite.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Roderick Paige once said, "We are facing an unrecognized educational crisis in this country" (US Department of Education, 2003). River Charter's sponsoring organization observed such an epidemic and formed the Academy to address it. Further, Paige confirmed that a majority of the students affected by the crisis are disadvantaged or students from low-income families—"effectively the

educational circumstances for these students are not unlike that of a defacto system of

apartheid" (see US Department of Education, 2003, p. 5).

Chapter Summary

The push for accelerated learning and academic engagement has provided an

opportunity for the purposeful use of dual enrollment programs. These programs have

caused critics to challenge the delivery and rigor of dual enrollment courses, but despite

criticism, the programs have been able to dispel most misconceptions; prosper with

evidence of academic success and college persistence with program participants; grow in

popularity; and, enable students to excel academically.

As demonstrated by the recent increase of dual enrollment programs, support for

such programs will surely continue to rise as populations gain more information

regarding the benefits of dual enrollment. Such support is acknowledged by legislation,

funding, and continued program growth. Barriers separating certain populations of

students and dual enrollment programs as well as the lack of information on the

effectiveness of these opportunities present the need for more in-depth research on

individual programs, at different institutions, and in other states. Yet, there is an

immediate need to evaluate the quality of accelerated learning programs—both

individually and collectively—to provide an enriched our understanding of dual

enrollment and student outcomes.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

The current qualitative study was conducted to address the question, "In what ways does participation in a dual enrollment program enhance the college readiness and persistence of marginalized students attending an urban charter school?" The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the initial experiences of the Aquinas Scholars in the dual enrollment program?

2. How does the dual enrollment experience effect the decision of Aquinas Scholars to attend college?

3. What comparisons can Aquinas Scholars make between the college experience they had at River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University as compared to the subsequent college experience as a full-time student?

Minority students were of particular interest in the current study. According to Astin (1993), minority students may come to college saddled with academic deficiencies because many of them may come from disadvantaged backgrounds; therefore, they may not have as access to as many opportunities as other students. In addition to the pre-arrival deficiencies, minority students also face other issues once enrolled in college. Astin (1993) found that due to the lack of connection with other members of the academic and social communities, many minority students often experience difficulty persisting in college. This lack of connection is greater at institutions where their needs and interests do not match those of the institution.

In further justification of the sample of students selected for the current study, Schwartz and Washington (2002), in a study of 229 African American high school students, found that the strongest predictors of college persistence were high school rank and student perception of social integration. Relevant studies have shown that participation in dual enrollment programs assists students attempting to be proactive in efforts to integrate into the academic and social communities of their institutions (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Dual enrollment often solidifies a participating student's interest in earning a Bachelor's degree and also aids them in their determination of an institution's fit—both academically and socially (Kleiman, 2001).

Qualitative Research

Merriam (1998) stated, "in its broadest sense, research is a systematic process by which we know more about *something* than we did before engaging in the process" (p. 4). That *something* in the current study is a dual enrollment program existing between a predominately African American public charter school and a predominately White private (and religious-based) university. This study provides additional knowledge to previously existing studies as this particular program has not been gauged in order to understand how dual enrollment may have had an effect on the program participants' high school experience or served to influence matriculation and persistence relevant to college.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study, along with phenomenological theory to ensure that previous studies were referenced. However, participants' experiences were also used to enhance the understanding of marginalized

and at-risk student access to such programs. The chosen approaches were deemed most appropriate for what I sought to explore—the perceptions of marginalized students participating in a dual enrollment program.

Further, phenomenology is appropriate to apply to this study because it outlines an understanding of the essence of one phenomenon, the academic experience of dual enrollment students, through the perceptions of the participants who experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). As qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and with perception at the base of human behavior, this research path provides the best opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants perspective (Creswell, 2007).

The affirmation for this chosen path is found in qualitative researchers use of data generally represented in the form of words as opposed to numbers (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). It is also stated that qualitative research is legitimate on its own merit, making it unnecessary that it be compared to quantitative research to be respected (Creswell, 2007). This is further explained as Creswell outlines that qualitative study assumes that reality is subjective and multiple and also seen through the participants' perspectives.

Further, it is noted that "qualitative research is appropriate when the research is on little known phenomena or innovative systems and on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). The current study allowed me to explore the phenomena of the dual enrollment program selected for the current study and its respective participants. The current study's findings may also

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provide some insight to aid the understanding of similar programs as well as the

development of future accelerated learning opportunities.

Most researchers engaging in qualitative study are intrigued by complex social

interactions as well as the effects that such interactions have on the participants being

studied; therefore, participants should be examined in their natural environment

(Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Rather than looking forward to future outcomes, a

qualitative researcher must give reverence to the past to make participants feel more

comfortable. So throughout the study, participants shared their own personal perspectives

in surroundings as close to their own environments as possible. This added to the

robustness of the data and allowed for less interjection from obstacles that may have been

present in other scenarios.

The current examination of college matriculation and academic persistence as well

as the social engagement of former student participants in the dual enrollment program

between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University provides an understanding

that is perfectly aligned with qualitative research. According to Marshall and Rossman

(2006), qualitative research aids the development of an in-depth understanding of rarely

reviewed phenomena.

This study also provides the detailed perspectives of student participants to provide

broader viewpoints relative to student matriculation in institutions of higher education.

Due to the detail and personal nature of the previously outlined objectives and the listed

inquiries, it was imperative to gain the individual and collective perspectives of the

participants. It was further believed that the best approach to gauging such a perspective is found using qualitative methodologies.

Research Setting

Marginalized students, more specifically, African American students, have been largely overlooked in dual enrollment program opportunities and associated research. This is the primary reason that the research site selected for this study was chosen. In addition, the students that do have access to dual enrollment programs often attend dual enrollment classes on high school campuses or by attending class at a neighboring community college. The site (the River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University dual enrollment program) chosen for the current study selects students from a list of marginalized students at a local public charter school and enrolls them in a dual enrollment course at a predominately White private, religious-based school.

The school district. Urban County Schools is in an urban area located in the southeastern United States. The district is the 23rd largest district in the nation, with approximately 105,000 students in grades K–12. The student body is 86% African American, 8% Caucasian, and the remaining 6% of other races or nationalities, including Hispanic. More than 80% of the students enrolled in grades K–12 receive free or reduced lunch.

River Charter Academy: The secondary institution. River Charter Academy is a charter school in the Urban County Schools district, located in the southern portion of the city in which crime rates, poverty rates, and infant mortality rates are higher and the most schools on the state's "high priority" list for failing schools are contained. River

Charter Academy has 320 students in grades 9–12, with 80 students per grade to control

for class sizes that do not exceed 24 students. The student body is 98% African American

and 2% other races or nationalities, including Hispanic. More than 70% of the students

enrolled received free or reduced lunch.

St. Aquinas University: The postsecondary institution. St. Aquinas University

is a private Catholic university located in the middle of the city. The institution is less

than a quarter-mile from the offices of Urban County Schools and less than 5 miles from

River Charter Academy. St. Aquinas University is the oldest degree-granting institution

in the city; therefore, it has a rich history connected with the education of the citizenry.

St. Aquinas University has a total enrollment of 1,779. The student body is 51%

Caucasian, 33% African American, 5% Asian, 2% are Hispanic, and another 2%

classified as "international." This diverse student population hails from more than 28

states and 14 countries. In addition, more than 74% of the students receive some form of

need-based financial aid.

Participant Selection and Identification

Those selected for the current study participated in the dual enrollment program

between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University during the 2007–2008,

2008–2009, and 2009–2010 academic terms. These students were invited to participate in

a focus group that session with dates set according to the class year of participation. The

total number of students eligible to participate in the study was 36, and all of them were

invited to participate in the study.

To reach the program participants, I mailed letters, used Facebook (an online social networking Web site), and sent electronic mail messages (e-mails); I also made personal phone calls to these 36 former students. The goal was to have up to 50% of the population to participate in the study, and no more than 6 respondents (with at least 2 from each cohort) were selected from the survey to later participate in the focus groups. Of the survey and focus group participants, my goal was to have at least one respondent from each academic cohort participate in interviews.

Twenty-one former students completed the online survey. Of these 21 participants, the cohorts were represented as follows: 6 participants from the 2007–08 academic term, 10 participants from the 2008–2009 academic term, and 5 participants from the 2009–10 academic term. The participants were enrolled various four-year postsecondary institutions located in multiple states (i.e., Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, New York, Tennessee, Texas). Additional demographic information regarding the participants is outlined in Table 7.

Table 7

Demographic Characteristics of Open-Ended Survey Participants

| | Academic Term | | |
Demographic Variable	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
Male	14%	10%	20%
Female	86%	90%	80%
African American	100%	90%	100%
Enrolled in a 4-year college after graduation	100%	100%	100%
Continuously enrolled in college	86%	100%	100%

In conducting the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, participants were contacted after completing the open-ended survey, according to their particular cohort. With each cohort having at least 5 participants, the goal of having 6 respondents (with at least two represented per cohort) to participate in the focus groups was easily met. Demographic information about focus group participants is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

| | Academic Term | | |
Demographic Variable	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
Male	50%	0%	100%
Female	50%	100%	0%
Enrolled in college	100%	100%	100%

With multiple outreach measures and the number of respondents, my goal of having 50% of the focus group participants to then participate in the interview sessions was also easily met. Demographic information regarding interviewees is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

| | Academic Term | | |
Demographic Variable	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
Male	100%	0%	100%
Female	0%	100%	0%
Enrolled in college	100%	100%	100%

Participation in this study was voluntary. Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Memphis (see Appendix

A). In addition, each participant signed a consent form that outlined his or her right to withdraw from the study. After participant selection, participants were identified only by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and ensure participants that their responses, candor, and interaction would not be erroneously or maliciously shared.

Data Collection Procedures

To reduce the risk of systematic biases or limitations, multiple methods of data collection were used (Maxwell, 2005). The data sources included an open-ended survey, field notes, and recordings and transcripts from interviews and focus group sessions. The analysis of information from these data sources aided the identification of significant patterns or themes, as related to the research questions. Merriam (1998) described qualitative research as an "umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). The use of qualitative inquiry allowed me to thoroughly understand, without interference, both the subject and the participants through the voices of these former students. The methods of data collection used in this study (i.e., document review [high school portfolios and an open-ended survey], focus group sessions [3 focus groups assigned to program-year cohorts], and one-on-one interviews) guaranteed triangulation of the data.

Data collection methods included an open-ended survey and semistructured focus groups (lasting 45 to 60 minutes) and one-on-one interviews (lasting 30 to 45 minutes) that were conducted and recorded on a conference calling system at a time that was predetermined and shared with all participants. Surveys were completed online and all

focus group sessions and interviews were recorded (and later transcribed) with an online audio recording system; all facets of the process were repeated for all participants. After data collection, I developed a composite description of the essence of the individual and collective perspectives of the participants. Beyond the use of the survey data, the composite perspective was developed by the review of the transcripts from the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews that were read and continuously reviewed as recurrent themes were noted through a previously outlined three-phased coding process.

Document analysis. Analyzing documents and collecting historical data provided insight and understanding of the participant's personal perspectives and the possible themes that may have arisen during the interviews or focus group sessions.

Document analysis, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), is an "objective and neutral way of obtaining additional information that may serve to be meaningful in the context of the study" (p. 11). Such an analysis assists in establishing a baseline or background prior to gleaning information from focus group sessions and interviews. This is a critical step in research, as such analysis allows the researcher to fill in gaps in possibly unexamined areas, as well as to review questions and gain further context of the participant's perspectives (Marshall & Rossman).

Prior to conducting the focus group sessions and interviews, I used an open-ended survey to determine participants' perspectives. This survey provided me with insight that helped me gauge "the individual" as opposed to "the group." This type of individual perspective is critical in qualitative research.

Participant's high school senior portfolios, providing information about participant's projected goals as related to college and career opportunities, were also used in the document review process. Portfolios were reviewed once again during the interview phase. I discussed the portfolios with each participant, inviting each of them to explain in more depth and share their perspectives.

Focus group sessions. The primary method of data was the use of focus group sessions (along with subsequent interviews). Morgan and Krueger (1993) stated focus groups were defined by the existence of group interaction, which is initiated in response to the questions posed in the researcher's inquiry. In the current study, focus group sessions enabled participants to interact with one another, which allowed more conversation and information sharing and made the process a more enriching experience. Morgan and Krueger (1993) also found that focus groups are an effective data collection tool if any of the following conditions are present: (a) there is a difference of power between participants and decision makers, (b) there is a gap between professionals and their target audiences, (c) the research involves complex behavior and motivations, (d) there is a desire to learn more about the degree of consensus on a topic, or (e) there is a need to employ a friendly research method that is respectful and not condescending to the target audience is needed (p. 15-19).

For the focus group sessions, participants were divided into academic class cohorts according to their year of enrollment (i.e., 2007–2008, 2008–2009, or 2009–2010). This division allowed me to ascertain if responses were program-appropriate, individually significant, or germane to the year in which the participant was in the program.

Yovovich (1991) stated, "interaction among respondents stimulates new ideas and thoughts, yet group pressure challenges participants to be more realistic" (p. 43). Due to the rich data derived from the personal perspectives and considering that there is no previous study of this phenomenon, focus groups helped deepen the understanding in the current study. These cohorts eased in-depth discussion and helped with the possible diversity of experiences or themes that may have arisen between groups.

There were three focus group sessions, grouped according to academic terms, with two participants per group. Prequalified questions were used to encourage engaged discussion and expression among group participants. Using open-ended questions helped participants recall specific aspects of the dual enrollment program. In addition to question type, location and environment were considered, as these things may affect the quality of an experience. Comfortable location and environment ensured a more robust exchange, all contributing to more enriching data collected and results. All of the focus group sessions occurred in a comfortable, familiar environment to motivate participants to be more forthcoming with their perspectives—both individual and collective.

Before the focus group sessions, participants received a correspondence regarding the location and time of the session. During the sessions, a virtual audio recording system was used to capture the dialogue, and after each session, conversations were transcribed. A copy of the transcript from the respective focus group session was sent to each participant to ensure that their responses were represented accurately.

Due to the semi-structured format of this process, hand-written notes were also taken during the focus group sessions to provide a baseline for issues that may arise and

require further investigation. Each focus group session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Albrecht, Johnson, and Walther (1993) argued that focus groups, often conducted in environments where interpersonal communication and social influence are always present, frequently have a life of their own. This may have further enriched the data collected, especially since participants were allowed to call in from their respective college campuses.

Interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2006) reported that qualitative research relies heavily on the use of in-depth interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2005) go on to describe interviews as a "conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion" (p. 4). I used one-on-one interviews to ascertain the perspectives of individual participants to accurately represent his or her views on experiences with the dual enrollment program and subsequent influences.

Merriam (2002) stated the semi-structured interview contains a mix of structured questions that are usually outlined beforehand but do not generally proceed in the same order for each interview. Due to the desire to build trust between the participants and myself, I followed a semi-structured interview format that allowed the participant to lead the discussion. Although both the focus group sessions and interviews followed a semi-structured format, the interviews offered a better understanding, which may have been mistakenly overlooked or overshadowed during the focus group session. Interview times were scheduled at least an hour apart to ensure the integrity of the study, by not allowing other participants to be able to identify participants beyond their respective cohort.

