

DISSERTATION

SUSTAINED PARTNERSHIPS: THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
OF MEANINGFUL STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINED PARTNERSHIPS: THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANINGFUL STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

This phenomenological study was designed to explore the one-on-one connections between successful students and the faculty members with whom a meaningful relationship was fostered. The specific focus was on the establishment, development, and reciprocity within the context of the relationships. By comparing the students' experiences to their expectations coming into college, the study pinpointed specific ways that faculty member interventions encouraged relationship development. The defining themes from the student stories were *commits time*, *connects to college*, *creates culture*, *challenges performance*, and *consistently cares*.

Collectively, these five themes intertwined to provide a framework for the experience. Further synthesis showed student expectations for the relationship ranged from utilizing the faculty member as a guide, an expert, a friend, or an educator. Analysis of the themes and textural-structural synthesis led to the emergence of the essence of the phenomenon, *sustained partnership*. The concept of a *sustained partnership* encompasses the goals that the student and the faculty member were investing in change and driving towards success together. The essence continues with the idea that the relationship was based on a symbiotic component in which both parties are looking out for one another.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As the community college system across the nation has advanced, there has been a significant focus on enhancement of the student experience, both in student services and in academic rigor. Student affairs programs have grown exponentially as expectations for the college experience have risen. Howard (2005) argued that expectations are closely linked to the schema students use to process information and make decisions about college. These expectations may influence student behaviors inside and outside the classroom in ways that help reinforce the characteristics of academic environments (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). As a result, schools across the nation have expanded their offerings. Residence life programs have upgraded to promote student interaction, intercollegiate athletics programs have exploded to attract diverse students, and the opportunities to learn leadership through involvement with clubs and organizations have spiked (Weinberg, 2005; Li, Maximova, Saunders, Whalen, & Shelley II, 2007).

Entering students' experiences generally fall far short of their expectations, a phenomenon referred to as the "freshman myth" among first-year students (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Pike, 2006). College administrators are called upon to debunk these myths and can do so in one of two ways. The first is to help students lower their expectations; the second is to improve students' experiences. Kuh (1999) advocates that the advantage of the latter approach is that meeting high expectations in some areas helps students maintain high expectations for learning as well.

Academically, the student experience in college differs from that of high school. Some incoming students arrive well-prepared for the challenges that await them and others arrive ill-suited to meet the imposed demands; nearly all of them spend the first few weeks “simply overwhelmed” by the college experience (Kidwell & Reising, 2005). Kidwell and Reising (2005) continue by explaining that the incoming students learn two important lessons quickly: “(1) College is not high school; one cannot just ‘coast’ through and (2) the successful college student takes responsibility for his or her education” (p. 254). One of the most significant changes for students is the perception of their own learning. The dynamic of thinking changes as students are no longer expected to recite answers but to think, and to think for themselves (Erickson & Strommer, 1991; Kidwell & Reising, 2005). Perry (1981) described the sensation as the shift from dualism to multiplicity. Learning evaluation transitions away from simple right and wrong labels and towards categories based on the interplay of more complex ideas and abstract reasoning.

Students are now called upon to absorb, interpret, and apply more information than they ever have in the past. In addition to what is presented in the classroom, students are required to read a significant amount, be active in online learning communities, and work in small groups to meet specific course objectives. As Lammers, Keisler, Curren, Cours, and Connett (2005) proved, students and faculty share perceptions about how hard students have to work to be successful in an academic environment. Still, these new resources cannot serve as a substitute for the vital interaction between student and faculty as a learning tool (O’Toole, Spinelli, & Wetzel, 2000). As additional technologies and learning paradigms emerge, students need to see faculty members as partners in

navigating an ever-expanding pool of knowledge. Both students and faculty members will be well-served to see faculty members' role not as an authority but as a facilitator, responsible for helping students better see themselves as a learner (Kidwell & Reising, 2005).

Aside from the better student programming opportunities and heightened academic demands, students are also facing increased demands from life outside of school. Improvements in technology have allowed students to maintain instant access with parents, siblings, and friends. In the past some students took advantage of their time at college to separate from these securities and learn to live independently. This change in role status is important. "The transition to college from high school challenged young adults to live independently, handle finances, maintain academic standards and integrity, and adjust to a new social life. It also provided an opportunity to modify existing roles (for example, son or daughter) and to adopt new roles (for example, college student)" (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009, p.86).

Collectively, the increased opportunities and expectations both within college and outside of college while the students are enrolled have led to a marked increase on the amount of stress that today's college students are experiencing. Balancing the opportunities of a new social environment, the demands of college classes, and the desire to stay connected to home while adjusting to life as an adult is not an easy endeavor. Seeking to balance all of these priorities often results in even higher levels of stress being reported by students, both during their first semester and beyond. College has been found to be stressful for many young adults, with as many as 75% of students classifying

themselves as moderately stressed and 12% classifying themselves as severely stressed (Pierceall & Keim, 2007, p. 707).

When this stress hits, the students look to the institution to resolve the issues. As Weinberg (2005) confirms:

We have encouraged a sense of entitlement among them, so that they increasingly view themselves as clients that our institutions are obliged to serve – isolated individuals with problems to be fixed – rather than members of a community who work together to develop solutions (p. 13).

In many cases the institutional resources cannot simply step in and resolve the issue. For many of these students, the extended stress may lead to the decision to stop attending classes either temporarily or permanently. Other students find ways to manage the stress and continue pursuit of their goals. The latter group may simply have higher self-motivation and stress management skills. Or, there could be other factors at work that give this group an advantage over those that elect to stop pursuing their degree.

For many of these students, the intervening factor is the emergence of a meaningful student-staff relationship. In my own experience as a community college professional, I have seen these relationships emerge and both directly and indirectly witnessed the impact they make on the individuals involved. Although the names were changed in the following two vignettes, the impact of the staff member was not. Reviewing the stories of Mark and Shelby provides a baseline for understanding how powerful these connections can be.

Mark is a full-time student who completed high school the spring before enrolling. Mark is a smart individual but never felt challenged in school. As a result, he lost the motivation to try. Mark knew that he did not have to work very hard to earn B's, and he decided that B's were good enough. He chose to come to a community college

because he is a first-generation student and not sure that he belongs in college at all.

Mark's goal is to get a degree and then go into his father's plumbing business.

During orientation, Mark met with an advisor who helped him register for 15 general education credits, including economics, a lab science, and American history. A month into the semester, Mark is really struggling to adapt to the different academic workload and decides that his gut feeling was right and college may not be a fit for him after all. The reading load in his history course alone is more than he can handle.

The withdrawal policy at his institution requires the signature of the faculty members teaching the courses. Mark gets the signatures of 4 of his teachers; however, his history professor refuses to sign the paperwork until Mark visits him during office hours. When Mark goes to the instructor's office, they talk about his struggles and begin formulating a plan to lower Mark's course load, improve his study habits, and continue progressing towards a credential. Mark agrees to meet with the professor weekly for the remainder of the semester. During these meetings, Mark steadily demonstrates higher levels of confidence in himself and motivation to excel. In November, the teacher helps Mark register for another semester's worth of courses, including the second half of American history.

Mark and the professor continue their weekly meetings during the second semester and Mark's second year at the school, even after Mark was no longer enrolled in any section with this teacher. During this time, the professor helped Mark complete paperwork to transfer to the local university. After graduation, Mark sought out the history professor, gave him a huge hug, and introduced the teacher to his family as "the

man who saved me.” As the student walked away the teacher was overwhelmed with a sense of pride.

Shelby is a mother of two and has loved her life as a stay-at-home mom for the last 12 years. She has enjoyed volunteering 3 days a week at her children’s school for the last 6 years. Shelby graduated at the top of her class in high school and had to work hard to earn her grades. After graduating from high school, Shelby spent several years working in retail and enjoyed interacting with the customers and managing the floor. She feels confident that much of the knowledge she had at high school graduation has faded over time.

Shelby is returning to the community college 22 years after completing high school because she knows her marriage is coming to an end, and she wants to be able to provide for her children. Shelby’s nervous energy comes across as shyness. As a result she does not really make many new connections as she completes the enrollment steps. In many ways, she feels like just another number as she completes her application for admission, submits her financial aid packet, takes her placement test, and registers to attend a new student orientation. During orientation, she sits in a large auditorium and listens to several presentations, proceeds to a campus tour and session on getting involved on campus, learns how the computer registration system works, and listens to an advisor talk through all of the academic program options she has.

Totally overwhelmed, Shelby gathers her purse, pen, and notebook and begins walking back to her car. As she is leaving the building, a faculty member was entering. The faculty member makes eye contact with Shelby, smiles, and asks her how she is doing. Sensing the half-heartedness of her reply, the teacher asks if he can do anything to

help her. Shelby starts to blurt out the whole story. The faculty member invites Shelby to a quiet place, and they talk through all of the steps, discuss Shelby's goals, and get her registered for classes. Shelby walks away from their hour-long conversation in much better spirits and with a confidence that she can be successful.

Three weeks into the semester, the work starts piling up on Shelby. Luckily, the time management skills she has learned as a parent allow her to make a few small adjustments to her schedule and carve out the time she needs to study. From time to time in the hall, she sees the faculty member from her orientation. These days when she sees him, she always smiles back.

Shelby and Mark's stories offer some valuable insight into understanding the phenomenon of the college experience. As we review their stories, several concepts merit discussion. First, Shelby and Mark are typical students. According to Sax (2003), today's college students are easily labeled by several trends: they are impacted by "grade inflation, increasing financial concerns, heightened stress, academic and political disengagement, declining social activism, and record-level volunteerism" (p. 16). Mark and Shelby are good examples of how these labels can interact with one another and define the student experience. Providing personalized, comprehensive, effective service to students like Shelby and Mark directly represents the mission of the community college system.

Second, without the intentional interventions of the faculty members, these students' next step may likely have been permanent disengagement from the college. Mark's lack of confidence and early struggles in history may have confirmed his initial feelings of not belonging and encouraged him to walk away for good. Had Shelby left the

building without being stopped that day, it seems highly unlikely she would have made the effort to enroll again.

Third, the choices made by the faculty member may or may not have seemed like an extraordinary effort at the time. Mark's history professor and the faculty member who stopped Shelby may have seen a student in crisis and made an extra effort to assist. They may also have acted in that way simply by their nature or because they considered what they did a part of their job.

Fourth, Shelby and Mark likely feel an established bond with the faculty members who helped them and will likely continue to seek them out for support and further mentorship as additional barriers arise in their college experience (Tinto, 1993, p. 159-160). The struggles to adapt to college are not unique to these students, but are also not likely to be one-time occurrences. A major purpose of higher education is to help the student develop and confirm an identity. Identity development does not complete after successfully reconciling one crisis. As Tatum (1997) stated, "The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives. The process of integrating the component parts of our self-definition is indeed a lifelong journey" (p. 20). Shelby and Mark will continue to rely on these partnerships as they face other crossroads on their journey.