Multiple interviews were conducted in the current study; this is often referred to as a phenomenologically informed interview sequence. Seidman (1998) further describes this process as one in which the researcher conducts three separate interviews (per participant) over a 2 to 3 week period.

I used a virtual audio recording system to ensure the participant's perspective was captured accurately. After the interviews, recordings were transcribed and a copy of the transcript was sent to each participant to ensure that their perspectives were represented accurately. Hand-written notes were also taken during the interviews in order to provide a baseline for continued questioning that may arise. Interviews were conducted in the same location as the focus group sessions and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Creswell (1998) reported that qualitative research is an ongoing process of developing a detailed illustration of a participant's point of view and from that creating a linguistic portrait. This portrait is created from a collection of interviews, field notes, artifacts, and intrinsic examination and data analysis. The perspectives of individual participants aided efforts to "paint a portrait" in the current study.

The 3 Cs (coding, categorizing, and concepts), as defined by Lichtman (2006), were employed during the data analysis process and will be used throughout this chapter to better define the process that I undertook for this study. Using an inductive method, data analysis process began immediately upon receiving survey data and continued throughout the focus group sessions and interviews. Inductive analysis increased the possibility of moving from generalizations to individual occurrences. Using a phenomenological

epistemological approach, I attempted to find meaning in data that underwent intense review at the coding, categorization, and definition of concepts stages. This helped identify recurrent themes that would aid the development.

Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Merriam, 1998) first introduced grounded theory in 1967 as a research methodology that derives meaning from data and in turn develops an emerging theory. Merriam (1998) also describes the resulting theory as "substantive and having usefulness to practice" (p. 17). This description is accurately aimed at this study, as I focused on generating a new theory about the ways in which dual enrollment influences the matriculation, persistence, and overall college experience of marginalized students attending an urban public charter school.

Merriam (1998) further describes the first step in data analysis as "having a conversation" with the data. Such a conversation for me included the review of historical data while simultaneously making notes. It was critical to keep hand-written notes throughout the process, especially when reviewing survey data and later during the focus group sessions and interviews. Concluding this "conversation," survey data was labeled by coding it into specific categories developed from the research questions. This process also enhanced the observational data that was gathered during the interviews.

Since data should be developed as it is initiated and continuously analyzed, upon collecting the data, the constant comparative method was used for date coding. Coding, in qualitative research, allows the researcher to better identify recurrent themes, patterns, and trends that aid in data analysis. For this study, three levels of coding were employed: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open Coding. Once the data was collected, open coding was the first step in data analysis. To ensure validity of the study, codes were not predetermined but occurred as data was analyzed. Open coding provided me with the opportunity to review, name, and categorize phenomena according to general and specific characteristics, as defined by category. Survey and interview data was analyzed for key phrases and recurrent themes that may provide insight to the participants' perspective of the dual enrollment program and its influences on their matriculation, persistence, and full-time college experience.

Using categories as guides, I then constructed the range along which general properties within each category may vary and defined dimensions within these categories. As interviews were conducted, transcribed, and reviewed, data was dissected using previous codes or by adding new ones until all interviews were coded and categorized.

Also during open coding, high school portfolios were analyzed and intently reviewed to appropriately compare similarities and differences between data. Recurrent concepts were expanded upon to offer alternatives in organizing data and understanding perspectives as action codes were developed.

To further understand coding and categorizing and to ensure the ease of data management for ongoing manipulation, I grouped data that was conceptually similar. I was better able to discriminate and differentiate between all developed categories when the data was thoroughly examined for differences and similarities.

Axial Coding. Through axial coding, I reassembled data that had been categorized during open coding. In this stage, dual enrollment influence and experience categories were assigned to subcategories to provide better understanding. Although a category may have been denoted for positive influences relevant to dual enrollment and college matriculation, I also prepared for other categories, such as negative influences relevant dual enrollment and college persistence. Emerging subcategories were utilized to answer questions relevant to the phenomena and further assist in addressing the research questions and the outlined study objectives.

Finally, I used categories to ensure that the study was organized through relational statements. The use of relational statements of how these categories were connected allowed me to define how primary categories and subcategories were related.

Selective Coding. Although the last step in data analysis, selective coding, which integrates and refines the work of the previous steps, it is the most important step. At this stage, I organized categories around the central explanatory concepts that represented the main themes that surfaced during data analysis.

The coding process was integrated by making use of techniques to include relating the participant's perspective to central elements; use of highlights to connect themes, categories, and subpoints to core elements or ideas; and reviewing hand-written notes that outlined points of interest identified throughout data collection and analysis. I also ensured delineation of key concepts by reviewing and refining the analysis where necessary. After delineation, I reproached poorly defined categories and also integrated and combined other categories as appropriate to ensure that participants' perspectives

were accurately accounted for. This attention to detail allowed me to contrast, confirm, and capitalize the conceptual framework in comparison to the data collected throughout the study.

Finally, I provided individual summaries to the study participants. This extended the opportunity for participants to correct possible inaccuracies and allowed me to incorporate the corrections of the participants' reactions or responses, thereby enabling me to ask additional questions that may be appropriate or necessary for the study.

Merriam (1998) stated that the overall purpose of data analysis is to seek patterns within data. By abiding by such a purpose and employing three levels of coding (i.e., open coding, axial coding, selective coding), I was able to arrange the codes and categories in relation to each other to help construct a grounded theory. Ultimately, my goal of data analysis was to generate a theory about how dual enrollment influences the matriculation, persistence, and the college experience of marginalized students attending an urban public charter school.

Subjectivity Statement

It is important to identify my personal connection or subjectivity in the context of this study. Peshkin (1988) stated that though "subjectivity is invariably present in their research, they are not necessarily conscious of it" (p. 17). Identifying my subjectivity serves as a point of disclosure and clarity in the area of accountability in efforts to provide participants, institutions, and readers a broader understanding of the role of the researcher when viewing this study's findings and subsequent implications. The site of the current study has been my place of employment for more than seven years, in which I

have shared my educational insight with professionals, parents, and scholars to aid school reform efforts. I am also a founder of the institution referred to as River Charter Academy. Now, as a doctoral candidate of the Urban Education Program at the University of Memphis, I no longer see myself merely as a founder, but I am now an agent of educational reform. Due to my desire to provide the students of River Charter Academy with the best educational opportunities and social experiences, I chose to take an investigative look at this particular institution and at the program that I have created. I constantly challenge myself to correct and redefine the structure of the institution and myself—however critical such a reformation may be.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are an issue in all research, especially in qualitative research, due to the connection between the researcher and the participants. Halai (2006) found, after surveying online sites of major research bodies and universities, that there were five ethical principles that were common within institutions: (a) informed and voluntary consent, (b) confidentiality of information shared, (c) anonymity of research participants, (d) beneficence or no harm to participants, and (e) reciprocity.

In addition to the IRB approval, I sought the approval of the campus president and the governing body of River Charter Academy prior to initiating any contact with the participants. Once proper approval was obtained, I began outreach efforts to contact the participants. Parental consent was not necessary because all possible participants were over the age of 18 years, but each participant was asked to acknowledge or sign a consent form and a clause stipulating that their participation in the study was voluntary.

All information collected for purposes of the study was kept, stored, and maintained only by me, and all associated computer files were password-protected. All hand-written notes, audiotapes, videotapes, and transcripts were locked away; the key was kept in my possession at all times still. Security of these items was critical to this study to maintain a standard of ethics during and after the research of this phenomenon.

Benefits and Risks

Although benefits and potential risks can be difficult to identify prior to conducting a study, both may be a part of the research process; therefore, rapport between the researcher (myself) and the participants was significant in the early stages. Further, in efforts to maintain comfort and confidentiality, data analysis procedures were discussed with participants. I ensured that all outlined procedures were shared with participants to effectively address ethical issues in research, including benefits and risks.

Chapter Summary

As previously stated, methodology is one of the most critical components of a study. Due to the importance of this element, this chapter explained how I gathered data and found meaning for this study.

This chapter provided an introduction; outlined a narrative for the institutional settings; defined the standards that were used for choosing the study's subjects; detailed the demographic characteristics of the participants; and, provided an outline of the procedures for gathering and analyzing the data.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

The current study examines the effects of a dual enrollment program on college readiness and persistence of marginalized students attending an urban charter school. The research uncovered and analyzed specific experiences from the perceptions of students enrolled in the Aquinas Scholars program, a dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University. A phenomenological research method was employed in the current study to aid in theory construction, as the study was directed at a singularity. Such an alignment was further defined as the researcher undertook multiple measures to understand the experience through the perceptions of the participants who experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The research questions that guided the current study were:

1. What were the initial experiences of the Aquinas Scholars in the dual enrollment program?

2. How does the dual enrollment experience effect the decision of Aquinas Scholars to attend college?

3. What comparisons can Aquinas Scholars make between the college experience they had at River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University as compared to the subsequent college experience as a full-time student?

The depth of the participants' experiences provided data that contributed to a richer understanding of this phenomenon. After data disaggregation, four well-structured themes emerged: (1) isolation, (2) college-going, (3) prepared, and (4) balance. These

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themes will be thoroughly explained via the participants' perspectives to comprehensibly

elucidate the effects of the Aquinas Scholars program on these students' college readiness

and persistence. This chapter also presents a brief collective description of all participants

(to include those from the open-ended survey) and individual descriptions of those

participating in the focus group sessions and the interviews.

Participant Descriptions

Participants in this study included 21 former students of an urban charter school.

During their respective senior years, each former student had participated in the Aquinas

Scholars dual enrollment program. The participants were enrolled in the program over a

3-year period, and more than 95% of them have been consistently enrolled in college

since graduating from high school. Currently, all of the participants are in college, with

classifications ranging from sophomore to senior. Of the 21 participants that completed

the online open-ended survey, 7 were randomly selected to participate in the focus group

session and interviews. Each of these participants was assigned a pseudonymous name,

and all of the student participants are African American.

Two of the participants, Beverly and Cedric, are 2008 graduates of River Charter

Academy. Beverly is currently a senior at a predominantly white public university

located in the southern region of the United States. The university has a student body of

over 23,000 students. Beverly was one of the first students to participate in the Aquinas

Scholars dual enrollment program. Cedric was also one of the first students to participate

in the program. He currently attends a private, predominantly white premier liberal arts

college located in New England. The college has a student body of less than 2,000 and an endowment of more than $1 billion. Cedric is a senior in college as well.

Danielle, Latonya, and Rachel are 2009 graduates of River Charter Academy and were all juniors in college during the time of study. Danielle currently attends a private, predominantly white coeducational college located in the northeastern United States. The college has both undergraduate and graduate academic programs and serves over 6,500 students. Latonya currently attends a predominantly white metropolitan university with a student body of over 10,000. The final participant from this cohort, Rachel, currently attends a predominantly white, public university located in the southern United States. The university has a student body of over 25,000.

The final two participants, James and Yvette, are 2010 graduates of River Charter Academy and were sophomores in college during the time of study. James currently attends an art-based institution located in the southern United States. The art institute offers undergraduate and graduate degrees and has over 45 schools throughout the nation. James was a member of the third class of seniors to participate in the dual enrollment program; however, his older brother was a member of the first class of students to participate in the program. Yvette currently attends a private, predominantly white, single-sex liberal arts college located in the southern United States that grants undergraduate degrees to more than 900 students located in the south. She transferred, on scholarship, to the college that she currently attends, which is located within 20 miles of the first institution she attended. The first college she enrolled in was a private,

historically African American, single-sex liberal arts college with a student body of more than 2,100.

Synthesis of Findings and Structural Themes

It was assumed, from reviewing the literature that most of the students from the Aquinas Scholars program participating in the current study would progress through college just as they had successfully progressed through the dual enrollment program. Using a phenomenological case study approach, I sought to deepen the understanding of the effects of such programs on the participating students. The diverse voices of the participants revealed four themes that defined the students' academic experiences while in the dual enrollment program and later on as full-time college students (i.e., isolation, invited but not integrated; college-going, college: the choice is clear; prepared, rigor is relative; and balance, I now know me better. Despite the participants' differences, each experienced *isolation* to some extent while in the program, but the program aided them in their *college going*. Also, all participants expressed that their dual enrollment experiences helped *prepare* them for college and aided in their understanding that *balance* was needed in the academic and social lives of full-time college students. Yet, each participant's response to these experiences was slightly different.

The participants in the study openly shared their academic experiences. By their enthusiasm, participants understood that specific factors supported their ability to complete the dual enrollment program, subsequently enroll in college, and consequently maintain enrollment. Although the participants may be considered "marginalized students," coming from an urban public charter school, most of their experiences

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mirrored the positive observations and findings outlined in previous dual enrollment studies, despite the minimal studies examining at-risk student populations.

Study participants were also able to identify with other less favorable aspects of dual enrollment programs. Participants were encouraged to "bare all" and share experiences that they believed could have been more positive or could have adversely affected their academic development. Generally, participants had positive experiences with the program; in fact, many of them believed the program was beneficial but thought it was necessary to share both the positive and negative aspects. These collective perspectives holistically contributed to the development of the unified themes that guide the broader understanding of the dual enrollment program's impact.

Theme 1: Isolation (Invited but not Integrated). The theme of isolation refers to the seclusion participants felt as they maneuvered through the dual enrollment program. After discovery, data review further confirmed that four dimensions of the participants' academic experience contributed to their sense of isolation: (1) the lack of an orientation to college, (2) the limited opportunity to interact with college students, (3) the restricted time spent on the college campus, and (4) the fact that only two courses were offered to dual enrollment students.

The lack of an orientation to college. Participants agreed that the absence of a college orientation contributed to their lack of knowledge about the expectations in college classes or ways to prepare for college as high school students. They discussed the difficulty of having to trade their high school perspectives for those of college students with real college responsibilities. Danielle stated:

After the first week, I felt more comfortable than let's say within the first two to three days because I was still doing everything in high school mode, but after that first week I was able to actually tune into myself and realize that this is really preparing me for college, and I'm not just in high school.

Many other participants who maneuvered through the college landscape as dual enrollment students felt they were not warned or adequately prepared for what it meant to be high school students participating in the dual enrollment program. This feeling of uneasiness was more noticeable among participants from the 2007–2008 cohort.

Cedric, a participant from the first cohort, said, "I would say, walking into it, I really didn't know what to expect." As he remembered:

It's kind of like, I'm going away from school, like high school and I'm going to another, to a whole new realm that I've never experienced before and it was awesome, it was. I can say it was very humbling because you got to learn the ropes of how college works and how the course load is and what's required of you and you don't really get that foundation sometimes at school, like some people can grasp it and some others don't, like they don't really understand, but once you get into that setting and you get to learning and processing and knowing, then it's all right, this is how it is, this is how it's going to be. You got to get used to this, got to get adjusted.