Fifth, for every story like the ones offered above, there are many more where the faculty member involved was not alert enough to step in and help prevent the student from disengaging without an institutional intervention (Tinto, 1993). On average, only 15 to 25% of all institutional departures are a result of academic failure (Tinto, 1993, p. 82). The vast majority of exiting students leave for other reasons, most notably problems

adjusting to college life, perceived incongruence between the individual and the institution, and feelings of isolation (Tinto, 1993, p. 82). In far too many of these cases, the students end up either stopping out or dropping out of their educational pursuits without ever having to be held accountable for why they are making the decision. It must be noted that “individuals leave not so much from the absence of integration as from the judgment of the undesirability of integration” (Tinto, 1993, p. 50). As a demographic, voluntary leavers are far less likely than retained students to be able to identify someone on campus with whom they have established a meaningful relationship (Husband, 1976, & Bligh, 1977, as cited in Tinto, 1993). Colleges that are committed to retaining students must build a culture that ensures students perceive themselves as belonging to the community and emphasizes meaningful engagement with faculty members.

Purpose Statement

The study results from the six years I spent in the student affairs profession and the three years I have spent in higher education outside of student affairs. Throughout this time, I have witnessed directly and indirectly the impact that individual college employees have had on students successfully achieving their goals. I have also run into students several years removed from the college and learned that they never met the goals they had set for themselves when they initially enrolled. I started to notice a difference in the two populations; those who were engaged with a faculty member persisted until goal completion; those who didn't make this connection were less likely to reach their self-identified goal. I felt strongly that the problem was the latter group's lack of connection with a faculty member. Due to this relationship not existing, the likelihood of students achieving their goals is lower.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore one-on-one relationships between students and the faculty members with whom connections were fostered. Specifically, a “phenomenology provides a research approach that allows for in-depth study of participants who share a common experience” (Moustakas, 1994). The dynamics of student and faculty interaction remain an area of inquiry that has been largely ignored (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991, p. 90). Thus, the purpose was to better understand how students experienced these relationships and identify the common themes that students assigned to the establishment, development, and reciprocity within their context. The purpose also included understanding the benefits the students attributed to the relationships and their evaluation of the relationships’ overall impact. By comparing the students’ experiences to their expectations coming into college, the study pinpointed specific ways that faculty member interventions helped incoming students reinforce high expectations or debunk college myths and find success. The achievement of this goal allowed me to raise awareness of the need to create and foster these relationships within the culture of an effective community college.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided guidance for the study:

1. How do relationships between students and faculty get established?
2. What are the specific benefits that students perceive they receive from the relationship?
3. How do students perceive their college journey would have changed if this relationship had not been developed and nurtured?

Delimitations

There were several choices that were made to narrow the scope of this study. These included the decision to study a single community college which was easily accessible to me. This particular community college is in a southern state, suburban, medium-sized, not-for-profit, and part of a state system.

A second choice that was made to focus the study was to limit the nominator list to teaching faculty at the school. There is no doubt that staff members at a college represent a critically important resource for students and that many staff members build relationships with students that equal, and sometimes surpass, the depth of the relationships that students build with faculty members. However, these relationships may develop in a different manner than student-faculty relationships develop and should be studied as an independent phenomenon.

The final choice that was made to narrow the study was not to interview the faculty members who identified the participants. Although there is significant interest in determining whether there was intentionality behind the faculty members' decisions and if they interpret the components of the relationship in the same terms the students do, that research was deemed beyond the scope of this particular study.

Significance of the Study

Enrollment in the community college system across America continues to expand significantly. Associate's level degree-granting colleges and universities and public, two-year institutions account for just under one-fifth (18%) of all postsecondary institutions (Borden, 2008, p. 9). Yet, community college enrollees account for 44% of all U.S. undergraduates and 43% of all first-time freshmen (American Association of Community

Colleges, 2011). Higher education enrollment grew 300,000 students in 2008 (Borden, 2009). Due to attendance at the four-year schools staying relatively flat, almost all of these additional students are being served in the community college system (Borden, 2009). Between the fall of 2008 and the fall of 2010, there was an additional 15% estimated growth leading to a total of 7.4 million students enrolled nationally at a community college. Higher enrollment demands means that schools must place an increased emphasis on getting students through to the completion of their goals to open up classroom seats for the students that are entering (Borden, 2009). The biggest area of demographic growth for community colleges has long been students that are between 18 and 24 years old. Today's arrivals in this age bracket are the millennial generation and are setting foot onto campus with a well-defined set of high expectations.

Students who enter into the semester and withdraw prior to course completion represent an interesting dynamic for the school. Although these students' time with the college would be considered a success by enrollment figure and revenue standards, the school certainly failed to achieve its core objective: moving that individual closer to a credential or achievement of their academic goal. In broader terms, the school would also be considered to have failed the student regarding accountability and assessment requirements. Additionally, these students often take classroom seats that other students could have used for their own academic advancement.

Simply put, students who take the time and effort necessary to enroll and register for classes are expressing interest in furthering their education. As Tinto (1993) offers, the students have demonstrated an "intention" to enroll but have failed to transition to the "commitment" stage (p. 37). Society has supported these students' desire by allocating

considerable resources, both human and financial, to help them achieve this goal. When students fail to complete their courses, it should be explored as a failure of both the student and the institution. This study will show what specific interactions are occurring in student-faculty relationships that keep students engaged with the school.

From the faculty members' perspective, those who work on a college campus are almost always drawn to the field because they want to see students succeed. If this study can show that those personal relationships are the difference between success and failure for some students, perhaps it will spark more faculty members to seek out students to mentor, inspire, and support. The more faculty members who commit to engaging with the student body in this way, the better the likelihood these students will be retained to goal completion. If given the chance, the results of the study have the potential to improve the entire campus culture of a community college.

Investigator's Perspective

I bring some important parts of my personal perspective to this study that merit discussion. First, I spent six years in the student affairs profession where my goal was to foster effective and meaningful relationships with students. In short, I was being paid to do this. Still, I held the beliefs that other individuals at the college should be equally invested in the process of getting to know who the students were and why they were attending. I hold firm to the philosophy that everyone who works at a community college is a teacher.

I enjoy attending commencements each spring. It always intrigued me to watch students find a favorite teacher after the ceremony just to introduce them to their parents, significant other or children. I started to believe there was something special happening in

these students' lives; something more than just being awarded a degree or certificate.

They were excited, energized, and inspired. They had a gleam in their eyes, were filled with self-confidence, exuded a purpose, and were ready to embrace their next step.

I am a hopeless optimist and look for the good in everyone. I believe that students who enroll at an institution do have the intention of succeeding. I believe that people who work at an institution should want to impact the students who attend. And, I believe that we all have a story like Mark or Shelby's; it may not have been in our educational endeavors, but I believe we all have one or more individuals in our life whose sole purpose was to help us break down the barriers that stand between us and our own success.

I believe this because I experienced it myself. Like so many others, I faced a time when I was in crisis at college; a faculty member intervened and became my mentor. Had it not been for this individual's perception of the trouble I was facing and the ability to guide me to the right resources, my path may have played out very differently. I can say with a high level of certainty that this individual became a major player in my identity development and had an excessive influence on who I am today and the person I am continually striving to become.

Finally, I believe that I was called to the community college system. When I was hired into the community college I knew very little about it. As I learned the role that the community colleges play in their community, I became more passionate about serving as an ambassador of the good work of the schools. I became more committed to the mission and knew that I had dedicated myself to an educational arena where I could make a real impact.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's college environment, some faculty members seem to have the gift of being able to connect effortlessly with students and become resources that are sought out on a frequent basis for services, advice, and support while other faculty members consistently struggle to establish even the most basic relationships with students; the latter frequently come across to students as cold and aloof.

Those college faculty members who successfully foster connections with students play a critical role in assisting the student in smoothly transitioning into college. Tinto (1993) identified five clusters of experiences that students encounter during the transition: difficulty in adjusting to the college environment, experiencing academic and social difficulty, suffering from incongruence between student expectations and institutional demands, a feeling of social isolation, and serendipity. Faculty members who engage in regular dialogue with students can help address these experiences and prevent temporary frustration from becoming longer-term problems. Helping students navigate these issues can help prevent them from becoming another attrition statistic.

Defining Student Contact and Relationships

Student contact consists of any direct or indirect interaction between a faculty member and a student. Contact may involve the faculty member processing paperwork for students, answering a question during a class lecture, having an e-mail exchange, or helping with registration for the upcoming semester. Establishing a relationship with a student takes additional effort on the part of both parties. A relationship involves the

student and faculty member engaging in behaviors above and beyond the minimum necessary to achieve a goal. Jaasma and Koper (1999) called these behaviors out-of-class communications (OCC). Examples of OCC behaviors include frequency of office visits, frequency of informal contact, length of office visits, topics of discussion, and student satisfaction with contact (Medved & Heisler, 2002, p. 106). Relationships are more likely to emerge when the interactions extend beyond the core level of contact and include interactions before and after class, during office hours, and sometimes even off campus.

One way that faculty members encourage relationships with their students is by establishing a rapport early on that promotes interaction. Qualities that students expect from faculty members in an effort to build rapport are, in order, “encouraging, open-mindedness, creative, interesting, accessible, happy, having a ‘good’ personality, promoting class discussion, approachability, concern for students, and fairness” (Benson, Cohen, & Buskist, 2005, p. 238). While some of these ideas are qualities that faculty members may or may not naturally embody, others are behaviors that can be implemented by any faculty member (Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010).

Establishing meaningful relationships with college faculty members yields tremendous benefits for the student. Among other perks, students report an increase in the value they place on courses and academic efforts, a greater commitment to the institution, and a higher likelihood of first-year persistence (Thompson, 2001; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The list of benefits that meaningful student-faculty relationships offer is extensive. However, interactions between students and faculty members still do not occur as regularly as educators might hope (Cox, 2011; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Too many students remain unaware of the potential benefits that these

significant interactions with faculty members can provide (Cotten & Wilson, 2006). Studies have found that as high as 80% of students reported *not* interacting with any faculty member outside of the classroom during a given school year (Hagedorn, et al, 2000). As a result, it often takes a catalyst to get the student to engage (Cotten & Wilson, 2006).

In most student-faculty relationships, a critical moment will arise when the student, whether realizing it or not, experiences a crisis (Bain, 2004). One example of this would be when a student makes the decision to withdraw from one or more classes. Requiring a faculty signature is an effort to get a dialogue to occur prior to the student leaving, but a proactive effort to establish a connection with that student prior to the moment of crisis may change that conversation. Students who report establishing early connections with faculty members report higher perceptions of the relationship as beneficial, higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience, an enhanced sense of community with the institution, and more motivation to increase the effort being applied to work in the classroom (Cotten & Wilson, 2006).

In summary, defining student-faculty interactions is difficult since “each incident of [student-faculty] interaction is unique, each [student-faculty] relationship differs, and each context has its own influence on the type of interactions occurring” (Cox, 2011, p. 55). Cox (2011) continues by saying that five general lessons emerge from extended study of student faculty interactions. First, “even simple, incidental contacts mean something to students” (p. 61). Second, “one interaction can lead to another” (p. 62). Third, “[student-faculty] interaction is a misnomer” (p. 62) as students often define any professional associated with their class experience as a faculty member, frequently

including professional academic advisors and student affairs staff members in the category. This idea carries significant weight as he expands the thought:

The goodwill (and sometimes ill will) students had toward these and other representatives of the institution – sometimes a resident assistant, the front-desk security guard, or custodian – seemed to have a carry-over effect, with students ascribing to the faculty whatever attributes they had observed in other campus personnel. As a result, students’ initial perceptions of the faculty were sometimes established with little or no direct interaction with traditional tenure-line faculty members (p. 63).