Beverly, who was also from the first cohort, acknowledged Cedric's points. She stated:

What I expected was a higher level of learning and to be surrounded by people who were higher educated than I was and to learn something more than what I had experienced just in high school. There was not so much freedom. We got to walk around campus and see what that was about or whatever, it was just cool to know that we were in an actual college class, and we were only high school students. So I expected to be challenged, which I was. And you know it was nerve wrecking as far as the beginning goes, but you know after the first couple of days of us going and actually getting a feel for it, it was a breeze from there. After that first few days we knew what was expected of us, and we did that.

Beyond the few first few days, Beverly also talked about the transition that was necessary throughout the program, as there were no initial expectations outlined. Beverly said:

As far as learning and thinking outside of the box and grasping a higher level of learning, it was so much different because we had to write papers and the papers were longer, and you had to go into further detail and it was just really abstract as compared to high school. It was outside of the box for us, for all us. It was something that I personally wasn't used to.

Many of the students enrolling in the program after the 2007−2008 cohort knew what to expect and were even given an assessment prior to program admission. Yet, all of them voiced concern about the lack of detail given to them by River Charter Academy or St. Aquinas University explicating the purpose of the dual enrollment program and the higher expectations that would be placed upon them. Danielle said:

With the dual enrollment program, initially I wanted to do it because I saw it as just another thing to do. I was a part of the second graduating class at our high school, I felt like that was a precedent set by the class before us, and I really didn't go into the program having expectations because of the course, being English as we were told by the previous participants.

Just as Danielle gained her own understanding, the lack of structured orientation led other participants to also depend upon the experiences of former program participants.

James, who had a brother to participate in the program two years before him, constructed his understanding from his brother's experience. James said, "My older brother went and he told me a lot of great things about it." Although his brother's experience was positive, James said that it did not help him understand any actual class expectations, other than the fact that he would be taking college-level English courses.

Yvette was prepared for the dual enrollment program in a similar manner, getting her information from a family member who had previously participated. Yvette learned about the program through her cousin's experience rather than by the school's communication. She said:

I thought it would be nice to have the off-campus college experience while in

twelfth grade, out-of-school experience and getting credits for college while in high school. Those were the perks. I knew I was gonna do it because I've been thinking about it since I first started [at my high school] in the ninth grade. I knew about it because of [my cousin]. When I was a freshman, she was in eleventh grade, and when she started the program in twelfth grade, she told me about all the things she was doing, and she recommended I try to do it when I got in twelfth grade, so I thought it would be good.

Also, despite the initial anxiety or expectations outlined by previous participants, the participants felt that the dual enrollment faculty were very much like their high school teachers—easy to connect with—therefore making it easier to make the transition and understand the expectations. Participants reported that classroom assignments were relatively understandable and the faculty made it easy to adjust to college coursework expectations. Latonya said, "St. Aquinas was real because the teachers there seem to really care." She expressed that the teachers were similar to her high school teachers, were willing to help the dual enrollment students understand assignments, and worked with them through the transition. James described his transition by saying:

> We got to sit down and have one-on-ones, just like we did in our high school. When we had problems in class, we always went to our teachers after class. They were open to letting us talk to them, come to their offices, or actually, there were a few times where we would go to the library, because there was a room where he would reserve. He would use that room to let us come down and ask him about different assignments and he would help us out with them.

Other participants shared similar expressions of support from the dual enrollment faculty in easing their academic transitions. Unfortunately, the favorable close-knit relationships with the faculty made the participants more aware of their isolation due to there being only few (and in some cases no) full-time college students in their classes.

The limited opportunity to interact with college students. Struggling to find their place on the college campus, many participants tried to establish connections with other

students, especially those in college. Despite the participants' expectations, their classes

were absent of college students, as Rachel said:

> It was only us, so it was like we were still in high school. No one else took the class with us except the first semester. It was one guy, but other than that it was just all of us.

Many program participants saw only their peers from River Charter Academy. Latonya

stated, "It was really just us in the class, so it just felt like being in our high school,

really."

Unlike Latonya, Cedric had an opportunity to be in class with a few college

students, which he believed enriched the experience, but he stated that he wished more

college students were encouraged to enroll in the classes with the dual enrollment

students. He said, "Being in an environment with other college kids actually helps to

uplift the classroom, so to speak, instead of it just being just us high school kids."

Although a different experience, Danielle echoed Cedric's thoughts and said:

> I felt like it would have been a better experience if we were allowed to engage in classes with other college students, then we could actually get the essence of the campus. Get the essence of actually being on a college campus and taking those classes actively instead of basically being transferred from one campus to the next. Because if that was the case, we could have just taken the course on our high school campus.

Others that were given the chance to interact with college students relished at the

opportunity. James explained that the dual enrollment participants were always anxious

to interact with college students, so when such opportunities presented themselves he

took full advantage. He said:

> The first day we got there, we were outside the classroom standing in the line, and I introduced myself to each and every one in the class and I talked to everyone, even the students that weren't in our program or whatnot. I talked to them. I got to know everybody and the first day, the teacher asked me to introduce everybody

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since he walked up and saw me talking to everybody. And I thought that was a pretty cool experience.

However, interaction outside the classroom between participants and other college students, despite participants' attempts, was limited. The lack of outside-of-class interaction with and access to the other college students further exacerbated the feelings of isolation for program participants.

Unlike earlier participants interviewed, Yvette did not feel isolated because there were no college students in her class. She expressed that her feelings of separation stemmed from her physical appearance. Laughing, Yvette said, "I was just out of place with my skirt, my uniform skirt I had to wear at my high school." Yvette's feelings of isolation were further lessened because other students that had attended River Charter Academy now attended St. Aquinas. She said:

> I felt like the freshman there at St. Aquinas, while I was in the 12th grade. They looked at us like we were in high school still, but I didn't feel like I was isolated because I still hung out with my peers and River Charter alumni that attended St. Aquinas.

The restricted time spent on the college campus. Participants explained that their socialization experiences were limited, as they had limited time on the college campus, which meant few opportunities to explore the campus or become familiar with true college culture. Cedric conveyed that only on a few occasions after class did he have an opportunity to socialize with a full-time college student from his class. Cedric also expressed his wishes to have had more opportunities to interact with college students because he believes that more lasting relationships could have been built. He stated that he has maintained contact with the one college student that he built a "semi-relationship" with. Cedric said, "He actually goes to the University of Mississippi. He transferred after

that semester, so we keep in contact frequently."

In addition to the limited access to full-time college students, some participants

expressed that the restricted time on campus furthered their isolation. Latonya said:

> The minus was we didn't really get to meet anyone new, in case we were actually going to St. Aquinas after graduating. We were not allowed to find people that we could group with for future references, the limited time on campus made that impossible to happen.

The absence of interaction between program participants and college students intensified

the separation felt by participants. Most participants reported that involvement in the

larger campus community was pretty much nonexistent unless you were connected with a

full-time college student.

Due to his unabashed approach to meeting people and the fact that there were

college students enrolled in his class, James had an opportunity to experience what most

participants had not. Reflecting on his time there, James said:

> After class, we talked and two of us went to go and have lunch together. A few of us went to go and play basketball and do things like that and they were very open to us being in their class and they were very helpful also.

James agreed with fellow participants that he had to *forge* such relationships on his own,

but his high school class schedule allowed him to stay on the college campus longer than

other participants.

Although Rachel agreed that the overall experience was great, she felt there were

some points that could have been better. Rachel stated:

> I would have been more on campus if I knew other people there. I didn't know anyone, so I think if more time were allotted, I would have met new people and things like that. If the classroom had real college students in there, we would have got to talking and I would have went on campus more.

Not all participants felt isolated by the separation of the dual enrollment students

and other college students. Beverly acknowledged the isolation, but she further stated:

> Well it wasn't many college students in the classroom, but I didn't see that as being a problem. I knew I wasn't there to socialize and to be like, 'Hey what's up,' to the college students or whatever. Because when we went into the computer lab, we were surrounded by plenty of full-time college students. But it wasn't like everyone was talking or trying to be friendly.

Due to her commitment to academic success (as outlined in her senior portfolio), Beverly expressed that her top priority in the program was to prove that she was capable of doing the work. She further stated:

> It wasn't like people were there to socialize or get to know us, which was fine because I felt like I was there to do a job and that was to prove that I could be in a college class taking a college-level course—not to get to know the college students.

Only two courses offered to dual enrollment students. Aquinas Scholars program participants could only take two college courses. Yet, many participants believed that an opportunity to take other courses would have presented more chances to engage in the college experience. Although participants agreed that the dual enrollment program was academically enriching, most said that being able to take more classes would have allowed them to engage with more college students and would have thereby enhanced the experience. Participants said that more course options would have eased some of the isolation that they felt. They saw this limited access to courses as an obstacle to them becoming fully acclimated to the campus and aligned with the ideology of being a college student.

Cedric enjoyed his two English courses and the academic development that these courses provided. He stated, "It was a great opportunity and helped me to build on my writing foundation." But he also expressed that other classes would have been great:

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Now, it would have been excellent if I could have taken other courses, but that's a story in itself. Like if you take other courses, then I'm pretty sure it helped you in other areas, but because the courses that I took were for writing, it helped me tremendously in that aspect.

Although the desire to take additional courses was expressed by most participants, many stated that the two-course limit did not lessen their experience as dual enrollment students at St. Aquinas. Yvette articulated her desire to take more courses without insinuating fault of the dual enrollment program. She said:

The whole dual enrollment experience was a great opportunity, so how could others believe it limited you when the school is extending to you this basically once-in-a-lifetime experience. In high school, you get to go to college. Limiting me, no—I just wish other classes would have been offered.

Yvette's view of the program differed from that of her classmates because in addition to talking to alumni who attended St. Aquinas, she also met dual enrollment students from other high schools. In her conversations with them, she realized that their programs were different from the one offered at River Charter Academy. She said:

Although I met the other school's dual enrollment students, they took an English class and other courses each semester. I feel, like, the dual enrollment program would have been better if we would have gotten to take a broad variety of courses. But we probably would have just gotten messier and messier (laughing). So, I don't know how it could have balanced out, but I wish other courses would be offered.

Latonya expressed that in her two dual enrollment English courses she felt as if the curriculum was only an extension of her learning experience from her high school campus. Although she enjoyed the courses, she believed that additional and more rigorous college courses could have helped to increase her academic fortitude. She stated:

I feel like if it was a different subject, where we had to just study for it instead of doing papers – because we got accustomed to doing papers and research in Senior Seminar class at our high school and in the English course we had in high school in the eleventh grade. It's like you get accustomed to doing papers with those

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courses. You know, you just get used to understanding grammatical errors and things like that after you do it so many times.

Just as other participants had, Latonya expressed that although the collegiate English courses gave her an opportunity to become a better writer, it was skill set that was acquired at River Charter Academy.

Although the participants expressed an attachment to their high school, they stated that additional courses on a college campus may have helped them understand college better as well as strengthen their understanding of courses that were not offered at River Charter. Beverly said:

The only thing I regret is not doing more classes at St. Aquinas. The one class was fine, and it was a blessing. We had the opportunity to do a math class, but we had to pass the [pre-enrollment assessment] test. I wish I would have done better on that so I could have taken math there.

Beverly went on to express, "As far as doing the dual enrollment, I have no regrets, but I wish I would have done more or had the opportunity to do more."

So despite the isolation that participants experienced in the dual enrollment program, it encouraged them to think about the ways that the program could have helped them better understand the "real" college experience. In addition, this isolation did not affect the academic enrichment provided by the Aquinas Scholars program.

Theme 2: College-Going (College, The Choice is Clear). The idea of going to college upon completion of high school, referred to as "college-going," defined the participants' goals after completing the dual enrollment program and graduating from high school. The dual enrollment experience helped shape these post-graduation goals, along with several other factors. College going among program participants was

motivated by four factors: (1) self-motivation, (2) parental push, (3) high school design, and (4) dual enrollment program experience.

Self-motivation. Some participants shared how exciting it was to be a part of what they considered "a great opportunity." They discussed how the dual enrollment program, their high school's design, and parental support were all sources of motivation but said that the ultimate decision to attend college must come from within. Cedric outlined this intrinsic motivation by stating:

> …the reason why I went to college wasn't because I had to. Well, I guess it was because I had to, but it's also because I wanted to. I wanted to better myself. Education, as they say, is one of the keys—it's one of the big keys of success and if you don't have it, then you really can't succeed. I had already made up in my mind that in order for me to become what I wanted to be and have a comfortable lifestyle, then I needed to do what was required of me and that was gain an education. So the only way you can really gain an education was through school, so I already made up my mind that college is where I had to go and where I needed to be.

Cedric used the same approach deciding on the type college he wanted to attend. He expressed:

> I knew that I wanted to go to school outside of the city and state that I lived. I didn't want to follow the norm and stay in my comfort zone to go to school where I knew all my friends would be going. I wanted to go away and I wanted to experience the world. I wanted to see different things. I actually gained this idea from traveling all over America during the summer while participating in programs supported by my high school.

Considering his life experiences and the things he had been exposed to, Cedric decided to "…go to a school not only that was in the north, but it was on the east coast as well, and predominately white," which deviated from what was considered "the standard" for a young African American male from the south.

Danielle also spoke about self-motivation. She said that at St. Aquinas,

"everybody was given an opportunity, but it was up to us to actually take the initiative to move forward, and then after taking advantage of that, I moved forward." Danielle did give credit to the dual enrollment program, but she stated that it was also necessary for her to motivate herself beyond that experience. She went on to say:

> Given the opportunity to achieve within the program actually set me up into a mindset where I could actually tell myself every day, this could be who I will be for four more years after this moment. It was the mindset to be able to do the college thing, and not just think it's work or it's just partying, or it's just kissing up to a professor, because it's not that at all. Because it has to do with your effort while in this program.

Danielle used a more inherent approach, applying for admission to St. Aquinas along with 50 other colleges; in turn, she earned more than $1,000,000 in scholarships to attend her college of choice. Like Cedric, Danielle used experience and exposure to help her ultimately decide on the college she would attend. She stated, "As I went through my college application process, it was very organized, but at the same time very skewed." She shared that applying to so many colleges is difficult and to do so, you must be self-motivated just to stay organized, but she also said that her process was somewhat skewed because she knew the type college she wanted to attend—a college outside of the norm for a young African American female from the south. She, too, chose a Northeastern, predominantly white college.

Although Yvette voiced having a close connection to her mom and members of her high school staff, she stated that her decision to attend college was mostly based on her experiences prior to participation in the dual enrolment program. She recalled the St. Aquinas experience, stating that:

> It gave me an inside scoop of what to expect once I was a full-time college student. So, I was more eager to attend college after I'd been taking classes at St.

Aquinas. I knew I already wanted to go to college, but I was just unsure to where. Knowing that she wanted to attend college, Yvette applied to nearly 40 colleges while participating in the dual enrollment program. Like Danielle, she also received more than $1,000,000 in scholarships, which made her choice somewhat more difficult. She said:

> I feel like St. Aquinas influenced what type of college I wanted to go to because it was more of an academic-based school, and there wasn't any social interaction going on that we had access to as dual enrollment participants. I think St. Aquinas had an influence on me of picking my school, because my choice was to make sure that I would be challenged and have fun—in and out of the classroom.

With experiences not granted to all high school students and exposure to opportunities that are considered atypical for African American students, some of the program participants were self-motivated in deciding to go to college as well as determining the type of college to attend. Although these participants accredited self-motivation as the impetus for their college going, like their peers, they were aware of the other factors contributing to their inspiration—including a "push" from their parents.

Parental push. Many participants received guidance from their parents as they maneuvered through high school, but they also expressed how their parents served as primary guides in their college-related decisions, going so far as determining the exact institution they would attend. For example, Rachel shared how her mother greatly influenced her college-related decisions, stating:

> I wanted to go to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff because I got a scholarship. My mother said, 'No, you don't need to go there.' She said, 'You can go to [University of Tennessee at] Martin,' and I said, 'Nah,' and then she took me here, too, because I initially wanted to go to the University of Memphis but they didn't accept me until after I came to this college and I finally got my acceptance letter. My mom said, 'Well, no. Just go here to this college.' So I'm here.

Participants also mentioned that their parents' influence regarding their college going did not begin with the dual enrollment program, but for some, it started long before high school. James stated, "Since we were young, our mom was like, you all are going to go to college, you have no choice." As James had an older brother to also participate in the program, his mother's influence was present as well, which is evident in his matriculation and persistence at a highly ranked, predominately white public institution with over 20,000 students.

High school design. In addition to parental influence, River Charter Academy supported college going merely in its design—a college preparatory charter school. Participants discussed that the school's approach to ensuring that college followed graduation mirrored their parent's motivation. According to LaTonya, her college going was equally motivated by both her high school chancellor and her mother. She further conveyed that she never had intentions of going to college, but instead she wanted to enlist in the army; yet, her decision had been swayed because "…they just stayed on my back all the time about going and why I needed to go; and if I wanted to give it a try, I needed to see what it was like." LaTonya, who is now a junior in college, credits her mother and her high school support system for helping her make the right choice. Although she still considers the armed services, she said, "I still have time to go into the service if I want to after I graduate from college." By going to college, LaTonya feels that she has been able to satisfy many current aspects of her life without compromising future opportunities. According to LaTonya, making the final decision was easy:

> Honestly, I chose my school because I was lazy. I didn't want to take the ACT again and I figured if I got here, I could transfer to the school that I really wanted

to go to because the other school was a part of the state system too.

Despite being languid in her choice, LaTonya was satisfied with her decision to attend

college and was not only proud of her school selection but also excited for her continued

academic success.

The participants also expressed that the high school's mandatory graduation

requirements prepared them to go to college. Such requirements included having to apply

to three colleges and be accepted by one in order to graduate from River Charter

Academy. Many participants believed that because of the programs and resources offered

by their high school, not attending college was not an option. Cedric echoed the feelings

of his peers, believing that his high school and dual enrollment experiences somewhat

ensured his academic success and transition to college. He stated, "I really feel like this

[dual enrollment] program really prepared me and our high school really prepared us for

college."

Beverly also believed that her high school strongly influenced her decision to

attend college. She acknowledged that her high school's approach to education and its

partnerships with other academic institutions and programs helped her make the decision

to attend college. She said:

> It was River Charter Academy that made me go to college, because it was the
> school that had instilled in us about college and how important it was. We were
> told if you went to college, your opportunities could be limitless. They pushed us
> to pursue going to universities and applying to higher-level institutions.

Beverly expressed that the push from her high school motivated her to look beyond the

things that had been sources of discouragement since middle school. "I would say the

school helped me, from 9th grade all the way up until 12th. River Charter Academy

instilled in me that college—well a university, would be the best choice for me," Beverly

stated. Like the other participants, Beverly also acknowledged her parents' influence, but

she expressed how her high school helped her to think larger than her parents' dreams

and beyond previous self-doubt. She said:

> My parents were a part of my motivation as well, but I would say when I was in
> middle school and going to the type of school I attended, I really wasn't thinking
> about what college I wanted to go to; whether it be a community college or
> picking up a trade. I wasn't thinking about attending college until I got to River
> Charter Academy—honestly.

> Graduating from a high school that supports college going after graduation, the

participants were able to share their thoughts on their high school pushing them toward

college. They felt as if the choice was unavoidable once they were in the dual enrollment

program.

Program experience. As program participants shared their stories, many of them

realized the impact of the dual enrollment experience and the influence it had on the type

of college they would attend, which ultimately weighed on their decision to select a

college. After graduation from River Charter Academy and receiving the six college

credits for the English courses taken at St. Aquinas University, all participants enrolled in

four-year colleges or universities.

Beverly said that although she truly enjoyed all of the opportunities associated

with the dual enrollment experience, she knew that St. Aquinas was not the type of

college she wanted to attend after graduating from high school. She said that being at the

small private school:

> …helped me to decide to go to a public college and not go to a private college just
> because I felt like—even though we didn't interact with any of the students on the
> St. Aquinas' campus, the campus felt kind of dull.

Beverly further stated:

> When we would walk around campus, it was nothing really going on. I didn't see any sorority bake sales going off—you know, just activity that colleges do from time to time. So I would definitely say it pushed me in the direction to go to a public college to get what I felt was the full college experience.

> While Beverly chose to attend a college with a culture different from that of St.

Aquinas, many of her classmates expressed comfort with the environment offered in their

dual enrollment program. Many participants stressed that they looked for colleges that

were committed to liberal arts and that offered the small class sizes that they had become

accustomed to while dually enrolled at St. Aquinas. When it came to choosing a college,

James stated:

> I wanted to go the whole way and get a Master's in whatever I was doing or whatever I chose to do. It's just like my high school and St. Aquinas prepared us for what we wanted to do as it related to college. If we wanted to go to a two-year school or four-year school.

> None of the program participants attended two-year institutions or community

colleges after high school. James proposed a possible reason for this, saying that:

> I thought since I am prepared, I might as well go ahead and do the whole nine, the whole thing and not just halfway. I did it because I thought that it would be an insult to my high school and St. Aquinas that prepared us and did as much as they did to get us prepared for college and then we went and did something small with it—that would be a letdown.

According to James, going to a four-year college is something "big" but even more so in

an environment in which he felt comfortable and connected.

Participants were able share the multiple sources of motivation to apply to and

ultimately attended the college or university of their choice. Although their choices were

very diverse and vastly dispersed over the collegiate edifice, all participants identified the

greatest influences on their college-going as (1) self, (2) parents, (3) high school design,

and (4) the dual enrollment program. Beyond directing participating students to go on to college after high school, the dual enrollment experience also had an affected students both after graduation from high school and during their college years.

Theme 3: Preparedness (Rigor is Relative). The term "preparedness" expresses the feeling that participants faced as high school students in a dual enrollment program that posed initial challenges, coupled with their subsequent ability to overcome similar obstacles later as full-time college students. Due to the participants' ability to both share ideas and have an individual stance on these occurrences, preparedness emerged as a structural theme that was defined by four areas in the participants' experience: (1) knowledge (2) environment, (3) content, and (4) leniency.

*Knowledge***.** The participants' lack of knowledge framed their initial challenges with the dual enrollment program. Many participants believed it would be more difficult to understand the content taught in the college course and navigate through college resources as compared to their high school experience. For example, Danielle outlined her initial assumptions about her dual enrollment courses, as she had no clear understanding of expectations:

> As my classes weren't specifically on my high school campus, I was able to see, I guess, the worst of those classes, but I looked forward to how they would pertain to me actually becoming a college student later and becoming that freshman in class with other students.

As she progressed through the program and gained further insight, she said:

> It helped with me being in class, or being in the St. Aquinas classes with my peers that I'd been going to high school with for two or three years. I feel like that experience helped me to become a better student, but I didn't notice that until now. I wasn't conscious of that while in the program.

Danielle said that the dual enrollment experience helped prepare her for what she would face as a full-time college student. When comparing her time as a dual enrollment student to the full-time student experience, she encapsulated those experiences into communities, seeking to put them into the perspective—where she was then and where she is now. In comparison, she said:

> I believe that the advantages were displayed within these two communities, but it's not a bad thing because I'm actually able to have seen the difference within my home and then where I am now. Making college my home and then appreciating where I came from. Appreciating the slipups within the education system. Appreciating my own slipups within my education system and just being able to see the difference. I wasn't able to see the difference at first I believe, but now that I'm away and I've been away for going on three years now, I'm able to see the difference and appreciate the difference and work forward from that difference and make something more of myself because of the difference.

In referencing the differences in the communities, Danielle was able to pinpoint specific instances in which she was "unknowing" as a dual enrollment student but now knows better as a full-time college student. A specific instance that she can now counter is her interaction with college faculty. She explained that although she did not interact with her professor at all during the dual enrollment program, she has learned the importance of such since that experience. She said:

> Now I see the importance with visiting with your professor and catching them slightly out of work mode. Because I'm a junior now, and it's very much important to visit with your professor, whether it's conversing about academics or just anything that pertains to their course, or their interests. It's very much important. And I'm actually glad that I did not take that action while in my senior year in high school, because I learned from that.

Danielle also shared other differences between the two communities, but the things that exist outside the classroom are the things that make her a better student, as she implied. She even used her study habits as an example, expressing, "Being a part of the dual

enrollment program actually showed me that I need to study and be able to make studying worthwhile. That has helped me since being here, being in college."

Danielle considered herself fortunate to have been a part of the dual enrollment experience because so many other high school students do not have access to such an opportunity. Danielle felt that the absence of such a program should not cause other students to be "unknowing"; therefore, she has used her experiences to motivate other students to ensure they too are better prepared. She said:

> Being a part of these two experiences, one presently and then one in the past, has really given me a boost to be able to speak to the freshmen that are coming into the college I am attending, and also high school seniors, whether they be in my hometown or in other states. I'm really able to give them a more fervent explanation of why they should do college, and not just go to class. Doing college is more than going to class, and I say that to anybody.

Cedric made observations similar to Danielle's, comparing his own experiences as a dual enrollment student and later a full-time college student. According to Cedric:

> …the dual enrollment program did give me the opportunity to better understand how college works and how the work load is and what is necessary in order to graduate, as well as, how it will be when you take not just one, but multiple classes, just like this one.

Although his experience with the program was initiated without advanced knowledge or program explanation, Cedric understood that his enrollment in the Aquinas Scholars program helped him better navigate through his early years as a full-time college student. He shared his appreciation for the contributions the dual enrollment program made to his college experience, but he also acknowledged the program's limitations in providing advanced knowledge about other aspects of college. Cedric highlighted:

> This dual enrollment program offered me a chance to understand what a college campus would feel like, but it did not give me the opportunity to know what it felt like to actually stay on campus and what it felt like to be away from home.

He continued:

> Once you get there and really stay on campus, it is totally different than it is going to a campus for a couple of hours. Now you have to understand that you are here and this is your new home and this is your actual school family that you have to relate to on a day-to-day basis because especially for me since I was 2,000 miles away, I really didn't have that chance to interact with my family from home. I had to make use of the new way of how it worked being away from home and I can't lie and say that initially it wasn't hard for me.

Cedric related his matriculation to college the same as his transition in the dual enrollment program. He said much of the program he did not know about in advance, but over time he gained a better understanding. He said he felt the same about his college experience and used that familiar method as a fulltime college student. He said:

> Breaking away from being used to seeing your friends and spending a lot of time with them was tough, but after a while you kind of get used to it and you learn to adapt to the situation and environment that's your immediate surroundings.

Cedric also said that as a high school student, he did not know that he would have to make sacrifices for his education, but because he had participated in the dual enrollment program he knew how to make the adjustments necessary as a full-time college student.

Environment. Participants said that the academic environment at St. Aquinas University was similar to that of River Charter Academy. Participants believed the faculty and staff at River Charter Academy cared about their academic growth and well being and provided them with the resources necessary to be successful. Due to the dual enrollment program being on the college campus and away from the high school, many participants expressed initial concerns about the academic environment at the college level—wondering especially if college instructors would be as supportive as the high school faculty and staff.

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Participants expressed their fear of going onto the college campus, which was even worse with them being high school students. Some participants stated that although the fear of being on a college campus while still in high school was hard enough, having to wear school uniforms made them standout even more. Participants stated that despite their initial fears, the academic environment at the college while in the dual enrollment program was similar to what they were used to at the high school.

Beverly expressed her initial hesitation to participating in the dual enrollment program as she had no prior knowledge or exposure to the expectations that would be required to be successful. Fortunately, after enrolling in the dual enrollment program, Beverly learned that the academic environment on the St. Aquinas campus was similar to the environment at River Charter. She said, "At River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University, those teachers were very lenient about things like repeating information and making sure comprehend. If you needed them to repeat something or break something down, they would." However, the environment changed once she became a full-time college student. She said that although instructors in the dual enrollment program were willing to provide individual attention, they were also working with smaller class sizes, as compared to her current college: "At the university that I attend now, I'm sitting in a class with a hundred plus students. So a professor may not have the time to go over something again and again or break it down." She admitted that this took some adjustment during her freshmen year in college, as she had never been to classes as large as those she was in once she began college full-time.

Beverly's point was supported LaTonya, who participated in the dual enrollment program a year after she did. Now a junior in college, LaTonya said she wishes that she would have taken dual enrollment courses on a larger college campus. She said:

> St. Aquinas is a great school as far as setting your standards because I feel like their standards are higher than the larger nearby university, but as far as class sizes, I feel like we should have gone to that larger school.

She further stated, "At River Charter Academy, we had small class sizes and then when we went to St. Aquinas University, it was still small class sizes. When I got here and I'm in chemistry, it might be 150 people." Although she did not plan to attend college at first, she believed that attending a larger university while in the dual enrollment program may have better prepared her for her future enrollment as a full-time student.

Rachel, a classmate of LaTonya, agreed the dual enrollment program could have been more effective had it been offered on a larger campus. She said:

> Instead of taking classes St. Aquinas University, because our high school wanted us to attend a college with a similar environment for our dual enrollment, I think we should have gone to the larger university in our hometown. There the classes are bigger and we actually would have had to walk a bigger campus because most of us now go to large universities. My college that I currently attend is huge! It's big, so when I got here I really wasn't, like, 'Dang, it's a big school,' because I went to large public high school before transferring to River Charter Academy. But, I had gotten used to the smaller classroom environments.

She too expressed having to adjust to the new environment during her freshmen year and that this adjustment was not easy.

Contrary to other dual enrollment participants, James stated that the academic environment he was a part of during the dual enrollment experience was similar to that of his full-time college environment. He said:

> The class settings were the same. Our teachers were just as interactive in our classes on both campuses. They asked us questions that made us think and that

made us do our own answers. They weren't just shooting out what the book said. They would use the book as a guide and not as a script of what they need to do. They ran the class and they knew what they were talking about. In St. Aquinas they gave us a time to explain what we thought about the subject and that's the same exact way we have it here at the college I'm currently enrolled.