Fourth, “perception of faculty often trumps reality” (p. 63). And fifth, “one good relationship can shape a student’s perception of the entire faculty” (p. 63). Collectively, Cox’s points provide a strong framework through which to view student-faculty interactions.

The Importance of Student-Faculty Connections

When students perceive faculty members as approachable and work to establish relationships with them, the results yield a positive effect on a number of student outcomes (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011; McIntosh, Cox, Reason, & Terenzini, 2010). In 1993, 2.4 million students began their college journey. Of this group, over 1.5 million will leave their first institution without having earned a degree (Tinto, 1993). The research has clearly borne out the critical value of the relationships that students develop with faculty members as an avenue to lower this rate of attrition. Successful student-faculty relationships have been credited for increasing persistence towards degree completion, strengthening student decision-making regarding career choices, improving the students’ attitude towards the college experience, and increasing the students’ overall satisfaction with the college environment (Tinto, 1989; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Austin, 1977; Pascarella, 1980).

These broad benefits are complemented by advantages that student-faculty relationships have on the student as a scholar as well. Astin (1993) reported that students who spend time outside of class engaging with their instructors or having school work critiqued were more likely to report gains in knowledge in a specific field or discipline. This may be because student-faculty relationships have been credited with increasing student enjoyment of the course material, affinity for the instructor, likelihood to attend class, attentiveness during class, dedication of time to studying for that course, and contact with the professor outside of class time (Benson, Cohen, & Buskist, 2005; Buskist & Saville, 2004).

For some students, just one relationship of value with a faculty member at the college can be the difference between becoming another attrition statistic or successfully completing a program. Students who lack this sense of community are more likely to experience higher levels of emotional and physical exhaustion on campus (McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990). Relationships with faculty members represent one means of achieving this feeling of belongingness to the college community.

While decisions about the structure of an institution and the pattern of policy making within that school may support or inhibit the development of interpersonal relationships, it must be accepted that it is people who affect people (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) report that:

A large part of the impact of college is determined by the extent and content of one's interactions with major agents of socialization on campus, namely, faculty members and student peers. The influence of interpersonal interaction with these groups is manifest in intellectual outcomes as well as in changes in attitudes, values, aspirations and a number of psychosocial characteristics (p. 620).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) also reported that students place more value on the quality of their interaction with the staff member than the frequency. High-quality interactions provide the student-faculty relationship the opportunity to progress beyond the stages of disengagement and incidental contact towards functional and personal interactions, and ultimately to mentoring (Cox, 2011, p. 51). This transition represents a significant change:

The transition from functional to personal interaction with a faculty member was often a powerful and surprising experience. The transition to personal interaction was powerful because it marked a fundamental shift in the nature of the relationship. It was at this point that students began to recognize faculty members as ‘people’ and to feel valued as unique individuals, peers, or even friends of the faculty members. The faculty members’ concern for student well-being and success became clear to the students. Moreover, students often expressed some surprise when they described, often with great animation, the ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’ personal conversations they would have with faculty members (p. 52).

Once this transition takes place, the nature of the relationship starts to change. Suddenly, the logistical impact of retaining these students becomes secondary as an important student development impact surfaces. Tatum (1997) introduces the concept well:

The adolescent capacity for self-reflection (and resulting self-consciousness) allows one to ask “Who am I now?” “Who was I before?” “Who will I become?” The answers to these questions will influence choices about who one’s romantic partners will be, what type of work one will do, where one will live, and what belief system one will embrace. Choices made in adolescence ripple throughout the lifespan (p. 20).

Students who go through the experience of starting college believe that higher education is a part of their identity. It should be expected that students experiencing the intensity of self-reflection identified by Tatum would need assistance in doing so successfully. Identifying and fostering a meaningful relationship is an important step in helping to provide that support.

How Students Define Success

Many students enter college with the hopes that the experience will help them reach a higher level of identity development. If the college is successful the student will emerge with:

Perceptions of intellectual growth during college, increases in intellectual orientation, liberalization of social and political values, growth in autonomy and independence, increases in interpersonal skills, gains in general maturity and personal development, educational aspirations and attainment, orientation towards scholarly careers, and women's interest in and choice of sex-atypical (male-dominated) careers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 620).

In the students' eyes, establishing a solid identity is the first step towards defining a purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The students define success as progressing towards actualization on Maslow's hierarchy, gaining exposure to more of the elements of the JoHari window, coming to better terms with themselves as a component of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, and trying to escape from Perry's "dualism" classification.

These pieces collectively indicate that college is a key step in the development of personal identity. This development is an incredibly complex process, as explained by Erikson (1994):

We deal with a process "located" in *the core of the individual* and yet also in *the core of his communal culture*... In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. The process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness" (as cited in Tatum, 1997, p. 19).

In other words, Erikson is advocating for the self-creation of one's identity. Without strong role models to assist in the process of reflection, the student is more likely to succumb to peer pressure and develop without taking the time to ask those critical questions. The college years represent the first window where the cognitive skills are strong enough to engage in this self-reflection process, thus making the need to reflect even more critical in this context. Relationships with college faculty members present students with the opportunity to achieve this level of reflection.

The path to reflection is met through the faculty members' ability to meet a number of other needs for the students. Weiss advocates six relationship needs for college students: (1) attachments, (2) social integration, (3) opportunities for nurturing, (4) reassurance of worth, (5) sense of reliable alliance, and (6) obtaining guidance (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). The need for college personnel to provide guidance to students is clear; however, the best models of successful student engagement often serve the student in multiple ways. Parr and Valerius (1999) offer three even more practical outcomes for the students: scholarship recommendations, letters of reference, and job referrals. Regardless of which specific needs a relationship may meet, the presence of meaningful relationships bears rewards for all parties involved.

College students' biggest predictor of success overall is their level of self-esteem (Chang, 2005). Levels of self-esteem also typically drop during the first year of college, often due to the intensity of the transition and the failure to thrive immediately (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 80). As a result, the best practices in fostering student connections must combine an element of motivation with the components of information

sharing and providing advice and guidance. One way that faculty members can help build students' self-esteem is by learning their names. As Cox (2011) asserts:

When faculty members remember students' names and acknowledge students in a friendly, informal way, students are likely to leave the encounter with a positive perception about the faculty member, thereby increasing the likelihood that the student would intentionally pursue future contact with the faculty member (p. 51)

Remembering students' names sends a message about their value. Strengthening that message with a motivational component can further increase the impact. Clearly hearing that someone believes in the student and his or her potential for long-term success is an incredibly important step in expediting that process of acclimation.

Another part of the acclimation process involves building a social circle. Thus, the first goal in college for the majority of students is to overcome potential feelings of loneliness. Often, they do so by becoming connected to a network and by establishing a best friend (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Sometimes, when introversion, shyness, or some other factor prevents seamless connections with other students being established quickly, the student will look to college faculty members as a potential resource for friends until peer relationships can be established. In some cases, this connection is initiated when a student calls home and parental advice leads towards negotiating relationships with campus personnel (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001). In these circumstances, it becomes an important part of the faculty members' roles to ensure the students make connections with peers as well.

Among other expectations, students want faculty members to explain the college experience to them on a holistic level. Incoming students arrive with a set of expectations about what will happen and how much time they will need to dedicate to their academic work, to extracurricular activities, to work and to socializing. Often, this is a division that

has been established based on media portrayal of the college experience and through the student affairs staff of the college promoting extracurricular involvement during orientation activities.

Student Responsibilities to the Relationship

It should be noted that students must be willing to do their part to make sure that expectations are met. Often, students and instructors have divergent views on the responsibilities of the faculty members and the process of teaching (Buskist, Sikorski, Buckley, & Saville, 2002). Frequently, students arrive with a plan to spend 40 hours a week on academic endeavors, but within a month are spending only 20-30 weekly hours on these tasks (Schilling & Schilling, 1999). In order to avoid students maintaining this faulty definition about what academic success looks like, faculty members (particularly for first-semester students) must help to provide an accurate job description for “college student.” Establishing this framework for the students early will help increase the students’ likelihood of achieving success in the manner in which they have defined it.

Research by Valerius and Parr (1997) suggests that students can and do influence the impressions teachers form of them by performing the student role. There are a variety of reasons why a student may be perceived as not performing this role: a lack of clear communication of expectations from faculty, differences in educational goals between faculty and students, student misunderstandings of expectations, or students choosing not to engage in certain desired behaviors (Parr & Valerius, 1999). Successful performance of the student role is not difficult. According to faculty, it involves taking notes in class, greeting an instructor when passing on campus, using office hours, completing assignments on time, and participating in class by asking questions and completing

activities (Valerius & Parr, 1997). Simply, the students who show instructors they are vested in their education are more likely to find the instructors willing to invest in them.

Students must also actively seek out connections with faculty members as partners in the learning process. Research on this topic has shown that students often do not take full advantage of the faculty resources that are available to them (Cotten & Wilson, 2006). In a study of community college students, Fusani (1994) found that 23% of students reported no interaction at all with faculty outside of the classroom. Students pay keen attention to certain accessibility cues, such as teaching style, classroom discourse, and evaluation practice, to determine faculty members' interest in interacting outside of class (Wilson, Wood, & Gaff, 1974). Students who reported that they did interact with faculty members often kept the conversation centered on a course-related issue or topic (Anaya & Cole, 2001). Additionally, interactions via office hours lasted an average of 2.4 minutes and all other informal exchanges lasted an average of 1.4 minutes (Jaasma & Koper, 1999).

Faculty members also have the responsibility to be consistent in their approach to fostering connections. Part of this responsibility comes from appearing approachable. When faculty members show a sense of humor and disclose something personal about themselves, students often feel more comfortable approaching and interacting with them (Cotten & Wilson, 2006). Human nature leads individuals to more naturally connect with some people than others, but the teacher must be willing to engage in relationship-building behaviors with all students. One example of this would be not defaulting to connections with the older students in the class at the cost of interacting with traditional-aged students.

Mischler and Davenport (1984) showed that older students' presence enhances the intellectual environment of the classroom. Follow-up research showed that 23% of faculty members admit a preference for older students, as they "make class meaningful," are "more interested in learning for the sake of learning," and are "willing to challenge the instructor." 11% of faculty admit being friendlier to adult students than younger ones. A significant number of faculty members said that they are more likely to believe excuses that are offered by an adult student. Perceptions of the younger students were that they were more willing to engage in philosophical discussions that had no practical application, but were less concerned about grades, less serious in the classroom, and less willing to engage in class activities (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1998). This disparity is significant. It would be difficult to challenge younger students' assertion that adult students have a distinct advantage in the classroom. As a result, faculty members have the responsibility to ensure that they are interacting with students consistently.

Relationship Expectations Based on Student Age

Achieving this consistently is difficult since the two groups sometimes have different expectations regarding how their relationships with faculty members will look and feel. Understanding the cohort group that labels a student is a key component in being able to serve that student effectively. Stewart and Healy (1989) offer a deeper perspective on understanding the impact of historical periods on the development of identity:

Am I a child of the Depression, a survivor of World War II, the Holocaust, the U.S. internment of Japanese Americans? A product of the segregation of the 1940s and 1950s, or a beneficiary of the Civil Rights era? Did I serve in the Vietnam War, or am I a refugee of it? Did I come of age during the conservatism of the Reagan years? Did I ride the wave of the Women's Movement? Was I born

before or after Stonewall and the emergence of gay activism? What historical events have shaped my thinking?