James said that because the environments were so closely aligned, he was truly prepared for his full-time college experience by participating in the dual enrollment program. He stated:

They really prepared us exactly for what college would be like. They prepared us with everything we might need for school and I think it greatly prepared us for it and more. As far as comparisons, we are doing the same exact thing we did at St. Aquinas over here at my college.

James said the small and supportive academic environment that his dual enrollment experience offered has boosted his confidence to a point in which he feels equipped to handle any situation that may arise while he is in college. According to James:

St. Aquinas University built that confidence level in me to be able to do that and when I get in class. It's no longer one of those things where I am dreading going to class. I actually am glad to be in that class because I know it's giving me what I need to be prepared. I'm looking at the bigger picture and I know it's playing a great part in what I am about to encounter in my future.

He went on to share that because all of his academic environments were so similar, he now possesses the ability to make the right moves academically to achieve what is necessary.

Although Cedric completed the dual enrollment program two years before James, Cedric agreed with his perspective. He believed that although the environments at his high school and the dual enrollment site were similar, he was able to gain an understanding that later supported his transition from high school to college. He said:

I was just as active in both environments at River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University. I tried to make the most of it. I wanted to treat my dual

enrollment environment like I would treat any setting. I didn't want to feel like this is going to be something totally new to me or this is something I can't adapt to.

Cedric shared that because he was in the first cohort of the dual enrollment program, he was a bit more nervous than usual. Cedric said:

Like the first dual enrollment class, it felt kind of suffocating. It felt kind of like I'm this high school kid and here I'm at college taking classes and I said let me try to take the positive and make the most of it and just be you and do what's necessary.

Cedric said that being able to be in an environment similar to his high school environment made the transition into the dual enrollment program easier. He also found similarities in the small, private liberal arts college that he later enrolled in full-time, which was similar to his previous experiences. Cedric said:

I actually liked the smaller classes because you get that one on one opportunity with the professor and you don't have to worry about, oh, I don't get attention. Or, I won't get the opportunity to talk with the professor because he or she may have other obligations with other students who have already made appointments or things of that nature. You get a chance to actually talk to the professor one on one, meet with the professor and have that connection as opposed to going to a big, lecture-based class where the professor doesn't really hear every discussion-based opinion.

Cedric stressed that because of the similarities of each environment, his transitions between the three were simpler, and these transitions aided his academic development.

Shared "environmental" experiences gave participants the opportunity to discuss their development as related to the things that make a classroom conducive to academic growth and development. Participants were able to retrace certain experiences and share a more developed understanding of themselves—from then to now. Even in instances where the dual enrollment experiences were not equivalent to those that came later in college, participants still expressed valuable lessons learned that aided in their

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preparation and persistence as full-time college students. On the other hand, some participants shared that their dual enrollment and respective college environments were equal; therefore, they expressed the benefits of a seamless transition. Despite the differences in environment, content is most often used as a single qualifier when comparing academic experiences.

  Content. Although participants were initially challenged by the academic content of their dual enrollment programs, many of them found it less challenging than they expected. In the absence of any advanced knowledge, participants had feared the worst and prepared themselves accordingly. In such preparation, participants stated that they were nervous that maybe they were not as academically well prepared by their high school. Participants stated that fear was squelched early on as they realized that their professors at St. Aquinas University cared just as much about their academic success as their high school teachers. Participants expressed that although the work was on the college level, both their professors and peers were willing to offer assistance. Participants further expounded upon the college-level work and support received while in the dual enrollment program, which later supported their academic preparation and success in college despite the fact that some participants mentioned the same fear resurfacing during their first year as full-time college students. James referenced his participation in the dual enrollment program and stated:

> When I was at St. Aquinas, we had a lot of help. Sometimes, teachers would kind of baby us, but then they would give us that real taste of what college would be. When I actually got in the setting of the college classroom, it dawned on me that this is where I'm going to actually be. Our high school is preparing us for this and now I am here.

Due to his early introduction to the content and format of college, James said:

> When I got to college, I don't think it really hurt me as much as it did other people because I was so prepared for it. I knew exactly what was coming. I knew how the teachers would be. I knew how much they would help us, because they would only help us to a certain extent and they always pushed us to go ahead and keep pushing forward. When I got to this college, everything was real smooth and a lot of people were asking me why things were so easy for me. I referred back to my high school's dual enrollment program and I always said, I took classes at an actual college and it really, really helped me out a lot.

James considered the content of the English courses he took while in the dual enrollment program as a resource that helped him succeed in his college courses. Now a sophomore in college, he says:

> Any class I go to, there will be people that will say I try to take over the group. I don't try to do this, but what it is I have a lot of leadership qualities that I feel were developed in my high school and developed at St. Aquinas. The dual enrollment program gave me that confidence to go ahead and give my interpretation or give my two cents when participating in class discussion.

Although he sometimes experienced backlash from his college classmates, James did not allow it to deter him from continuing to do his best as a full-time college student. He said:

> …as far as coming in class and doing what I had to do to get a great grade, I did it because St. Aquinas prepared me for exactly what I would be going through so I basically knew the ropes. I knew what I needed to do for my classes.

Although LaTonya's experience with the dual enrollment program differed from the others, she agreed that the content of the English courses sharpened her writing skills, but that additional boost that the others spoke of was not present. She said, "Even though I graduated high school in the dual enrollment program, when I got to college my first semester, I still messed up." Her classmate Rachel echoed her sentiments. Despite Rachel attending a different college than LaTonya, she expressed the same concerns regarding her dual enrollment experience. Rachel said:

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I thought I was going to do real well in college. I failed Pre-Calculus twice, but in high school I had an A. But I get to college, I took the class, I failed it and I took it again and failed it. So, I don't think we're being prepared with the work in the dual enrollment program currently.

Although Rachel considered the content of the English courses "appropriate," she said that the course did not expose her to a real college experience or opportunities that would have helped her as a college freshman.

As a junior in college, Rachel now believes that additional content should be offered to dual enrollment students to prepare them for the transition to college. She said:

I know it's not the teacher's fault. We didn't have the resources and the real college experience in class for us to get prepared for school—for college. We were being prepared, but we weren't getting prepared because the class was still kind of easy.

Rachel also stressed that these additional courses may give students the confidence they need to do well in their first year of college, which she initially lacked. She said:

I was shy my first year. I didn't talk to anyone and so I didn't raise my hand in class. My teachers used to try to make me talk and come to the front, but I didn't. I really just started talking this year. Well, actually, I started just talking more when I took Speech (public speaking), and that was last year and after that I just started to talk more.

Beyond these points, Rachel shared that her academic experience in the English courses was worthwhile, if only for the college credits and fulfilling the freshman-year English requirements.

Cedric, now a senior in college, said:

The dual enrollment classes helped me tremendously because the content was filled with writing and the school that I go to is mostly like a writing-based incentive school. Writing is essentially the main component at a liberal arts school and since I attend a premier liberal arts college that is nationally recognized, writing is one of the things that is key to your success in this school. With the dual enrollment program being basically two writing-intensive courses, both helped me to gain a better understanding of writing and it's proficiencies. Some things I still

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make mistakes on here and there, but my dual enrollment courses were not only meant to affect my writing. The program was meant to aid me and to get me to the next level, and that it did. It helped me tremendously; it was a great opportunity and helped me to build on my writing foundation.

Cedric stated that he would have liked to take additional courses while in the dual enrollment program, but:

I think writing was one of the areas that I needed to improve before I could go off to college. It was kind of significant for me later that the courses that I would take in dual enrollment were writing, which helped me tremendously when I got to college.

During Yvette's freshmen year in college, she attended a historically black private college for women but was offered a scholarship in an amount that exceeded what it would have cost to attend a predominately white college for women that was in closer proximity. At the end of her freshmen year, Yvette made the decision to accept the scholarship offered by the other institution and transferred. Despite transferring, she felt as if the Aquinas Scholars program played a tremendous role in preparing her for either college. She talked about the content being hard but supportive of her growth as a future college student. She said:

It helped me because my first semester of my first year, I had a lot of writing-intensive classes, and I feel with me taking college English in high school, it put me ahead of some of the kids. I already had college credits. I didn't have to take English, and I had this writing preparation under my belt, so it all came together.

Just as Yvette stated, all other study participants said that their dual enrollment credits were accepted by the institution they attended after high school graduation as well. Although all of them may not have experienced the same level of academic and social increase to garner initial success in college, each of them agreed the content taught

during dual enrollment was relative to their efforts in college courses that required lots of writing.

Leniency. Participants shared incidents that demonstrated the leniency they experienced while dually enrolled and how this leniency countered the rigidity of faculty once they became full-time college students. Some participants related this leniency to their high school's approach to helping students succeed using a rigorous academic program combined with a tough-love approach. In other cases, the school would be lenient on deadlines or allow students to do make-up and extra credit work later. Participants said that both their high school teachers and the dual enrollment faculty were accessible and amenable to their academic efforts but that this was not the case with faculty once they became full-time college students.

Beverly expressed the belief that her high school did an outstanding job in preparing her for college. Now a senior in college with a GPA of over a 3.0, she stated:

> I'm not gonna lie, it was more like a family at River Charter Academy, and more of your teachers wanted you to learn and wanted you to succeed. In college, they could care less whether you do or don't. In college, they don't care if you comprehend something. They are going to say it once and that's it. But at River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University, those teachers were very lenient about things like that. You needed them to repeat something or break something down, so then you could better understand, they would. You were also in the class with maybe 20-25 students, but at the university that I attend now, I'm sitting in a class with 100 plus students. So a professor may not have the time to go over something again and again or break it down because it's a time thing.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the leniency granted during their dual enrollment experience, but many believed that this gave them a false sense of what "real" college would be like.

Certain participants stated that the leniency granted by their college instructors in the dual enrollment program was a reminder of their high school status and that this caused them to not take the experience as seriously as they should have. Because of this, some participants believed that their college experience, once full-time students, was more realistic than their dual enrollment experience. They believed that college experience actually to have been the experience that mattered, whereas they considered the English courses at St. Aquinas as optional. Rachel said that when she attended:

> …St. Aquinas as a dual enrollment student, I was still in high school, so I could get away with stuff more easily. But now that I'm in college, I can't really get away with stuff as much because it affects me.

She further expressed that she believed the dual enrollment program was only an extension of her high school rather than an introduction to college; she further believed that failing in the dual enrollment program would not have stopped her from graduating from high school. Rachel said when she was in high school, she thought:

> …I can just get kicked out of the dual enrollment program and it was okay, but now that I'm in college full time, I get kicked out of college, and it's a big deal to me. This is my future. I know going back isn't going to be that easy.

She further expressed:

> With the dual enrollment program, my attitude was whatever. So if I get kicked out, I will just go take English at my high school for graduation purposes. But now in college for real, whoa, I can't do that. I got to stay on top.

Rachel stated that since she did not take full advantage of the dual enrollment program or the college experience it allowed, she went to college less prepared than her peers that had also participated in the dual enrollment program.

Rachel said that her lack of commitment to the college experience while in the dual enrollment program was visible during her freshman year of college. She pointed

out that she had to earn additional college hours in specific courses that in turn motivated

her efforts to interact with her college peers as well as her instructors. She considered the

consequences of failing as a full-time college student greater than the punishment for

failing as a dual enrollment student. However, in both high school and college, her goal

was to graduate, despite the college-like (or lack thereof) nature of the experience.

LaTonya, one of Rachel's classmates, also believed that as high school students,

they were shown favor by the college instructors while in the dual enrollment program.

But unlike Rachel, LaTonya did not see the leniency as an impediment to her college

experience while in the dual enrollment program, but she did express that it was opposite

to what she later experienced as a full-time college student. She said:

> When we were at St. Aquinas University, I guess since we were seniors in high
> school, the teachers had a little bit more slack on us than here. It's like here they
> have an 'I don't care' attitude and the teachers at St. Aquinas seemed to care more
> about us, like our teachers at River Charter Academy.

Although LaTonya considered the dual enrollment program a great experience that

introduced her to college (as she initially had no intentions on attending college), she also

spoke of early struggles as a full-time student. Now as a junior in college, LaTonya

remembers her early college days, emphasizing how much she has grown as a student,

but much like Rachel, she too found motivation as a full-time college student. Her

motivation was the cost associated with attending college. She said:

> I feel like I'm more comfortable now in college because, for one, I'm paying for
> these classes. And like Rachel said, if I mess up it's a big deal because I want to
> get a degree and no degree—I mean, in this world today, it's really not much that
> you can do. It's like money, and so, I figure I need to ace these classes or I'm
> going to be out of luck. And the teacher's not going to hand-feed it to me, so I got
> to do it on my own. It's like more responsibility and, I mean, whether you're
> ready for it or not, you got to take it.

Motivated now by graduation plus the costs of attendance, LaTonya expressed that she

appreciates the dual enrollment experience but wishes she had taken better advantage of

the opportunity, as she had no plans to attend college while she was in high school.

In opposition to his peers, Cedric believed the program was exactly what he

needed it to be—the right levels of leniency, the perfect college campus, and, as stated

earlier, English courses perfectly aligned with his academic needs as a full-time college

student. He said:

> I felt like it had the feel of an actual college class and that's what I thought I was
> going to experience, was the true college class feel. I did not believe that I would
> experience the whole college environment. That I knew was going to come later,
> once I got to college.

Cedric was pleased with the fact that St. Aquinas had values similar to those of River

Charter Academy; this brought him comfort during his participation in the dual

enrollment program, especially since he was a high school student on a college campus

for the first time. He said:

> I didn't want to rush that process. I still wanted to have my high school life before
> it turned into the college life. I wasn't ready for the college life because I hadn't
> finished my high school life.

Cedric further demonstrated his understanding of the format and leniency of the

program's work with high school students by saying, "The class was basically for me a

way of gaining the foundation to know what college classes would feel like when you get

to the level."

Despite the various levels of leniency experienced by the participants, all

instances demonstrate the diversity of the dual enrollment students and the differences in

their desired outcomes. With such richness in diversity, participants had differing

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opinions about and perceptions of the dual enrollment program's possible shortcomings. However, it is ultimately demonstrated that all of these students participated in the dual enrollment program and later went on to college with their own set of expectations.

Theme 4: Balance (I Now Know [Me] Better). A positive attribute of the participants' involvement in the dual enrollment program was their ongoing development. Participants shared stories and instances by which transformation and maturity aided their efforts at River Charter Academy, St. Aquinas University, and the colleges they later enrolled in as full-time students. Due to participants' academic and personal gains, the theme of *balance* emerged to describe their subtle growth and development throughout their academic experiences. Balance, defined for purposes of this study, is the participants' ability to prioritize congruent opportunities in their academic experiences to gain the best possible outcome. Balance was seen throughout this study in two instances—academically and socially.

Academic balance. Participants positively illustrated their academic growth by explaining how the dual enrollment partnership between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University had shaped who they are as students. They shared how their inspiration, confidence, and independence enabled them to participate in the dual enrollment program and complete high school. Participants related these same factors in their college transition and persistence.

Beverly shared how she was inspired and her confidence levels were boosted in high school and how she was, in turn, able to use that motivation to become more independent in her other academic experiences. She believed:

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Outside of River Charter Academy, people don't care about you the way they did. Other people don't care if you make it, but sometimes we need that to succeed or to pick ourselves up. We need to feel like somebody cares about where you end up in order for you to get that extra push to say, okay well you know what, I'm gonna do this because I got this person rooting for me. I know he is going to help me.

Beverly expressed that she was inspired to do better by the staff at her high school, who worked with the students every step of the way, including throughout the dual enrollment program and their enrollment in college. She went on to say, "I don't feel like my high school babied us. I just feel like River Charter cared more than a lot of administrators would have about us." Beverly said that their care was motivation as she went through the dual enrollment program and later on to college. Upon review of her senior portfolio, Beverly was able to see her academic development through such motivation and also see how she had gained the confidence needed to conquer previous fears, whereas in the past, she had used food as comfort. Now with more independence, she has been able to continuously perform well in college. Although she still has some weaknesses, she stated:

The way I study, it hurts me a lot because I feel like I don't put enough time into it as I should and I've even considered quitting my job to put more time into studying. I think that's one of my weaknesses, but to help me in that weakness, I'll cut off the television or I'll cut off my phone, and I'll black out the world for hours in order to get some studying in.

With a renewed spirit of confidence after sharing her experiences, Beverly said:

Whatever problem that I have, I think I face it head-on now instead of avoiding it or covering it up with something. I stare fear in the face now, so whatever weakness or fear that I have, I'll approach it head-on, and I won't cover it up with eating or something like that.

Although she has changed her major, extending the length of her undergraduate studies, Beverly feels that academically, she is at her strongest point.

Cedric, one of Beverly's classmates, also described how the dual enrollment

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program positively impacted his academic growth, saying:

> Granted, it was a lot of course work and a lot of reading and things of that nature, but at the same time, it was work that probably would have been given to me had I been in a high school courses only, but it probably wouldn't have been as proficient or as difficult. I think at the same time, gaining that experience from the dual enrollment program helped me to understand and better myself for the high school courses I was taking because I knew the workload that was required of me in the dual enrollment program.

He further articulated his academic development when he said:

> You always have to understand that the smaller things are what matters. So if I didn't get my high school grades, when I went up to college, then there was no point of me being ready for the college level and it would be a setback. So I think the dual enrollment program was a great positive experience that helped me to gain a better understanding of my high school classes, the work that I was taking at St. Aquinas University and then to be able to transcend it to the level of college.

Cedric discussed his ability to take full advantage the academic experience granted by the dual enrollment program, saying that the workload was a motivational tool that aided the growth of his academic confidence. He stated that he completed high school and prepared himself to go to college with an independence that had developed over a period of time but was more defined while he was in the dual enrollment program.

James, like Cedric who participated in the dual enrollment program before him, also believed that the program boosted his confidence and helped him find the balance necessary to succeed as a high school student taking college courses. He said:

> I think St. Aquinas University built that confidence level in me to be able to do well, and when I get in class, it's not one of those things where I am dreading going to class. I actually was glad to be in those dual enrollment classes because I know it gave me what I need. I'm looking at the bigger picture now, and I know it's playing a great part in what I am about to encounter in my future.

James said that being in the program made him more comfortable with his surroundings, which helped him easily find academic balance.

Although some participants described their development in more immediate terms, others perceived their growth to occur over a longer period of time. Danielle was like the others who were motivated to continue to grow academically far beyond the dual enrollment program and who received a delayed appreciation for the dual enrollment program later on in college. Danielle said:

> Being a part of the dual enrollment program prepared me to actually engage myself in my courses while in college because I was not as engaged while in the program in high school. And because I was not engaged, I learned from that.

As Danielle only participated in the dual enrollment program for one semester, she used the semester that she was not enrolled as an opportunity to reflect on her experience and began to project what her academic future would be like to find the balance needed in her life. She said:

> It wasn't so much of a bad experience that I wasn't fully engaged. I took advantage of being able to sit back, do my work, visualize what I wanted to do, who I wanted to see, and the people that I wanted to surround myself with in the education realm. Then I also got the time to actually mold my model student—me as a student.

She further discussed her academic growth pattern by saying:

> I don't believe that I can actually pinpoint an effect that being a part of the program had on me while in the dual enrollment course because now I'm in college and I've been taking classes for three years, but I do believe the program had some relevance, and it had an effect, but I can't really just pinpoint it right now, but the effect is there.

Although Danielle did not define the dual enrollment experience as "ideal" while she was in the program, she said that because of the program, she was better able to mold herself as a student to find the balance needed prior to enrolling in college full-time.

Although participants considered the dual enrollment program essential to their academic growth, some found that their balance was motivated by other factors, such as

their parents. Yvette explained that it took her some time to find balance as a full-time

college student. She said that although she suffered academically during her first

semester, she gained confidence from her parents' support as well as from the self-

motivation triggered by the high costs of a college education. "It took a lot of mistakes to

find my balance," she said, laughing at memories of her missteps during her freshmen

year. She continued with:

> My first semester, I think I was too happy to be away from home, on my own and
> with independence. At first, I wasn't able to find my balance, but once I started to
> buckle down, I needed to find my discipline and do what I need to do because I'm
> paying to go to school now. School's not free. It costs too much for me to be
> sitting around here and making the grades that I'm making.

Yvette said that while she was in college, she talked to her mother everyday, who would

tell her what she needed to do as far as class and also direct her to seek scholarships that

would ease the financial burdens of college. Yvette said that because of such a push, she

considered her parents her support system. In explaining how she found balance, Danielle

stressed her mother's inspiration. Talking about her mother, she said:

> She just has to remind me, every now and then, when I feel like I can't. But, at the
> same time, she's telling me, 'Okay, this is not a game. You're down there for your
> education. You know you can do it. Don't play games.' And I know that I've been
> taught a certain way to handle situations that may arise—whether it affects me
> academically or socially.

Yvette believes that her parents' motivation and her self-confidence enabled her to

become more balanced and find academic success in her first year of college. After

finding this balance, Danielle was able to find a scholarship that allowed her to transfer to

another college during her sophomore year.

Each of the participants shared their experiences related to their academic growth

and development. Although each of them were enrolled in the dual enrollment program,

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they all expressed different points at which they fully understood themselves as individuals and understood how they could interpret and define balance in their lives. Beverly found inspiration from her high school, whereas Cedric and James built their confidence while in the dual enrollment program. Danielle found her independence to be most instrumental while she was enrolled in college. Despite each of them reaching academic maturity at different times, they all found balance after aligning their academic priorities.

　　　Social balance. The notion of *social balance* describes how participants blended into the college environments existing outside the classroom. Many participants expressed that the dual enrollment program provided them with limited access to the "real" college experience, but some shared that they engaged, to some extent, in activities that supported their social transition as full-time college students.

　　　Because Danielle had become the "model student" she had imagined while in the dual enrollment program, she was able to find balance between her social and academic life. She said:

> Doing college is more than going to class and I say that to anybody. Because I feel like if you are just mentally and physically engaged in class you're not getting the full experience. And I saw that being a part of the dual enrollment program. I had to go to my classes in the morning at River Charter Academy, then I had to rush to get something to eat and then go to the St. Aquinas campus to be a part of that class and then stay over for work purposes, and then I had to go back to my high school campus to practice or participate in this and that. That experience really showed me that there's more to school than class.

She stressed that her dual enrollment experience provided her with a broader understanding of what it meant to be a student beyond being in a classroom or library.

While in the dual enrollment program, Danielle sought balance by defining a mantra in

which she constantly told herself that she was more than just a student. She said:

> I'm still sticking to that motto because now in college as a full-time student, I'm a
> student, but I'm also a member of the executive board for various organizations
> and I still do ballet. I talk to my friends and go out. I cook dinner. I do this and I
> do that, and my academic experience is much more wholesome because I am
> spreading myself. I'm not just staying to myself in the library holed-up 24 hours a
> day because I feel like that would be me depriving myself of the true college
> experience.

Through her efforts, Danielle stated that she has successfully balanced her classroom

assignments and her social calendar. She said that without being socially vested in the

college experience, she probably would not have made it to her junior year, since she is

so far away from her home.

Participants described how their approach to the dual enrollment program was

mirrored in their attitudes as full-time college students. As previously stressed, Rachel

remained committed to the idea that if she had attended a dual enrollment program at a

larger institution, her experience would have been different and she would have been

better equipped to attend a larger university like the one she currently attends. Rachel

thinks she could have easily handled being dually enrolled at a larger university while

still in high school, and that experience, she believes, would have propelled her to be

more social in a larger environment. She said:

> I probably think I could have adapted to attending a larger university while in
> high school because now in college at a large university, I don't do anything here.
> I'm boring.

She expressed that because she did nothing socially while in the Aquinas Scholars

program, she has become set in her ways despite the need for social interaction in

college. She did clarify that she has a limited social life while in college, but back home,

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which is more than 200 miles away, is where she really experiences being a college student—including coming home in the early hours of the morning.

Other student participants discussed their attitudes toward their high school dual enrollment program after enrolling in college full-time. Just as James was a very sociable student among his dual enrollment peers and still is as a full-time college student, he was able to find balance more easily once he became a full-time college student. He described his current college experiences as very similar to those of his period of dual enrollment. Speaking of the dual enrollment program, he said, "This will prepare you for whatever you are going to go through in college, school-wise and class-wise, and you will be prepared for everything." He further noted that:

> My high school prepared me and the dual enrollment program prepared me a lot. I give a lot of credit to the Aquinas Scholars Program and because of my upbringing as well as the guidance that Chancellor gave us. As far as St. Aquinas, I do owe it a lot too. I really do think they helped us out and gave us what we needed for when we got here to college.

He expressed that he was able to gain balance from the input of many others, but he gave special acknowledgment to his upbringing. In addition to the impact of his high school's faculty and staff, as well as, the dual enrollment program; some participants also expressed that their family had an influence on their ability to find balance in their lives, just as James discussed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from the online open-ended survey, participant interviews, and focus group session. Structural themes were presented, and these themes were used to categorize participants' academic experiences. Using participants' perspectives, multiple points were connected within singular categories,

which allowed a broader understanding of the diverse voices of the participants. The data

analysis presented in this chapter enabled me to better understand the effects the River

Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University dual enrollment program on the

participating students' college readiness and persistence.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The multilayered purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the of a dual enrollment program's impact on the college readiness and persistence of marginalized participants as well as to gain a better understanding of whether or not dual enrollment affects the academic and social experiences of student participants once they become full-time college students.

The findings and conclusions of the current study present the participants' perspectives and their commitment to share their successes and failures while dually enrolled in high school and college and later as full-time college students. Utilizing a phenomenological research approach, student participants' lived academic experiences were used to build a broader understanding of marginalized and at-risk students' access to dual enrollment programs and their subsequent college readiness and persistence, as such a student perspective is limited in extant literature.

Study findings will be discussed in this chapter, as compared to previous studies, and the results will be rationalized with regard to the contributions this study makes to existing literature. I will also present possible implications of this study's impact on the development of dual enrollment programs that may later benefit urban high schools and their students. Finally, I will offer recommendations for future research. Conclusions that have been gathered from the data will also be presented throughout this chapter.

Summary of Conclusions

The current study was initiated based on my personal interest in understanding how dual enrollment influences urban high school participants who later become full-time college students. After an initial evaluation, I realized that most of the literature on dual enrollment had been conducted among nonminority student populations, with most of these programs aligned with community colleges offering college-level courses to high school students on high school campuses. My desire became to determine if the results of previous studies were applicable when considering opposing demographic parameters, such as students' race, locale, and institution type. Such demographic changes could possibly present a juxtaposition to existing literature on dual enrollment.

The Aquinas Scholars program, the dual enrollment program examined in the current study, was established in 2007; therefore, the results of the current study can purposefully aid efforts to address, appreciate, and align the needs of future dual enrollment programs.

The Aquinas Scholars program was met with some resistance during its early implementation phases, as this was the first on-campus dual enrollment program that St. Aquinas University had established with a high school serving a predominately African American population.

Although administrators had to meet unforeseen logistical needs, the partnership between the two institutions was noted in a 2008 press release by the University:

> By partnering with St. Aquinas, Robinson has created this opportunity for students to succeed in the university classroom and give them not only the aspiration, but a confidence to attend a college or university upon graduation, because they already know that they can do it (St. Aquinas University, 2008).

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The dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University was later used in the 2010−11 academic school year as the model used by Urban County Schools to redefine the district's existing Middle College High School concept. In this redefinition of its Middle College High School, Urban County Schools severed a long-lasting relationship with a local community college to partner with St. Aquinas University to offer dual enrollment courses to a larger population of minority students.

Attending college is a dream of many high school students that extends beyond demographic identifiers. This dream is accomplished by some and not accessible to others. The participants in the current study have provided an enriched perspective that enables (1) dual enrollment program providers (colleges), (2) program partners (high schools), and (3) future dual enrollment participants (students) to gain a broader understanding of the effects of dual enrollment programs. This in-depth understanding is strengthened by the following conclusions, all constructed from the study's findings:

1. The dream deferred: Dual enrollment programs diminish the dream denied by granting participants with access to college; but ultimately, the dream is still deferred.

2. The dream realized: Dual enrollment programs provide participants with the confidence and belief that the dream can be a reality.

3. Reality is not a dream: As full-time college students, former dual enrollment participants often find that reality is more difficult than the dream.

These conclusions are explained below to provide an understanding of how this study has a broader impact on both dual enrollment programs and marginalized students.

The Dream Deferred

Dual enrollment programs diminish the dream denied by granting access, but ultimately, the dream is still deferred. For African Americans, Langston Hughes believed that dreams were the greatest asset of one's life due to the overbearing evidence of the marginalization of a people that existed in his day. His poetry often spoke of opportunities for the intellectually gifted to overcome oppression and the denial of access to pathways of enrichment (Hughes, 1935). Although in modern-day society African Americans are afforded greater opportunities than in the past, this "denial of access" still exists in achieving the status of the intellectually elite. The current study found one such barrier and gives rise to the opportunity for a more diverse population to gain access and ultimately achievement through dual enrollment in high school and college.

By allowing marginalized and at-risk students an opportunity to participate in dual enrollment, program providers give participants a chance to prove that they are able to tackle the rigors of college prior to being admitted as degree-seeking students. The access to college granted by dual enrollment programs gives participants a glimpse at something that is in some ways essential to future success while still withholding admission to the privilege of college.

One of the study participants stated, referring to the exposure to college while in the dual enrollment program:

> We got to walk around a college campus and see what it's about. It was just like we were in an actual college class and we were only high school students. So I expected to be challenged, which I was. And it was nerve wrecking as far as the first couple of days of going and actually getting a feel for it. It was a breeze from there because we knew what was expected of us and we did that.

The participant further stated, "…I felt like I was there to do a job and that was to prove that I could be in a college class taking a college-level course."

The Dream Realized

Dual enrollment programs provide participants with the confidence and belief that the dream can be a reality. Hughes once asked, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore—" (Hughes, 1990). Marginalized and at-risk students participating in dual enrollment programs will never know what happens to a dream deferred, as many of these students morph their dreams to their realities by attending their college of choice.