The millennial generation consists of students who were born between 1982 and 2009 (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Around the year 2000, these students started entering the college ranks *en masse*. These cohorts arrived with some very specific expectations regarding the college experience. Two key factors are their propensity to remain close to home and their commitment to push themselves harder than others to succeed (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Each of these factors has an impact on student-faculty relationships. The millennials' interest in staying close to home means that they also expect their parents to be involved in many of the decisions that they make while at college. Howe and Strauss (2007) refer to this expectation by labeling the millennial students "sheltered."

Although their continued influence is well-intentioned, these parents, sometimes referred to as "helicopter parents," willingly accept the invitation to be involved and often hover over their children. The presence of helicopter parenting, evidenced through an intense micromanagement of the students' college experience, often results in decreased student autonomy and development (Howe & Strauss, 2003). In a recent millennial student survey, 24.9% of students reported that they speak to their parents every day by phone. An additional 30.7% of students reported speaking with their parents by phone a few times a week. Together, that shows over 55% of students to be in frequent contact with their parents (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009).

At times invested parents will even insert themselves directly into the educational process on the students' behalf. Although the intentions of these parents is understandable due to the significant financial and emotional investments they have made in their children's education (Carney-Hall, 2008), their involvement cannot be a

substitute for students resolving their own issues and building their own network of resources at the institution.

Students value regular contact with their parents (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). As a result, the responsibility often falls to parents to be capable of “letting go” and allowing their college students to make their decisions independently and to freely explore their new environments and the people within those environments (Coburn & Treeger, 2003). Allowing this independence to develop serves as the first step towards successful integration and subsequent retention in college (Tinto, 1993).

Non-traditional students also arrive on campus with a unique set of expectations. Holtclaw (1998) said that adults need two types of problems addressed: practical issues (such as accessibility and flexibility from the faculty member) and personal issues (such as self-esteem). Many of these students are also parents, which adds additional problems, such as child illness, lapses in daycare (due to costs or inability to find short-term replacements), and financial difficulties (Medved & Heisler, 2002). These students expect someone at the institution to take ownership for accommodating these needs. Medved and Heisler (2002) propose that the two most common accommodations sought after by adult students are altering assignment deadlines with extensions or excusing students who miss class.

Adult learners also arrive on campus with an expectation to receive effective counseling. Counseling not only serves as an accessible resource to help answer basic questions for students but also helps with confirmation of program choices, career decisions, development of learning plans, and the process of transitioning into the role of student again (Bos, Chapter 11, as cited in Poonwassie & Poonwassie, 2001).

Miller's (1989) work adds to the research on this population. His approach detailed additional personal issues that affect students' *intellectual* approach to learning, including students arriving with unrealistic goals, being unwilling to abandon a negative self-image and possessing an overly practical approach to learning. Clearly, adult students require additional time and energy to overcome these initial barriers prior to being able to foster successful long-term relationships. Although the faculty members who assist with these issues *may* be the same ones who become the long-term connections for the students, this is not often the case since the management of these particular concerns often begins prior to the first class meeting.

Adult students also want to know that the college acknowledges the experience and education they have accumulated prior to their arrival. "Appreciating and taking into consideration the prior knowledge and experience of learners has become a basic assumption of our practice as educators of adults, wherever this knowledge was learned" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.27). The most effective relationships involving adult learners are based on mutual respect of the self worth of each participant and an authentic desire to protect one another's dignity (Poonwassie, Chapter 9, as cited in Poonwassie & Poonwassie, 2001).

Relationship Expectations Based on Student Sex

Additionally, all students present differences in relationship expectations based on sex. Female students seek connectedness; they want relationships that are built in small groups, have a more intimate feel, and are based on members being equals (Pike, 2006). Gilligan (1982) called this idea the need to create community, the need to build capacity for intimacy and sharing. Females also reported significantly higher expectations for

interacting with diverse acquaintances and being involved in clubs and organizations (Wilks' Lambda = 0.018; $df = 5, 537$; $p < 0.05$) (Pike, 2006). This increased propensity to get involved on campus in these other ways leads to the belief that females are more likely to engage with faculty members.

On the other hand, male students seek relationships that are based in large groups, demonstrate traditional hierarchies, and breed competition. Over the course of history, research has shown that male students tend to develop fewer relationships with college faculty and tend to be less satisfied with the relationships that do develop (Hagedorn, et. al., 2000).

Level of parental involvement during college is also significantly different based on the students' gender. Research has shown that women are typically more involved with, and dependent on, their families during the college years (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Sneed et al. 2006; Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). According to Wolf, Sax, and Harper (2009).

Female college students reported greater parental involvement in their academics than did their male counterparts ($M_{\text{female}} = .04$; $M_{\text{male}} = -.06$), $t(10743) = -5.41$, $p < .01$. Females also reported more frequent contact with parents than males ($M_{\text{female}} = .15$; $M_{\text{male}} = -.22$), $t(10726) = -19.50$, $p < .01$ (p. 342).

Research has established the critical need for women to use their college experience as an opportunity to establish independence from their families (Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2004; Sax, 2008). Finding new mentors and advisors in college faculty members is one way that this journey towards independence becomes easier.

Relationship Expectations Based on Ethnic Background

Aside from students' age and sex, ethnic background will also play a role in students' expectations regarding developing meaningful relationships. Between 2002 and

2022, minority student enrollment in higher education is expected to grow to nearly 40% of overall enrollment (Solomon, Solomon, & Schiff, 2002). This significant growth will add incredible value to campus cultures and expand the possibilities for academic achievement across communities. Recruiting minority students and assisting them in successfully acclimating into the college community is a critical measure of a higher education institution's success. The presence of these students on campus helps the school achieve the critical function of introducing peers to complex and diverse perspectives and relationships (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002).

Research examining interracial interactions found a significant impact on student-faculty interactions based on other interracial contact (Cole & Jackson, 2005). Allen (1992) showed that minority students are likely to have more frequent, meaningful, and satisfying levels of faculty contact when they represent a significant portion of the student population. Still, not everyone is convinced of the importance of these relationships. According to Cole (2007):

The majority of faculty (82.5%, $n = 11,960$) felt that it was important to enhance students' out-of-class experience and their knowledge of other racial/ethnic groups (89.3%, $n = 12,941$), and that a diverse student body would enhance the quality of education (90.9%, $n = 13,168$)...Over one fourth of faculty believed that diversity leads to unprepared students (26.4%, $n = 3,820$) (p. 259).

With the infusion of increased diversity in the student demographic, faculty and staff members responsible for facilitating identity development must remember that a formulaic, template-based approach that works for most students will not work for them all.

The idea of developing an identity is, by itself, a complex process. For those students whose race is a significant defining characteristic of their identity, the process adds another layer. Tatum (1997) explains:

Racial identity development...usually refers to the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group. The terms *racial identity* and *ethnic identity* are often used synonymously, though a distinction can be made between the two. An ethnic group is a socially defined group based on *cultural* criteria, such as language, customs and shared history. An individual might identify as a member of an ethnic group (Irish or Italian, for example) but might not think of himself in racial terms (as White). On the other hand, one may recognize the personal significance of racial group membership (identifying as Black, for instance) but may not consider ethnic identity (such as West Indian) as particularly meaningful (p. 16).

College faculty can aid in this development in many ways. Among them is to ensure that the environment is welcoming. Evidence of racism or any type of racial tension creates a barrier for meaningful interaction between students and faculty members. This barrier affects the nature and quality of the students' educational experience (Allen, 1992; Hurtado, 1994). Another option to help spur identity development based on ethnic background is to promote discussion of racial issues. Chang (1999) proved that discussing racial issues and socializing with someone of another racial group were both positively linked to the development of a strong intellectual self-concept.

According to Wolf, Sax, and Harper (2009), Mexican American, Latino/Other Spanish, Japanese/Japanese American, and American Indian/Alaska Native students experience above-average levels of contact with their parents but report below-average involvement of their parents in their academic lives (p. 348). For Latinos research has shown that the strength of faculty relationships was significantly related to the students' undergraduate grades (Anaya & Cole, 2001). In other cultures (immigrant families for

example), the intentions of the college environment to develop independence and self-reliance contradict the expectations for respecting and defaulting to elders' opinions established at home (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). For these student populations, having a significant and meaningful relationship with a college faculty member is the most likely avenue to receive the academic interest and guidance they require.

Successful Relationships Inside of the Classroom

Understanding the demographic variables that are at play with their students is just one part of the faculty members' responsibility in endorsing student-faculty relationships. They must also insure that they are communicating the right message inside the classroom. An effective classroom environment improves students' skills as active learners and critical thinkers, allows them to ask questions, and challenges perspectives (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Cole (2007) reports several components of an active learning classroom environment that enhance students' learning and foster relationships. These include:

(a) Enthusiastically engaging students in the learning process (i.e., they are not bored); (b) valuing students and their comments; (c) strategically creating racially/ethnically structured student groups; (d) linking out-of-the-class social events with in-class content; and (e) allowing students the opportunity to constructively challenge professors' ideas (p. 276).

Any of these components added to an in-class approach individually will make an impact on the students. By utilizing a combination of several of the ideas simultaneously, that impact will only be further increased.

Creating this warm, welcoming environment does not require the faculty members to be extroverted and gregarious. Some college teachers who are best at establishing meaningful student-faculty relationships are quiet and reserved. These

faculty members have an important message to share. Simply put, the message would be that these relationships are about spending time with the students and showing them they have both value and potential. Bain (2004) made it clear:

It is not about personality; not about being bashful or bold, being restrained or histrionic, playing the devil's advocate or being more subdued, or being formal or informal. It is not even about what students and teachers call one another (formal titles and surnames versus first names).

What it *is* about is the beliefs, attitudes, conceptions and perceptions that the faculty member holds and demonstrates while interacting with students. Among others, these beliefs include viewing the students as an investment, not an opportunity to yield power, establishing a strong bond of trust in the classroom community, presenting high expectations for the students, believing in the importance of students learning (not just passing exams), looking inward to resolve problems before blaming students, sharing personal stories, encouraging questions and approaching learning as a journey *with* their students (p. 16).

Bain's work asserts the importance of high expectations; many other researchers echo it. The National Institute of Education's report *Involvement in Learning* (1984) promotes "three conditions of excellence." Alongside student involvement and assessment, setting high expectations is considered a pillar to the long-term success of the student. Schilling and Schilling (1999) added to the sentiment:

Classic studies in the psychology literature have found that merely stating an expectation results in enhanced performance, that higher expectations result in higher performance, and that persons with high expectations perform at a higher level than those with low expectations, even though their measured abilities are equal (p. 5).

Having high expectations for their students is just the beginning, however. The faculty members must take responsibility for communicating these high expectations to the students and must also commit to having equally high expectations for themselves as professionals. Often, these expectations will be met as the teacher maintains a willingness to adapt to the ever changing dynamic of the institution and the student body.

Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner (2007) paralleled the effective teachers' role to that of mentors. "The mentors serve as guide, cheerleader, challenger, and supporter during the learning process. The [mentors] challenge students to examine their conceptions of self and the world and to formulate new, more developed perspectives" (p.138). In these cases, the mentors become experts at encouraging students to share their dreams and tell their own stories in addition to sharing stories from their personal histories that will spur the development of the student. Chickering and Reisser (1993) add to the importance of mentoring and expectations:

What they say and do, and *how* they say and do it, can make a critical difference. Competence is fostered first by the example of those in teaching or leadership roles, second by the expectations they convey, and third by the encouragement they offer. When all three are present and balanced, they have the maximum affect (p. 317).

When these ideas are integrated into classroom environments it provides a framework in which the faculty members can operate. Integration does not lock faculty members into creating a culture that feels exactly the same to the student. No two classrooms ever have the exact same "feel." Many factors play into the overall feel of the classroom. These factors include, but are not limited to, the size of the class, the shape of the room, and the time of day the class meets. Each of these factors has an impact on the way the students will interact with one another, the instructor, and the curriculum. Simply put, the best teachers do not ignore this fact. Rather, as they prepare to teach, the best instructors are the ones that challenge every basic assumption with the intent of delivering the best possible product (Glenn, 2009).

Glenn (2009) advocated that instructors spend time developing challenging approaches to the curriculum, called "desirable difficulties," that were meant to achieve

the deepest levels of learning for the students involved. He further asserted the importance of spacing key points of the curriculum out over the course of the class and returning to the key concepts frequently and engaging in meta-cognitive monitoring by pushing students to be more thoughtful about their own learning styles and study habits. However, Glenn cautions that certain instructional practices that seem like a good idea in the abstract might actually *harm* some of the students some of the time. As they work to implement new techniques into their approach, instructors must ensure that they are cross-checking the ideas against the unique personality and environment of each given class section.

The student development course (also frequently called orientation class, college 101, or college success) is an important avenue through which relationships are established. It was no surprise when Schnell and Doetkott (2003) tied enrollment in a student development course to greater overall student retention. These courses center on the ideas of the transition to college learning, identity development, study and test-taking skills, note-taking, leadership, and critical thinking, among other topics. For adult students in particular, their lengthy absence from formal education only strengthens the case for the provision of a required study and note-taking skills class (Bos, Chapter 11, as cited in Poonwassie & Poonwassie, 2001).

Student development course curriculum is important as students are introduced to a variety of topics that promote success in college, but the students will often remark that the most valuable outcome of the class in their eyes was the establishment of a trusting relationship with the instructors of the course. Many students even seek these instructors out, in lieu of their assigned college advisors, for follow-up conversations about choosing

a major, future course selection and advice about other professors (O’Gara, Mechur, & Hughes, 2009).

Another option for faculty members is to set up a peer network for students to turn to one another for help and support. Sometimes, it is intimidating to approach instructors for help (Cushman, 2006). Instructors serve their students well to help drive connections among students. These connections could develop into resources to catch-up on material missed in a given class or into full blown study groups that meet on a regular basis. Even if many groups do not synergize, the benefits for those that do are significant. One consideration within these groups involves the partnership of traditional-aged and adult students. Each of these populations will have apprehension regarding working with the other (Jacobs, 1989). Facilitated activities inside the classroom must be used to establish a comfort level that will carry the group forward when they interact outside of class.

Faculty members must also intentionally build their course experiences to maximize the elements of diversity in the environment. Instructors owe it to themselves to create “opportunities for diverse students to interact and learn from each other in and out of the classroom” (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002, p. 7).

Successful Relationships Outside of the Classroom

In the same way that faculty members are tasked with creating opportunities for students to learn from one another inside of the classroom, the instructors need to insure that they are committed to helping students learn outside of the classroom as well. In their study intended to better understand “the nature of [student-faculty] interactions outside of the classroom” and “the conditions that foster and inhibit these interactions,” Cox and

Orehovec (2007, p. 344) showed that out-of-class interactions provided a critical framework for long-term relationship success. In a follow-up study, Cox (2011) identified that “relatively few students were engaged in more than occasional, or superficial, conversation with the college’s faculty” (p. 50). Engaging in conversation that is not superficial is difficult since student-faculty interactions outside of the classroom typically represent a more difficult dialogue to facilitate (Mara & Mara, 2011; Kim & Sax, 2007).

Relationships that involve visits before or after class, during office hours, or in brief exchanges in the hallway do not constitute relationships “outside of the classroom.” Astin (1984) claimed that student development and learning are dependent upon how involved or invested students are in their environment. As a result, successful institutions are often branded by a culture that focuses on getting the students engaged with the personnel and resources across campus (Cotten & Wilson, 2006).

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), establishment of an active learning environment also has a positive effect on students’ contact with faculty members outside of the classroom. Interactions outside of the classroom context are vitally important. This is where the instructor is given the opportunity to engage in some very important mentoring tasks, including listening with both ears and a kind heart, providing constructive criticism and disagreeing with the student, helping the student connect with other campus resources, promoting the student and increasing their visibility, and helping the student resolve any bureaucratic jams that arise (Bixby, 2000).

The instructors have the obligation to ensure that the students feel comfortable and validated after a visit. Approaching instructors outside of class takes courage. As one first-generation student explains,

“I just feel a little intimidated, like it’s going to feel really weird to approach them. Maybe I’ll ask a question that they’ll think is ridiculous. If I’m going about something that is really complicated to me, I don’t want them to think, ‘Well, maybe she’s not right for this class’” (Cushman, p.36).

As a result, “Instructors should be reflective, passionate, responsive and ‘keep in mind that you are a model for learners whether you want to be or not’” (MacKeracher, 1996).

The majority of two-year institutions sometimes struggle to make out-of-class connections between students and faculty members in the critical first six weeks of the students’ attendance. The struggle has not been due to lack of effort, however. The Freshmen Year Experience (FYE) movement, intended to connect students with campus resources to support success within and outside of the classroom, has been embraced by two-year colleges, with over 70% offering some form of FYE programming (Fidler & Fidler, 1991; Barefoot, 1992).

The disconnect is more likely due to the fact that both students and teachers at these schools, as opposed to students at residential colleges, are often interested in leaving campus as soon as possible after the conclusion of class (Lind, 1997). This exodus of people sheds light on the struggle of the community colleges to keep students engaged with the college as well as opens a door for faculty members to begin establishing this engagement with students in other ways.

Exposure to faculty members in a context that is outside of the classroom helps students with their own process of identity development. There are some specific skills that responsible faculty members impart on the students with whom they connect when

they are interacting outside of class. Being seen in contexts such as advising a student organization, supervising a work study, or attending a college basketball game helps students see the faculty members as approachable in addition to modeling other skills like personal balance and networking.

The first skill is maintaining personal balance. As a generation of multi-taskers, the millennial group in particular needs mentors to share with them the importance of living lives that incorporates multiple different facets. This group is entering college with very specific long-term plans and is terrified about making initial wrong choices, like a first job (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). They need to be exposed to successful individuals who have balance in their lives and can ensure that the students are successfully managing their stress.

The second skill out-of-class interactions builds in students is a strengthened ability to network. If instructors schedule and attend informal study sessions, those meetings will help the students get a more intimate exposure to those faculty members and increase their comfort level. The bonding potential is higher in circumstances such as that study session, since they are focused on one of the central issues of their academic lives (Martin, Blanc, & Arendale, 1996). Martin, Blanc and Arendale (1996) also believe there are benefits for the faculty members in designing these study sessions:

Faculty [members] engaged in (study groups) become involved in facilitating a process of collaborative learning, an important approach because it helps students learn to empower themselves rather than remain dependent as they might in traditional tutoring (p. 131).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, study sessions allow students to succeed in their courses while permitting faculty members to retain the integrity of their teaching style (Martin, Blanc, & Arendale, 1996). In these networking environments, the faculty

members can also demonstrate for the students how to refine their social etiquette and further develop their leadership skills.

Ethical Issues Surrounding Relationships

Whether the student-faculty relationships are more heavily based on in-class or out-of-class interactions, there is still an element of power in play for the faculty members. As a result, there are ethical issues involved with these relationships. Society has transitioned to an era in which the ethical considerations for higher education have faded significantly, if not dissolved completely (Zumberge, 1989, p. 200), but not necessarily in the realm of student-faculty relationships.

Students who engage in relationships with college faculty members open themselves up and demonstrate an authentic vulnerability. There is a personal and professional ethical obligation for faculty members to treat these encounters with care and to deliver the best possible outcomes to these students. This ethical balance must be sought by balancing the desire to help students overcome personal problems with the need to protect those students' right to confidentiality and not offering unsolicited advice (Poonwassie, Chapter 9, as cited in Poonwassie & Poonwassie, 2001). Maintaining this line is a difficult, yet imperative, directive for the faculty members.

Additionally, faculty members must take into account the power they yield in their relationships with students. Operating from a position of power, the faculty members own a presence over students (Johnson, 2005). This presence can be utilized to cast either light or shadow on the students. Light is cast by building the students up and shadow is cast by encouraging unethical behavior and interactions. Faculty members that establish meaningful personal relationships with their students must be careful not to

allow those relationships to diverge into unethical areas that cross professional boundaries.

Summary

The research has clearly borne out the idea that student-faculty interactions are a key part of successful intellectual development for college students. More research is necessary to explore the underlying patterns that cause these relationships to be successful (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1981). Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995) asserted that it is not yet clear where and under what conditions the role of faculty members as mentors is most important. Additionally, most of the studies exploring the topic of meaningful student-faculty relationships address student demographics, but fail to address important faculty information (Cole, 2007). The quantitative literature has done an impressive job of laying the foundation and now qualitative research is called upon to close the gap. As Cotton and Wilson (2006) explain:

Quantitative study results have shown that students who have more contact with faculty outside of the classroom exhibit higher levels of achievement. However, this relationship alone does not explain *why* contact was initiated, nor *how* the contact enabled higher achievement (p. 491).

It is the intention of this study to address the two components Cotton and Wilson (2006) claim remain unanswered.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter details the research methods approach utilized for this study. It begins with an overview of the study including the theoretical perspective in which it is grounded. It continues with a description of the research design and rationale, a listing of the research questions, an overview of the selected site and participants, and a review of participant access to the study. This is followed by explanations of the approach used for data collection and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a review of trustworthiness, including issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Overview

Transitioning into college and successfully acclimating into a specific campus culture comes with its share of challenges. As the literature review showed, students who foster meaningful relationships with a college faculty member soon after their arrival receive multiple advantages that students without those relationships do not. The intention of this study was to better understand these relationships from the students' perspective and identify the process of initiating relationships, the perceived and actual advantages of relationships, and the long-term impact relationships carry on identity development for the student.

When considering a theoretical perspective, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) offer, "we are talking about a way of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work" (p. 24). They continue by explaining the importance of researchers understanding their own theoretical orientation: "Good

researchers are aware of their theoretical base and use it to help collect and analyze data. Theory helps data cohere and enables research to go beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts” (p. 24). Based on my theoretical base and the desire to be able to better explain this experience from the views of the participant, it became clear that a qualitative study design would provide the additional depth necessary to understand the issue. Together, these two factors lent themselves towards the idea of conducting a phenomenological study.