By giving students considered "at risk" an opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs, program providers lead these students to believe that they can attend the college or university of their choice. Participation in such programs gives these students the confidence needed to seek admission to institutions that they may not have otherwise considered or thought themselves capable enough to apply.

Recalling the academic awakening that the dual enrollment program encouraged, one participant shared, "Once I went to the dual enrollment program, it cleared up everything. It made me know that college is where I wanted to be and this program is going to get me to where I need to go." Regarding the academic confidence built by the dual enrollment program, the participant further stated:

> When I had the dual enrollment opportunity, I noticed very quickly that this is exactly what I need to get where I am trying to go, because as everyone knows, I have big ambitions. Once I had that experience, it cleared it up real quick; that is exactly what I need and I think the program very vividly portrayed exactly what I wanted to do and it showed me that this is what it would take for me to get what I wanted out of life.

Reality is not a Dream

As full-time college students, former dual enrollment participants often find that reality is more difficult than the dream. Hughes, writing on the realities of life, stated, "Oh, God of Dust and Rainbows, help us to see that without the dust the rainbow would not be" (Hughes, 1935). Through his poetry, Hughes poetically explicated that dreams must be measured and acquired through work and appreciation and that there may be difficulty in the realization of such. He attempts to explain and help those considered socially disadvantaged to understand the long road of work ahead because if someone seeks to capture the rainbow, he or she should be prepared for the many pathways along this road that are filled with dust.

By allowing marginalized students an opportunity to participate in dual enrollment, program providers give students a chance to preview college; as full-time college students, these students must call forth this knowledge to tackle the "real" college experience, which usually differs from the preview. Although dual enrollment may provide participants from at-risk populations with a preview of college, these students must be able to convert these archived experiences into knowledge and apply this knowledge once they become full-time college students, regardless of the type of institution they choose to attend.

One of the Aquinas Scholars participants expressed:

The dual enrollment program helped me build or start on my foundation for college. The road for college is not easy, so dual enrollment was a great driving factor to get me to where I need to be. I would recommend all students—seniors, juniors—take dual enrollment courses because it's a great opportunity to learn the college ropes from a different perspective before you actually get to college.

Offering more advice to prospective dual enrollment participants, he went on to say:

> So, when you do get there, you are prepared for the bigger experience. You don't want to walk into college believing, 'it's college, and it's just like high school or dual enrollment.' No, it's not going to be anything like that. It's nothing like that because now you have gained freedom from high school and you are in control of what you want to do. It takes a different responsibility, which is necessary for you to do the work and to complete everything that is required of you.

Discussion

In Chapter 2, it was stated that dual enrollment programs (1) provide a more rigorously enhanced curriculum while capturing and maintaining the attention of participants, (2) foster a positive and academically rigorous image of the school, (3) promote student academic achievement, and (4) boost high school graduation rates and increase the rates of students matriculating to college; dual enrollment programs further provide high school students with greater academic challenges and prepare them for the rigors of college (Adelman, 2004; Andrews, 2000; Chapman, 2001; Clark, 2001; Krueger, 2006). In addition, it was noted that dual enrollment programs build ongoing connections for later opportunities of collaboration between institutions, lessen inefficiencies between high school and college curriculum, and ease student transition by lessening the anxiety often experienced when a student goes from high school to college, thereby enriching the student experience and the experiences of the faculty (Clark, 2001; Greenberg, 1991; Krueger, 2006). The participants in this study, all former participants of the dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University, agreed that being in the program had a positive effect on their academic experiences in both high school and college. Although there was no consensus among participants on the degree of the effect, all of them agreed that the program was an

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invaluable resource in their academic preparation and if given the opportunity, they would participate in the program again.

Aligned with the purpose of the current study—to examine the effects of dual enrollment on the college readiness and persistence as well as the lived academic experiences of marginalized students—each of the student participants shared real-life academic experiences, but their opinions were as diverse as their college choices. Yet, all candidates believed that the dual enrollment program supported their academic success throughout their senior year in high school made them more prepared for college, and helped them decide on the type of college they would ultimately attend. Participants also agreed that participation in the program was partially responsible for their college persistence as well as their ability to interact socially once they became full-time college students. The perspectives shared by the participants of this study are congruent with those presented in previous studies demonstrating that dual enrollment adds to the educational experience of program participants (Robertson et al., 2001). Karp et al. (2004) also proved that these programs promote both college and high school collaboration so that program participants are prepared for the academic rigor that is expected at the college level. The effects of the Aquinas Scholars program vary although participants agree that it was a great opportunity, but many participants voiced that it was not the only factor influencing their college choices, readiness, and persistence.

McConnaha (1996) found that high school students participating in dual enrollment were highly motivated. These students also possessed positive attitudes and self-concept. Participants in the current study shared that although the dual enrollment program was

core of their college preparation, there were various factors contributing to their college choice, readiness, and persistence. Other factors included self-motivation, parental support, and high school initiatives. These factors, along with the dual enrollment program, were critical to the participants' academic experiences and served as support mechanisms.

Participants, vividly sharing their perspectives on the impact of the dual enrollment program and its effects on their college efforts, also provided insight to other integral aspects that may assist in the continued development of this program. Midcap (2002) found that views shared by the participants helped identify barriers that should be addressed to improve the opportunity and process at Chesapeake College. Although not an intended purpose of the current study, the participants' perspectives provided an opportunity for River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University to identify areas of improvement for the Aquinas Scholars program (see the Implications section).

Previous studies show that dual enrollment programs are often limited in the types of students that have access. Greenberg (1991) demonstrates that "advanced" and elite scholars are overrepresented in dual enrollment programs while "average" and marginalized students are overlooked, showing a failure to examine the possible success of different types of students. Also worthy of mention is that a majority of the high school students enrolled in accelerated learning programs are White and female. The impact of the dual enrollment program expressed by participants in the current study mirrored that seen in previous studies, despite the major demographic differences in this sample. As in previous studies, most participants in the current study were female, as

female students are more likely than male students to take advantage of such. This leads one to question the *type* of student that chooses to participate in dual enrollment as opposed to examining only the demographics of the participant body.

The Aquinas Scholars dual enrollment program is a partnership between a predominantly African American public charter school and a predominantly White private university that provides at-risk high school students with access to college-level courses. Due to the demographic differences in the Aquinas Scholars program and other dual enrollment partnerships, a more diverse perspective is presented here, providing a deeper understanding of the effects of dual enrollment on a more diverse body of participants. Studying such a program teaches us more about the ways dual enrollment affects students who oftentimes do not have access to such programs.

Implications

There were four themes that emerged from this study: (1) isolation, (2) college-going, (3) preparedness, and (4) balance. In examining the development of each of these themes, several implications can be drawn in which dual enrollment program participants, partners, and providers can better understand the impact of such a program.

Revisiting Theme 1: Isolation. Astin (1999) found that due to the lack of connection with other members of academic and social communities, minority students often experience difficulty persisting in college. In examining the Aquinas Scholars program, despite participants having connections with their high school peers, they shared that they did not feel connected to the college campus for various reasons, such as the limited time they students spent on campus, lack of a program orientation, and even

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being required to wear high school uniforms while on the college campus. These reasons, according to the participants, limited their access to the "real" college experience due to feelings of being merely high school students on a college campus.

Lotkowski et al. (2004) concluded that participation in dual enrollment programs makes students more proactive in integrating into the academic and social communities in the college setting. Participants in this study shared that despite feelings of isolation while in the dual enrollment program, the program eased the transition from high school student to college student. Many of them stated that the dual enrollment program had taught them "the ropes" and other things important aspects of the college environment. Study participants expressed that they gained a better understanding of the collegiate academic environment prior to becoming full-time college students—this familiarity was attained despite the reported feelings of isolation. Therefore, it can be concluded that students who participate in dual enrollment programs can gain a richer understanding of the college experience prior to enrolling at a postsecondary institution. Program providers, partners, and participants will find identifying expectations at the beginning of the dual enrollment experience will better prepare students for academic success in high school and later on in college.

- *Program providers* must ensure that dual enrollment participants are exposed to the most important aspects of the multifaceted college experience, extending beyond simply taking classes on the campus. Providers must also ensure that dually enrolled students take classes with

full-time college students and that they have access to academic tools and
resources outside of class.

- *Program partners* should orientate program participants to college, openly
discussing the expectations and responsibilities associated participating in
such a program. Partners should also provide participants with a high
school staff member dedicated to the dual enrollment program and to
ongoing student success; ongoing assistance should be available to
program providers and participants.

- *Program participants* must understand and accept the losses and gains
associated with the participation in such a program, as participants attempt
to mesh two academic worlds. Something is often removed from one
environment to compensate for the gain in the other.

Revisiting Theme 2: College-Going. Many of the study participants had plans to
attend college prior to participating in the Aquinas Scholars program, citing various
sources of motivation such as self-motivation and the push from their parents. Despite
having different sources of motivation, participants did express that the experience gave
them more confidence and brought higher education closer within their reach. Windham
and Perkins (2001) found that students experience greater self-confidence and academic
preparation before enrolling as full-time college students if they are able to enroll in dual
enrollment courses and do well, which is perfectly aligned with the current study.

Study participants thought that River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas
University was a great match, discussing the transition from the high school classroom to

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the class on the college campus and the similarities in the environments. However, despite the schools' similarities, most of the participants decided to attend colleges different from St. Aquinas University. This difference in college choice, according to study participants, was because they were not exposed to the full college experience while dually enrolled.

In addition, dual enrollment programs often solidify participants' interest in earning a Bachelor's degree as well as aid them in their efforts to determine if the institution fits their academic and social needs (Kleiman, 2001). This was upheld in the current study and demonstrated by the participants' college choices upon the completion of the program. Although participants claimed to enjoy the dual enrollment experience, they ultimately sought admission to colleges further away from home with more students and a social environment that differed from their dual enrollment college experience. It can be concluded that students who participate in dual enrollment have more confidence in their ability to apply to, be accepted in, and succeed in college. Program providers, partners, and participants will find that a good "fit" between institutions and a diverse selection of rigorous would be beneficial to all since the program and the participants can grow from these reciprocally enriching experiences.

- *Program providers* must consider the diverse needs of participants; such consideration must be given to class size, the types of courses being offered, and the consistency of rigor throughout the curriculum.
- *Program partners* should understand the concept of best institutional "fit" for participants, as such efforts will greatly assist participants once they

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become full-time college students.

- *Program participants* should begin their college searches early to understand the pivotal nature of this choice; doing such allows students to understand the program better and assess institutional fit.

Revisiting Theme 3: Preparedness. Tinto (1993) indicated that dual enrollment programs can greatly impact participants' social and academic integration, which in turn influences the commitment to the institution and to degree completion. Midcap (2002) found that dual enrollment also purposely impacts student integration by ensuring that students are exposed to the rigors of college coursework, allowed to interact with faculty and other college students, able to experience campus culture, and granted access to student support services. Collectively, these activities may increase an institution's student retention rates (Karp, 2006).

Aquinas Scholars participants believed that the experience prepared them for their transition from high school to college, despite the institution they chose to attend. In addition to the acceptance of their dual enrollment credits by their respective colleges, all the participants believed that the college-level courses made them more competitive college students. Participants referenced the benefits of the writing skills they acquired while dually enrolled. Previous studies show that students who participate in dual enrollment programs are likely to be exposed to a more rigorous academic environment; therefore, these students are better prepared than students who did not participate in such programs.

However, a common concern regarding dual enrollment is that the college courses that high school students are allowed to take are not as rigorous as the courses for full-time college students. Although reasons for this notion may vary, the limited time that high school students have to commit to the college experience encourages this belief (Bailey et al., 2002). Some Aquinas Scholars participants believed that a few of the dual enrollment faculty members were more lenient with them because they were high school students. Some participants also expressed that the dual enrollment partnership should have involved a larger institution, which may have exposed them larger classroom environments with a more rigorous curriculum and additional full-time college students.

While participants agreed on the benefit of being dually enrolled, all of them expressed a desire to have taken additional college courses. This opportunity, according to participants, may have enriched their academic experiences and better prepared them for other critical courses (e.g., math and science). The implication is that students who participate in dual enrollment can gain valuable academic skills necessary for college success and degree completion. Program providers, partners, and participants will find that successful navigation of the dual enrollment experience strengthens student confidence that extends beyond high school experiences.

- *Program providers* should understand that the types of students that enroll in these programs are frequently self-motivated and often have strong support systems that nurture their academic growth; providers should ensure the same extent of motivation throughout their programs—involving the faculty, staff, courses, etc.

- *Program partners* should develop relationships with each participant to ensure adequate levels of motivation, which in turn aids in addressing program shortcomings (e.g., academic, personal, programmatic).

- *Program participants* must be committed to the program to promote their own academic success, which supports their transition to college and ensures that they go to college with both confidence and college credits.

Revisiting Theme 4: Balance. Tinto (1975) found that as members of the college community, students must interact and integrate within the college environment, which is comprised of two systems—the academic system and social system. Such a finding applies to dual enrollment students while in high school and later on in college students. It is especially applicable to dual enrollment students taking college-level courses on a college campus while still in high school.

A few participants discussed the relationships they were able to build with full-time college students in their dual enrollment classes. These participants shared that having college students in their classes gave them a better grasp of the college experience, both academically and socially, and provided them with a multidimensional view of being a college student while still in high school. Having more responsibilities than high school students not dually enrolled taught participants lessons on *balance* prior to their college enrollment. Other Aquinas Scholars participants expressed their limited interactions with full-time college students and failure to blend in with the St. Aquinas culture. Most participants cited time restrictions and fewer opportunities to engage with on the campus, which was a disappointing aspect of the dual enrollment experience.

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However, this provided them with the impetus to find academic and social balance once they became full-time college students.

Reflecting on the dual enrollment experience, participants were able to identify points while they were dually enrolled that would aid their integration and persistence once they became college students. This desire to be prepared and balanced as college students was due in part to the absence of full-time college students to serve as models. According to the participants, this absence of interaction with college students did not cause them to retreat as dually enrolled students but instead motivated them to develop their own "ideal college student," as outlined in the participants' high school senior portfolios (and a senior seminar course).

According to Tinto (1975), individuals enter social organizations, in this case college, with varying background attributes and experiences as well as personal educational achievement expectations and initial levels of affinity for their respective colleges. As full-time college students, the participants went to college with academic experiences from the dual enrollment program with ideas about college from these experiences. Although most participants shared that their initial transition from high school to college differed from what they expected, all of them agreed that dual enrollment had eased the experience.

Burns and Lewis (2000) found that participants in dual enrollment programs based on a college campus enjoyed more academic and social independence as opposed to dual enrollment students taking these classes at their high schools. Participants in college-based programs are allowed to explore the college experience, develop

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themselves according to their experiences, and get a head start on getting involved in college life. This development aids them in their later academic and social integration as full-time college students. Balancing student involvement efforts, as stressed by Astin (1999), is beneficial to academic and social integration, as this integration is the best indicator of success in the adjustment to college life.