According to Patton (2002), a phenomenological study “describes how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 104). Phenomenological research has been particularly influenced by philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Knowing that this particular research approach had its roots in the social sciences led me to feel more comfortable selecting it. As referenced in my perspective, there is a natural comfort level with the social sciences due to a history of teaching psychology, student development, and leadership courses for many years. In this time, a fascination with how social development occurs and how relationships get established evolved. As a result, an approach that emerged from these fields seemed a logical choice.

After doing some more in-depth exploration of the phenomenological approach, the following quote from Merriam and Associates (2002) stood out:

Phenomenological methods require a commitment to rigor and openness to learning, a respect for those who will participate as your co-investigators, and a sense of humility about the whole process. Enjoy the process as much as possible; develop a sense of wonder and awe for the phenomena you are investigating. Don’t set out to change the world, just try to understand better the experience you are exploring. This method of inquiry can be very exhausting and hugely

rewarding, ultimately adding meaningful understanding to the experience we call life (p. 141).

After reading that description, the idea of utilizing a phenomenological study proved to be the ideal design. A study which is described using words like *respect*, *humility*, *wonder*, *awe*, and *experience* was a solid match with the goals of my selected topic and my own values and experiences.

Patton (2002) describes two implications of the phenomenological perspective that are often confused. The first is that the important information to obtain is a strengthened understanding of how others interpret the world. “The second implication is methodological. The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves” (p. 106). Patton (2002) continues his assertion by explaining the impact of participant observation and in-depth interviews (p. 106). While in-depth interviews were employed as the foundation of this study, my previous experience on both sides of a student-faculty relationship provided a richer base from which to conduct the study.

Merriam (2002) noted that researchers working on interpretive studies have many options to consider including case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology, and basic interpretive designs. Of the options, the aims of a phenomenological study most closely aligned with this study’s research questions. As Moustakas (1994) defines, one uses a phenomenological study “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Descriptions are analyzed for underlying themes and then common themes are sought among cases. Themes present in multiple cases provide the structures and the essence of the phenomenon.

In describing phenomenological research in general, and phenomenological research in psychology specifically, Moustakas (1994) references the work of van Kaam (1959, 1966). Van Kaam (1966) believed that qualitative researchers must ensure that their subjects leave the interviews “really feeling understood” (p. 12) Van Kaam (1966) describes the phenomenon:

The experience of ‘really feeling understood’ is a perceptual-emotional Gestalt: A subject, perceiving that a person co-experiences what things mean to the subject and accepts him, feels, initially, relief from experiential loneliness, and, gradually, safe experiential communion with that person and with that which the subject perceives this person to represent. (pp. 325-326, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 12)

Creswell (1998) expanded the sentiment by describing qualitative research as an inquiry process where the researcher builds a “complex, holistic picture [by exploring] multiple dimensions of a problem or issue” (p. 15) and reports the findings through an intricate narrative.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this study was to better understand how students experienced meaningful student-faculty relationships. Breaking down a topic in this way more naturally lent itself to a qualitative research approach. As Merriam (1998) explains, “in contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6). Merriam (2002) also stated that qualitative researchers seek to understand “the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences” (p. 5). These revelations can only occur when the researcher has the ability to fully understand the subjects and the necessary skill to

rebuild a comprehensive picture of the experience. Then, the structure of the phenomenon can be developed and articulated.

The methodology also represented a reasonable scope for the dissertation. Boyatzis (1998) cautioned researchers to build studies that will give them satisfaction at their conclusion. On one end of the spectrum, he asserted, “research is a process of discovery and, at times, searching for validation or refutation of observations. If it always produces predicted findings, either it is not research or it is examining a trivial phenomenon” (p. 164). The argument continued with the recommendation to limit the scope of the research to something that is manageable and has a specific goal established (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 164). Several key decisions associated with this design were built around Boyatzis’ considerations. Among those decisions was the decision to conduct the research at one institution and to focus the review on the establishment of the relationship and the impact on the students’ academic and social lives. Additionally, based on the fact that 78.5% of community college full-time enrollments and 39.8% of part-time enrollments are students between 15 and 24 years of age (*Almanac of Higher Education*, 2010), and that only 39.6% of American 18- to 24-year-olds are currently enrolled in college (*Almanac of Higher Education*, 2010), this study focused on meaningful student-faculty relationships as experienced by 18- to 24-year-old community college students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore one-on-one relationships between students and the faculty members with whom connections were fostered. Specifically, a “phenomenology provides a research approach that allows for in-depth study of participants who share a common experience” (Moustakas, 1994). The

dynamics of student and faculty interaction remain an area of inquiry that has been largely ignored (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991, p. 90). Thus, the purpose was to better understand how students experienced these relationships and identify the common themes that students assigned to the establishment, development, and reciprocity within their context. The purpose also included understanding the benefits the students attributed to the relationships and their evaluation of the relationships' overall impact. By comparing the students' experiences to their expectations coming into college, the study pinpointed specific ways that faculty member interventions helped incoming students reinforce high expectations or debunk college myths and find success. The achievement of this goal allowed me to raise awareness of the need to create and foster these relationships within the culture of an effective community college.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided guidance for the study:

1. How do relationships between students and faculty members get established?
2. What are the specific benefits that students perceive they receive from the relationship?
3. How do students perceive their college journey would have changed if this relationship had not been developed and nurtured?

Site and Participants

In order to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout this study. Lost Lakes Community College (LLCC) is a public two-year college that enrolls 13,500 students annually among three locations. LLCC is part of a large, multi-college system that is centrally managed at the state level. The student population is

comprised heavily of dual-enrollment, transfer-prep, and health professions students. Dual-enrollment students receive simultaneous credit for their courses at LLCC and their local high school. Transfer-prep students are found predominantly in the liberal arts and business administration programs. The most popular health professions programs include nursing, dental hygiene, and emergency medical technician. LLCC was selected as the site for this study due to the school's desire to enhance student-faculty relationships and its geographic location. Additionally, there was a convenience factor since LLCC is my home school, and I was working with a desire to improve the student experience at my institution.

LLCC mirrors many other national community colleges in terms of its demographic makeup. Enrollment is skewed towards females and Caucasians, as well as students who are in their twenties, attending classes part-time and on-campus, and balancing multiple out-of-school responsibilities. Nearly a third of the Lost Lakes student population comes from dual-enrollment.

Participant Access to Study

The participants for this study were purposefully identified and recruited based on their having the necessary experience to describe the phenomenon. Creswell (1998) refers to this strategy as criterion sampling, where all individuals studied meet the criterion of having experienced the phenomenon. Convenience sampling was also used for this study my choosing to study my home institution. Creswell's (1998) definition for convenience sampling is selecting those available to participate in the study.

Each participating student had at least two years of full or part-time community college experience. Each participant, within that timeframe, had established a relationship

with a member of the college faculty that would be categorized as meaningful to both the student and the faculty member.

Selection of participants was handled using convenience sampling, paired with criterion and nominated sampling methods. Convenience sampling was utilized to keep the participants within the LLCC community. Criterion sampling was used as a measure to improve quality assurance (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). LLCC faculty members were asked to identify students with whom they established a meaningful relationship during the student's time at the college. Faculty members were asked to compare their lists with the minimum criteria for the study and nominate participants. Although the study utilized a homogenous sampling of traditional-aged college students (18-24), efforts were made to maximize the variation within that population by diversifying sex, racial background, faculty nominators, students' programs of study, continuing education and credit plans, and full-time and part-time enrollments. Variation was established within the participants' sex, programs of study, and full-time and part-time enrollments, as well as the faculty nominators.

The faculty nominations were compiled into one collection of study prospects. Then the prospects were contacted and informed they had been nominated by a college faculty member for participation in this study. Prospects were asked if they believed they established and cultivated a meaningful relationship with a college faculty member during their time at the school. If the students proposed the name of their nominator, this was considered confirmation of the relationship.

Prospects who confirmed their relationship were asked to participate in a 60-minute interview for the study as well as to participate in follow-up communication via

phone, e-mail and in person as necessary. Those who agreed to participate were shifted from prospects to participants in the study. Creswell (1998) noted that phenomenological studies typically utilize between five and 25 participants. For my study, fourteen qualified students served as participants to help achieve data saturation.

Data Collection

A very specific research protocol was followed to complete the data collection component of the study. First, necessary permissions were secured from the Institutional Review Boards at Colorado State University (CSU) and LLCC.

Following an established interview protocol, one-hour, tape-recorded interviews were conducted individually with each participant. Interviews were selected as the primary data collection method based on the goal to engage in active interactions that explore the student experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000). More specifically, the goal was to understand not only what the students experienced but also how it happened and why it matters. Creswell's (1998) recommendations served as a guide to create the interview protocol. Each interview started with a review of the informed consent form, a request to audio tape the interview, and an assurance of confidentiality.

After obtaining the participant's acceptance of the terms of the study, a selection of opening questions intended to serve as grand-tour questions began the conversation. The interview questions were designed to be intentionally broad in an effort to have the participant lead the interview and talk descriptively as much as possible. Additionally, the interview was arranged to begin with questions pertaining to the present before reviewing the past and envisioning the future. Such a design made it much easier for the participant to answer (Patton, 2002). After this initial interview, participants received a thank you

note and, if and when possible, a follow-up interview took place. Follow-up interviews provided clarification on issues from the initial interview as well as verifying the identified themes. This verification was a key component in establishing the credibility of the study.

Field notes were taken pertaining to all interviews. Field notes represented any additional information about an interview environment that was of interest to me but was not likely to be captured on the audio transcript. Examples might be a participant rolling his or her eyes, tearing up or shifting uncomfortably while telling a story or being asked a question. Noting actions such as these allowed for more expansive data interpretation. Field notes were taken by recording reactions immediately after the interviews by hand and subsequently adding them to the transcripts.

During the interview process, a reflexive journal was used. This process assisted with epoche, or “setting aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). By making a conscious effort to detail potential biases heading into an interview or as an immediate afterthought at the interview’s completion, I attempted to set aside personal beliefs and focused on the essence of the phenomenon. The reflexive journal consisted of weekly journal entries that cataloged experiences with the data and acknowledged any personal biases which emerged in the process. The details in my reflexive journal strengthened my discussion of the subject matter.

Data Analysis

Addressing the research questions in qualitative research requires higher levels of subjective thinking from the researcher. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) expand the distinction:

They strive to have their writing be consistent with the data they collect – not that they claim that their assertions are “true,” but that they are plausible given the data. In this sense qualitative researchers see themselves as empirical researchers. While this is true, most qualitative researchers see what they produce, research reports and articles, not as a transcendent truth, but as a particular rendering or interpretation of reality grounded in the empirical world. They believe that the qualitative research tradition produces an interpretation of reality that is useful in understanding the human condition. That is the logic in their claim to legitimacy (p. 27).

The study’s methodology demonstrated higher levels of subjective thinking.

Although an objective approach was used by selecting participants through a criterion, convenience sample model, the data analysis and interpretation processes were heavily subjective.

The goal of the interviews was to better understand the details of the students’ relationships with the faculty members. Gathering information about how students experience student-faculty relationships and the common themes they assign to the establishment, development, and reciprocity within their context provided a framework for the connections. Identifying patterns in the cases is the first step in the search for meaning (Stake, 1995, as cited in Creswell, 1998).

Each participant interview was transcribed and analyzed individually following Moustakas’ modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (1994, p. 121). Significant ideas, phrases, and themes were coded using initial designations. This process of phenomenological reduction, also called horizontalization, identified the significance behind each participant statement (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). Then, axial codes were developed by combining these initial codes. Axial codes were subsequently joined and clustered to identify interview themes. Finally, themes were validated and transitioned from textural to structural descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

Once data from each participant were analyzed individually, overall interview themes were explored and combined to identify emergent themes representing the collective structure and essence of the phenomenon. This process was completed using the same strategy that directed the transition from axial codes to interview themes for each individual participant. The three to five structural elements for each of the fourteen participants were considered independent ideas and clusters were developed. The cluster development was verified through an independent peer review of the individual participant themes.

These clusters became the emergent themes of the phenomenon. Although the study utilized a homogenous sampling of traditional-aged college students (18-24), efforts were made to maximize the variation within that population by diversifying sex, racial background, faculty nominators, students' programs of study, continuing education and credit plans, and full-time and part-time enrollments. Utilizing this approach ensured that the results reflect how the phenomenon is experienced by the greatest number of people. Variation was established within the participants' sex, programs of study, and full-time and part-time enrollments, as well as the faculty nominators.

The goal of these emergent themes was to provide a general explanation for the phenomenon. In turn, this explanation leads to more "sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). The goal of these final explanations was to draw conclusions related to the three research questions.

Trustworthiness

Demonstrating validity in a qualitative study requires a very different approach than establishing the same for a quantitative study. Qualitative studies require a much

stronger emphasis on a solid audit trail. An audit trail is an effort to ensure that others can see the integrity of the process. Specifically:

You demonstrate validity by showing that you collected your data in a thorough and authentic manner, were rigorous in your analysis, can explain alternative competing meanings, and can show through your steps of data transformation the path you took to develop your knowledge statements or findings (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 141).

In other words, it is an assertion that if an individual who has had the same experience as the subjects can relate to your findings and connect them to their own experience, it will serve as personal validation to the truth of your findings. This concept is referred to as transferability.

This idea of transferability has to be combined with a belief that the results will be acknowledged and adopted by the broader community college research base. In a qualitative study, ensuring trustworthiness helps establish the idea that the results of the study are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Trustworthiness refers to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). An effort was made to ensure that each of these areas was clearly addressed in this study.

Credibility

Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a “credible” or “true” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the instrument. As a result, finding ways to ensure the data are confirmed and presented authentically is even more important. Specifically, an effort must be made to ensure that the information gathered is presented publicly without being compromised by personal bias and experiences.

In this study, two strategies were employed to ensure that bias was minimized as much as possible. First, “member checking” was conducted by presenting initial interview themes to participants during follow-up interviews as a confirmation of accuracy (Moustakas, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The presented themes offered rich, thick description of the proposed phenomenon that had already been subject to peer review and analysis. Second, a detailed reflexive journal was maintained and captured potential areas of bias that arose throughout the study. These journal entries tracked concept development over the course of the study as well as detailing key moments of understanding or thought transition. Discussion of various parts of the journal insured that interpretation of the data was fair and unbiased.

Still, these efforts to remove bias from the interpretation were not at the cost of finding a voice within the field. A credible voice established on the topic engages the reader and offers a rich description of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Completed course work at CSU covering qualitative research established credibility to complete the study. Specifically, the narrative inquiry class provided a strengthened skill set in the area of interviewing skills, coding and thematic analysis.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as the degree to which the findings of an inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. Although the culture of every community college institution is unique, the results of this study allowed for transferability. The explored phenomenon, in its most general sense, was human relationships. Thus, taking into account the intrigue of a specific environment, the results and implications can be applied to a broader audience. Additionally, the details of

the case site, participants, and method provide sufficient depth to replicate the study at another community college. However, as in all cases of qualitative research, it would be up to the researcher to decide the level of transferability to their particular environment.

Dependability

Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The struggle with establishing dependability in qualitative research is nothing new. As Miles wrote in 1979:

The most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that methods of analysis are not well formulated. For quantitative data, there are clear conventions the researcher can use. But the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy-making audiences. How can we be sure that an ‘earthy,’ ‘undeniable,’ ‘serendipitous’ finding is not, in fact, *wrong*? (p. 591).

No matter how well documented the journey from 3,600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions may be, there will still be skeptics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, a detailed audit trail was established containing study materials, field notes, reflexive journal entries, coded transcripts, data analysis procedures and documents, and notes related to emergent theme development.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the research findings are derived from the research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer review was used as an effort to ensure confirmability. CSU faculty members, including the study’s advisor and methodologist, were asked to provide critical review of the study throughout the process. Their challenge and support ensures a high level of integrity throughout the process.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

Chapter four details the results of this study. The chapter is organized into four parts. Since the phenomenon is framed and described using the voices of the study participants, the first part provides a context through which to better understand each individual participant. The information shared pertaining to each student is offered as a base to better understand the factors that drive their comments.

Part two presents the structures of the phenomenon as explained by the collection of participant voices. After conducting an analysis of the student stories individually and as a unit, five core structures emerged as components of the phenomenon. These five structures—*commits time*, *connects to college*, *creates culture*, *challenges performance*, and *consistently cares*—are presented in detail.

Part three synthesizes the five structures and better describes how they come together to create a meaningful student-faculty experience. Part four presents the meaning and essence of the phenomenon, *sustained partnership*. As the essence of the phenomenon, *sustained partnership* presents the broadest view of the phenomenon as experience by these students.

Part 1: The Participants

The concept of the development of meaningful student-faculty relationships is offered through the shared stories of the students who experienced the emergence of such relationships. Brief introductions of the 14 study participants are presented to help

provide a context on which to base their contributions. The participants are introduced in the order in which they were interviewed. At the time these relationships were formed, each of the participants was between the ages of 18 and 24. In the introductions, the faculty members paired with the students are also mentioned. Throughout the chapter, the faculty members are referred to in the same manner that the students referenced them.

Introduction of Participants

Keith

Keith came back to college after having spent some time in the military. He arrived at Lost Lakes at what he referred to as the “last minute” before the semester started. As a veteran there were some pieces of his registration process that were unique, and he required some focused, individualized attention. Keith found that personalized attention from Alex White, a college staff member who taught in the classroom and worked in the financial aid office.

Jordan

Jordan had been homeschooled from grades one through 12. As a result, he was excited to arrive at Lost Lakes and begin the next step of his educational journey in a “formal” academic setting. That excitement was short-lived, however. In his very first class, Jordan encountered an instructor whom he still regards as his worst teacher of all time. Fortunately, his very next class was with Dale Coleman. His initial experience in Dale’s class showed Jordan that, with the right relationships, his college experience would certainly meet his admittedly high expectations.

LeAnn

Since LeAnn arrived at Lost Lakes, she intended to complete a degree and transfer to another state institution. LeAnn spent three years at Lost Lakes before completing her degree and transferring. During that time she held several work study positions at the school and self-professed to establishing multiple meaningful relationships with members of the faculty and staff. One of these staff members, Professor Evan Humble, connected with LeAnn when she registered for his math class. Entering with a self-professed fear of math, LeAnn was impressed with Professor Humble's teaching style and how he helped make the process of learning easier.

LeAnn believes she has a natural ability to connect with people, and this lends itself to making new relationships with relative ease. The relationships LeAnn discussed in the interview, however, had a deeper element. LeAnn holds most of her friends at arm's length and does not allow them to see the most vulnerable parts of her character. The faculty members she built relationships with were able to break through those initial barriers and connect with the individual underneath. LeAnn credits these relationships for making her overall experience at the community college a positive one.

Colby

Colby's education prior to college had been exclusively through the home-school system. She is an incredibly driven individual with a clear set of goals. Her work at the public library led to a desire to earn a degree in library science and to stay in the field after college. Colby attended Lost Lakes as a full-time student while maintaining her full-time job.

With so many life factors pulling for her attention, it is not a big surprise that Colby was drawn to the courses and faculty members who made learning both challenging and relevant. During her third semester she took a technical writing class with Professor Brian Brentley. Professor Brentley impressed Colby from the very first class session and maintained that positive impression over the course of the semester and beyond. Colby was impressed by Dr. Brentley's ability to earn her respect and make the learning experience relevant.

Kennedy

Kennedy had been away from LLCC for almost nine years at the time of her participation in this study. Kennedy also represents one of the most intriguing cases in this study since her involvement with her faculty member, Professor Kendall, served as a catalyst for her to pursue her own teaching degree and return to Lost Lakes as an instructor. She arrived at school intending to be a science major. The evolution of her relationship with multiple faculty members at Lost Lakes helped convince her she wanted to be a teacher; the development of her specific relationship with Professor Kendall led her to the realization that she was meant to be teaching English.

Molly

Molly also came to Lost Lakes after being exclusively home schooled. Molly arrived at LLCC in a self-described "very chaotic period of transition." She had recently lost the family dog and had gotten out of an emotionally-abusive relationship that she had been in for almost three years. As a result, she performed below her capabilities on the placement test and was slotted into developmental English classes.

Since she was unaware that she could retake the test and get a more accurate placement, Molly registered for the developmental courses. Her first developmental class was taught by Marcy Reid. From the very first session, Molly recognized that her skills were stronger than the majority of her classmates. Rather than complaining about having to take these classes, Molly accepted the opportunity to refine her skills and after being approached by a classmate for help began to look for opportunities to help other students improve their understanding of the material.

Molly has a very strong reflective component to her personality. This was evident throughout her interview where she offered comments such as, “I’m wondering if that would have a little bit to do with where I’m at today,” “I knew myself well enough to know,” “I didn’t put that much heart into it,” and “I don’t have the best self-confidence.” This ability to analyze her own experiences gave Molly an innate advantage in defining the evolution and progression of her relationship with Professor Reid.

Darryl

Lost Lakes was Darryl’s second effort at college. Due to his motivation to learn being lower during his first attempt, Darryl “didn’t do anything” and collected a series of failing grades on his transcript. When he came back to Lost Lakes, his life had evolved in several ways, and he arrived with a much higher desire to excel.

One of the first classes Darryl enrolled in was a student development class. Several weeks into the semester, his instructor gave a one-question quiz to her students asking them to write down their instructor’s name. As Darryl recalls, “I didn’t even know her name.” Later in the course his Professor, Ariel, assigned a project and asked the

students to commit to doing their best work. Darryl delivered a high-quality submission and felt that it sparked a small connection between him and his teacher.

Omar

Omar had been exclusively home-schooled until his arrival at Lost Lakes. As a result of his involvement in a strong academic environment at home, Omar arrived ready to engage with the institution. He was excited to be in a broader educational environment, to interact with the faculty and his peers, and to take on new academic challenges. Omar also had a very realistic perspective of some of the factors that would make his transition more difficult. He was aware of the culture he was joining and the areas he would have to work to compensate. As he said, “I really didn’t know a whole lot of people when I came on campus. I was an outsider. I was younger than everybody else. I was home-schooled so I was a bit socially awkward.”

As a result, Omar felt pressure to establish some strong connections quickly after his arrival. He found himself looking to members of the faculty and staff to help foster these initial relationships. One characteristic that helped him find success in this area was that Omar excelled at being a student. From completing his assignments at a high-quality level, to actively participating in class, to spending time interacting with faculty members after class and in their office, Omar worked hard to make these connections plausible.