Participants reported an understanding of the academic and social systems in the college environment, which was gained from their participation in the Aquinas Scholars program. This balancing act, essential to college success, assisted many of the participants in their initial transition into college but did not help to ease their fears. Many of them had experiences contrary to their expectations. The implication is that dual enrollment program participants should be given a chance (via college campus opportunities while dually enrolled) to find academic and social balance prior to becoming full-time college students. Program providers, partners and participants will find that student engagement and student responsibility better prepares the dually enrolled student to succeed in college.

- *Program providers* must ensure that dual enrollment participants are granted academically and socially engaging experiences and given opportunities to get involved and prove themselves as responsible students.
- *Program partners* must find ways to schedule dually enrolled students so that they have time and opportunities to engage with other students and get involved on campus.

- *Program participants* must be willing to take advantage of academic and social opportunities on the college campus by stepping outside their high school comfort zones to get the "real" college experience while participating in the dual enrollment program.

Directions for Future Research

The participants in the current study were all former participants of the Aquinas Scholars dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University. Future studies could examine the perceptions of others involved but not actively participating in the program, including the faculty and staff of both institutions. Their perceptions would offer more insight into dual enrollment participants' academic engagement and social interactions. This may also provide a more detailed description of the program's processes to aid the understanding of possible program shortfalls. Such a study may assist in the construction of a model for other dual enrollment programs uniting urban high schools with higher education institutions.

Another direction for future research would be to compare the academic achievement of the participants examined in the current study with those participating in dual enrollment partnerships in which students (1) are dually enrolled at historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs), (2) are dually enrolled at larger predominantly White colleges or universities, or (3) are dually enrolled in college courses but remain on their high school campuses. It may be advantageous to study students' academic achievement while they are still in high school and once they move on to college, paying attention to these students' persistence in college and the time it takes them to graduate

from college. A study examining the varying types of dual enrollment programs can partnerships that seem to be better fits for certain types of students. Although the current study specifically catered to the population of students that participated in the dual enrollment program between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University, future research opportunities may provide a better understanding how to address the diversity of needs amongst a more diverse population of students. Specifically, a longitudinal research study that investigates college choice and graduation of program participants from different dual enrollment programs would serve to be an invaluable addition to existing research. Commencing with a sample of students from each of the programs, a researcher could follow this group of students from college application to college graduation, examining their academic achievement, as well as, their college readiness and persistence.

Another opportunity for future research is to examine the ways dual enrollment affects parents in conjunction with their participating child(ren). As shown in the literature, dual enrollment programs have an impact on everyone involved in a child's education, including parents, considering the major role they play in a student's life prior to full-time college enrollment. Parents' input could possibly provide more insight to dually enrolled students' academic achievement in high school and their readiness and persistence for and during college.

Conclusion

Benson and Harkavy (2001) stated that partnerships among communities, higher education institutions, and schools are essential to the educational reform that is

necessary to trigger the changes that could possibly address the possible shortfalls in the modern-day education system. An increasingly favored measure of educational reform that connects multiple levels of education is dual enrollment, or the ability to allow high school students to enroll in college courses (Bradley, 2007).

Despite previous studies outlining that most dual enrollment participants are White, female, and supposedly "advanced" students, dual enrollment is beneficial to diverse populations of students, as demonstrated in the current study. According to the literature, these programs consistently ignore the needs of marginalized and at-risk student populations, who are continuously denied access. Unfortunately, dual enrollment programs often have the same approaches as the prevailing educational system, which allows access to "advanced" and elite students while overlooking "average" and marginalized students, without appreciating the reciprocal success possible if a more diverse student population has access (Greenberg, 1991).

The primary purpose of the current study was to understand the effects of a dual enrollment program on the college readiness and persistence of marginalized students. Student participants shared their academic experiences both during the dual enrollment program and later on as full-time college students through open-ended surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. The results of this study demonstrate the multiple ways that dual enrollment programs affect the college readiness and persistence of marginalized students not only by encouraging students to participate in dual enrollment programs but also by providing high school students with full access to the college experience. In addition to understanding the impact of the dual enrollment program,

student participants also discussed other program-related opportunities that may aid future program participants as well as perceived program shortcomings.

As this study has found, students that are dually enrolled should be orientated to college so that they understand the expectations and requirements of college and are given some direction on the development of study skills and finding balance as a student. In addition, high schools and colleges partnering to offer dual enrollment should be aware of the ways that program participants perceive and are affected by the classes being offered, class sizes, and academic rigor, among other things.

Considering the facts that (1) all of the participants in this study were accepted into four-year institutions and (2) over 95% of these participants are still actively enrolled in college, this study demonstrates that dual enrollment programs also assist marginalized students in their college readiness and persistence, just as they have done for students from nonminority groups as well as students considered "advanced." Dual enrollment assists participants thought to be "at-risk" by helping them understand their academic preferences pertaining to collegiate educational development, making them more confident in their college-selection efforts, and also motivating their integration in both the academic and social aspects of college life.

With the support of dual enrollment programs, many marginalized and at-risk students, who in the past would have not considered reaching beyond their gazes, can be afforded greater opportunities, which is thereby a true prospect of furthering the dreams

of these students. Such a life-altering opportunity is what Langston Hughes (1990) spoke

of when he said:

> "Hold fast to dreams
> For if dreams die
> Life is a broken-winged bird
> That cannot fly.
> Hold fast to dreams
> For when dreams go
> Life is a barren field
> Frozen with snow."

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Appendix A:

Institutional Review Board Approval

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Institutional Review Board

To: Robert Lemoyne Robinson
                      Leadership

From: Chair, Institutional Review Board
                      For the Protection of Human Subjects
                      irb@memphis.edu

Subject: Dual Enrollment: Breaking the Mold for College Readiness and
                      Persistence in an Urban Charter School (081911-825)

Approval Date: August 25, 2011

This is to notify you of the board approval of the above referenced protocol. This project
was reviewed in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical
principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:
1. At the end of one year from the approval date, an approved renewal must be in
   effect to continue the project. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form is
   no longer valid and accrual of new subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished or terminated, the attached form must be completed
   and sent to the board.
3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without board approval, except
   where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards or threats to subjects.
   Such changes must be reported promptly to the board to obtain approval.
4. The stamped, approved human subjects consent form must be used. Photocopies of
   the form may be made.

This approval expires one year from the date above, and must be renewed prior to that
date if the study is ongoing.

_____
Chair, Institutional Review Board
The University of Memphis

Cc: Dr. John Carson Smart

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Appendix B:

Open-Ended Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic achievement and social engagement of former student participants in the Aquinas Scholars Program—a dual enrollment partnership between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University. This study also aims to provide a detailed description of the pros and cons of this particular dual enrollment program in order to provide a broader perspective relative to student matriculation to higher education.

To assist in this effort, you will be asked about your experiences while participating in the Aquinas Scholars Program and your transition from River Charter Academy to postsecondary education.

Although the survey may take up to 30 minutes to complete, your candid responses will assist us in our efforts of ascertaining useful information towards the expansion and improvement of the Aquinas Scholars Program.

As your participation in this study is voluntary, your answers and comments will remain confidential. Information released from this study will in no way reveal the identification of any participant.

For your further convenience, you may also complete this survey online. Please visit www.surveymonkey.com/Aquinasscholars.

High School Experiences – Prior to Dual Enrollment
In this section of the survey, you will be asked to respond to questions as they relate to your high school experiences prior to your enrollment in the Aquinas Scholars Program.

1. Circle the number that best represents your level of involvement in co-curricular activities (such as student government, clubs, sports, etc.) from 9th through 12th grade.

Not Involved				Somewhat Involved				Very Involved	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. Circle the number that represents your overall level of satisfaction with your high school experience from 9th through 12th grade.

Very Dissatisfied				Neutral				Very Satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Circle the number that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at your high school from 9th through 12th grade.
a. Peers/Other Scholars

No Relationship				Somewhat of a Relationship				Great Relationship	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

b. Professors

No Relationship				Somewhat of a Relationship				Great Relationship	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

c. Administrators and Office Personnel

No Relationship				Somewhat of a Relationship				Great Relationship	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. What did you miss the most about not being enrolled in a traditional public high school?

5. What did you miss the least about not being enrolled in a traditional public high school?

Dual Enrollment Experiences
In this section of the survey, you will be asked to respond to questions as they relate to your experiences during your enrollment in the Aquinas Scholars Programs at River Charter Academy.

6. Rate (in order of most influential to least influential) what influenced your decision to enroll in the Aquinas Scholars Program? (1 is the most influential and 10 is the least influential)

____ Parental pressure   ____ Opportunity to earn college credit while in high school
____ Free college courses   ____ Opportunity to leave school early
____ Administrator/Faculty/Counselor ____ Opportunity to experience college while in high school
____ Friends   ____ Wanted to be part of something different
____ College preparation   ____ Other _____

7. Circle the number that best represents your level of involvement in co-curricular activities (such as student government, clubs, sports, etc.) while enrolled at the Aquinas Scholars Program.

Not Involved   Somewhat Involved   Very Involved
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

8. Circle the number that best represents your overall level of satisfaction with the Aquinas Scholars Program.

Very Dissatisfied   Neutral   Very Satisfied
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. Mark the box that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at the Aquinas Scholars Program.

a. Peers/Other Scholars

No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

b. Professors

No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

c. Administrators and Office Personnel

No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

10. What did you like the most about the Aquinas Scholars Program?

11. What did you like the least about the Aquinas Scholars Program?

12. What changes would you recommend for the Aquinas Scholars Program?

13. What should remain as a part of the Aquinas Scholars Program?

College Readiness

In this section of the survey, you will be asked to respond to questions as they relate to your transition from the Aquinas Scholars Program at River Charter Academy to the university or college of your choice.

14. After graduation from City University did you enroll in college or university?

_____YES   If so, which one? Please name: _____

_____NO   If not, please skip to question #23.

15. What was your major at the university?

16. Do you believe that the Aquinas Scholars Program prepared you to do well academically at the college or university?

_____YES

_____NO   If not, please state what could have been done better.

17. Did you face any challenges in transitioning to your college or university?

_____YES

_____NO   If so, please describe the particular types of challenges

College Experiences

In this section of the survey, you will be asked to respond to questions as they relate to experiences at your college or university.

18. Mark the box that best represents your level of involvement in co-curricular activities (such as student government, clubs, sports, etc.) while enrolled in college.

Not Involved   Somewhat Involved   Very Involved
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

19. Mark the box that represents your overall level of satisfaction while enrolled in college.

Very Dissatisfied   Neutral   Very Satisfied
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

20. Mark the box that best represents the quality of your relationships with people while enrolled in college. Relationships with:

a. Other Students
No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

b. Faculty Members
No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

c. Administrative Personnel and Offices
No Relationship   Somewhat of a Relationship   Great Relationship
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

21. What did you like most about the college you were enrolled?

22. What did you like the least about the college you were enrolled?

Outcomes

In this section of the survey, you will be asked to respond to questions about the overall experience and outcomes related to participating in the Aquinas Scholars Program.

23. Please indicate the highest level of education:

_____   Completed an associate's degree

_____   Started a bachelor's degree program

_____   Completed a bachelor's degree

24. How do you feel about missing out on a "traditional high school experience"?

25. If you could start over again, would you go to the Aquinas Scholars Program?

_____ Definitely yes   _____ Probably yes   _____ Probably no   _____ Definitely no

26. As you reflect on your experience with the Aquinas Scholars Program, is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences that you think would be helpful?

Demographics

27. Write in your age: _____

28. Your gender: _____ Male   _____ Female

29. Date of initial enrollment in the Aquinas Scholars Program

_____ Fall, 2008   _____ Fall, 2009   _____ Fall, 2010

30.   What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Mark only one)

_____ American Indian or Native American

_____ Asian American or Pacific Islander

_____ Black or African American

_____ White (non-Hispanic)

_____ Hispanic or Latino

_____ Multiracial/Other

_____ I prefer not to respond

Thank you for sharing your perspective of the Aquinas Scholars Program, as well as, your college experiences. Your participation in this study will assist in providing useful information for improving and expanding the dual enrollment program at River Charter Academy.

After completing the survey, please click submit and we will receive your completed survey immediately.

If you have any additional questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact R. Lemoyne Robinson at 901-212-5371.

Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Focus Group Questions

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
The following list of questions will be used for the focus group questions. Where appropriate, the interviewees will be asked to expand upon their answers.

1. What were the initial experiences of the Aquinas Scholars in the dual enrollment program?

1. How did your dual enrollment experience affect your performance in your courses while in high school?

2. How was your comfort level in the college classroom while in the dual enrollment program? Were you less or more active than you were on your high school campus?

3. While enrolled in the dual enrollment program did you visit with professors outside of class to better understand a lecture or an assignment?

2. How does the dual enrollment experience effect the decision of Aquinas Scholars to attend college?

1. Was the dual enrollment experience the key factor in you deciding to go to college?

2. Did your dual enrollment course credits transfer to your college or university?

3. If so, how did your dual enrollment courses affect your understanding and performance in the class(es)? For example, were the classes you took more advanced than your peers' due to prerequisites being previously met in your dual enrollment program?

4. How did your dual enrollment experience affect your performance in your courses while in college?

3. What comparisons can Aquinas Scholars make between the college experience they had at River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University as compared to the subsequent college experience as a full-time student?

1. How was your comfort level in the college classroom while in college? Were you less or more active than you were on your dual enrollment campus?

2. Did you feel more comfortable in large, lecture-based classes or classes that were the size of the dual enrollment courses?

3. While enrolled in college did you visit with professors outside of class to better understand a lecture or an assignment?

4. Do you feel like your dual enrollment professors were similar to your college professors in their teaching methods? Attitude? Workload?

5. Did any of your professors know you by name while in college?

Appendix C:

One-On-One Interview Questions

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list of questions will be used as a follow-up to the focus group questions. Where appropriate, the participants will be asked to expand upon their answers. There will be two interview sessions; therefore, these questions will be divided between the sessions.

1. Did your Aquinas Scholars Program experience take away from or add to your overall high school experience? In what way?

2. How did your Aquinas program affect your high school classroom? Were there parallels or completely different experiences?

3. Were you socially active in high school? If so, tell me about some of those activities and why you got involved. If not, tell me why you did not get involved?

4. Did your Aquinas experience make you more comfortable with deciding to go to college?

5. Would you recommend dual enrollment to a high school student? If so, why? If not, why not?

6. What were the factors that made you decide to go to college?

7. Did your Aquinas Scholars Program experience take away from or add to your overall college experience? And in what way?

8. How did your Aquinas program affect your college classroom? Were there parallels or completely different experiences?

9. Do you believe you were well prepared for the college by the dual enrollment program and River Charter Academy? If so, how? If not, please expand on what could have been done differently.

10. Were you socially active in college? If so, tell me about some of those activities and why you got involved. If not, tell me why you did not get involved?

11. If you could make any recommendation to enhance the Aquinas Scholars Program, what would it be?

12. If you could change anything about your college experience, what would it be?