The combination of Omar’s approach to learning and his personality opened the door for many strong relationships to develop over his time at Lost Lakes. Two of Omar’s professors, Dr. Toad and Dr. Brentley, were particularly receptive to him and became close personal mentors during his time at the school and at State U. after he graduated.

Robyn

Robyn is a first-generation college student who arrived at Lost Lakes committed to obtaining a degree. Her high school experience was defined by her grappling with a learning disability that made the journey more difficult. Her circumstances were made slightly more difficult due to the fact that her learning disability was not correctly diagnosed until she was almost 22. As a result she sometimes found herself being sent out of class for being disengaged and being treated like a trouble-maker. She also found herself in situations where she would ask for additional assistance, but she was not taken seriously and did not receive additional support. Robyn started to feel like it was the high school's goal just to get her graduated instead of making sure she was mastering the material.

Because of this background, she arrived at the community college campus with very little faith in herself, academically or otherwise. She arrived at new student orientation and found herself overwhelmed by being in a culture and hearing a language with which she was grossly unfamiliar. As a result, she defaulted to letting available support staff coordinate the logistics for her as opposed to managing the process herself. Through what Robyn refers to as "divine intervention," the staff member that helped her register was Paul Deanman who also served as LLCC's disability coordinator. Paul walked Robyn through the registration process and scheduled a follow-up meeting with her in which he walked her through a full slate of tests to identify her specific learning disability. Paul also taught Robyn how to interact with faculty members and request her accommodations.

Robyn's passion was for the visual arts in general and photography specifically. Due to her life circumstances, she elected to enroll at Lost Lakes on a part-time basis to get her comfort level established and gain some self-confidence. Her first class was with Professor Angela Curd who reassured Robyn that she was meant to be in college, was a great person just how she was, and was destined to accomplish great goals.

Quinn

Quinn came to Lost Lakes directly from high school. Quinn had been accepted to enroll with several state four-year universities and elected to come to the community college in an effort to begin her journey at a smaller institution, to stay closer to home, and to lower the financial burden required to earn her master's degree.

A strong student in high school, Quinn came to Lost Lakes with the intention of earning her associate's degree in education, transferring to a state school and obtaining her bachelor's degree, earning her master's degree, and finding a job as a teacher. Quinn had been a strong student in high school and was anticipating finding the same level of academic success in college. She knew she had strong and weak areas of her learning potential, and she also knew that there were different levels of comprehension. Her mindset was, "just because my work is not an 'A' doesn't mean that it's a failure, either."

During her first semester, Quinn registered for a psychology class with Professor Seth Wiseman. Her first impression of Professor Wiseman was a positive one and each subsequent interaction with him confirmed for Quinn that he was a necessary influence in her life. Quinn credits Professor Wiseman with redirecting her career plans based on the personal attention and mentorship he offered her.

Josh

Josh came to Lost Lakes after spending a year at another college. He arrived at the school with a passion for history and a desire to find a way to better infuse his love for history into his professional goals. Josh arrived at college as a “god-ling who knew everything” and was simply looking to earn his credits and move on. Early in his time at LLCC, Josh took a class with Dr. Morgan Toad. From the very first class meeting, Josh saw that there was potential that he could learn some important lessons about history from Dr. Toad.

Autumn

Autumn arrived at Lost Lakes with the intention of getting an associate’s degree in education and transferring to a state university to earn her bachelor’s degree. Autumn had known she wanted to be a teacher for as long as she could remember thinking about what she wanted to be when she grew up. Her time at LLCC helped confirm that she was making the right decision.

Autumn spent her entire life in Lost Lakes’ service region and had a connection with the school since her Aunt Janelle was also an LLCC employee. One time when she was visiting her aunt, she got into a conversation with a faculty member about vintage cars. That faculty member was Professor Seth Wiseman. As fate would have it, Professor Wiseman was named Autumn’s faculty advisor after she enrolled and he was the only faculty member who taught a prerequisite education class that Autumn was required to complete. When she registered for the course, she was excited that she would get the chance to spend some more time with Professor Wiseman. During her time at Lost Lakes, the relationship she hoped for did develop with Professor Wiseman.

Addison

Addison returned to Lost Lakes after accruing several years of clinical dentistry experience. The dental profession was very present in Addison's life. Her best friend is a dentist, and she has several girlfriends who are hygienists. As a result, she knew that she would stay in the dental field herself, either as a hygienist or a teacher at a dental school. She also knew that not having a related degree would stand in the way of her doing that.

While completing the prerequisite components of the program, Addison found herself frustrated. She felt that the courses were "bogus" and limiting in terms of preparing her to be a better professional. In her mind, what was reviewed in those general education classes was not going to help her better understand the individuals she was going to be dealing with on a daily basis. However, as she moved through the program she came to see that there were some circumstances in which learning what she did in those classes would allow her to have deeper conversations with some of the clients with whom she would interact.

Addison's extensive dental background played a role in her getting accepted into the highly competitive dental hygienists' program at LLCC. At the orientation for new students in the dental hygiene program, Addison met Professor Harriet Hunger. She formed a very quick connection with Professor Hunger because she could sense right away how trustworthy Professor Hunger was and how willing she was to trust her students, too. Also from that initial conversation, she knew that Professor Hunger was invested in her students' success both personally and professionally. Addison knew that Professor Hunger was committed to her achieving a positive outcome. Professor

Hunger's trust, investment, and commitment to Addison went a long way in establishing a very firm sense of mutual respect between the two of them.

Alex

Alex came to Lost Lakes with the intention of becoming a historian. He used the time he had off between completing high school and enrolling at LLCC to collect some work experience and make some important life decisions. Alex enrolled with a good sense of what he wanted to do with his life and how earning a higher education would help him achieve those goals.

During his second year at LLCC, Alex perceived a change in the way the faculty interacted with the students. He credited the change to an overhaul of the school's administration and the different energy that was brought into the college by the faculty members who were being hired to teach. He credits the hiring of a new president as the "watershed moment" that signified a change in the way LLCC operated. Additionally, Alex labels the community college as "intimate and laid back" in comparison to the four-year school he transferred to and believes these characteristics help spark connections that are more likely to be long-lasting. Also during this second year, Alex took a schedule of classes that included Dr. Brentley, Dr. Curtis, and Professor Humble. Alex developed connections with each of these faculty members and credits them with redirecting his personal career path into the field of teaching.

Part 1: Summary

Part one provided contextual introductions to the 14 study participants. The students are described as they arrived at Lost Lakes and any relevant information that

plays into how they framed their story is presented. The section also introduces the faculty member with whom each student established a relationship.

Part 2: Structures

One of the interesting outcomes of this study was the students' ability to identify the traits and behaviors that stood in the way of effectively developing relationships in as much detail, if not more, than they were able to identify the traits and behaviors that enhanced the likelihood of those connections emerging. Sam's story was developed to help provide a better sense of the traits and behaviors which represent barriers to building relationships.

Meet Sam

Since she was a young girl, Sam knew she wanted to be a nurse when she grew up. She struggled some with science in high school so her guidance counselor recommended that she consider the community college since the smaller class sizes would give her better access to the faculty members and support she needed to earn her degree. Sam arrived at Lost Lakes balancing the excitement of being in college with the apprehension of not being sure if she could achieve her goal.

Sam's first course was an anatomy and physiology lecture. The assigned instructor, Professor Dylan Balding, arrived several minutes late to the first class meeting. During that class Professor Balding reviewed the syllabus and established his expectations for the course. He told his students, "Traditionally only about 40% of my students pass the course, and I don't expect it to be any different this semester. If you aren't here to work hard and learn, then you should consider withdrawing from the

course.” Professor Balding ended class early that first session and was the first person out of the room after dismissing everyone.

As the semester continued, Sam was impressed with Professor Balding’s technical knowledge of the subject matter. His class was heavily lecture-based and the students were well aware that interrupting him with a question was a quick path to upsetting him. Even though Sam sat in the front of the classroom, she was constantly bothered by other students in the classroom who were passing notes, texting, playing on their laptops, and laughing during lecture.

When Sam needed clarification on a point early in the second month, she asked a question in class. Professor Balding did not know the answer at the time and promised he would follow up with the information during the next class session. When he failed to do so, Sam went and visited him during his scheduled office hours. The first time she went to his scheduled hours his door was locked and he was nowhere to be found.

When she went back a second time, he was sitting at his desk grading papers. Sam walked in and Professor Balding turned to her and said, “What’s your name and what class are you in?” Sam replied, “I’m Sam and I am in your Anatomy and Physiology class.” He asked, “What do you need?” She told him, “I asked a question in class last week about ligament tears and I just wanted to see if you had the answer.” He responded, “If it was important, I would have followed up with you. Anything else?” Sam followed up, “That’s fine. I am struggling to understand some of the material in your class. Do you know if there are tutors available to help with this course?” He answered, “It’s not my job to know how they can help you. They certainly spend enough money over there. Go ask them.” Sam left.

Shortly before the first test, Professor Balding announced that there would be a review posted online for those who were interested. He also announced that he would be at the local pub after class and would be available to answer questions and help prepare for the test for “those in the class who are 21.” When one of Sam’s classmates asked if those under 21 would also have an opportunity for an in-person review, Professor Balding scoffed, “Absolutely. Get together with one another and review your notes over your juice boxes.”

When Sam got her exam returned, she found a red “C-“ on the top. There wasn’t a single additional marking anywhere on the paper. She ventured to Professor Balding’s office hours again and saw he was speaking with several of the older students from her class. They were telling stories and laughing and Sam felt guilty interrupting. When Professor Balding noticed her in the doorway, he commented, “What’s your name and what class are you in?” She answered, “I’m Sam and I’m in your Anatomy and Physiology class.” He said, “What do you want?” She replied, “I was disappointed with my grade on my first test and wanted to discuss what I did wrong with you.” Professor Balding responded, “I’m busy right now. Use your textbook to see what answers you got wrong and then schedule another time with me to go over the rest.” Sam left his office and went to sit in her car, called her mom, and cried.

Introduction to 5 Structures

In her story, Sam experienced a series of moments that would have justified her walking away from Lost Lakes all together. One possible explanation for her persistence is that she had other instructors that semester that understood how to build student-faculty relationships the right way. Many students begin their college experience at the

community college for the purpose of creating relationships with members of the faculty. Voicing a sentiment that other students echoed, Quinn knew that being in a smaller community increased her chances of getting to know the faculty on a personal level:

[The personal attention] makes you feel like you're not just a number, which is part of the reason why I chose to go to a community college. It's smaller so your teachers get to know you. You build more close relationships with the people that work at the school... When you know people at the college and they know you by name or they recognize your face and they say hi to you, you feel like you can walk up to that person and ask them a question and not feel intimidated or feel like you're out of place or bothering them (34).

As Quinn asserts, students come to the community college seeking out meaningful relationships. The successful creation of these relationships is the core phenomenon of the college experience for many students. In this study, five structures emerged to represent the foundation of the phenomenon. These five structures are the faculty member's commitment of time, connection to the college, creation of culture, challenging performance, and consistently caring. Each of these concepts is explored in the sections that follow.

Commits Time

In many ways, fostering a meaningful relationship between a faculty member and a student requires the same steps that it takes to develop any other meaningful relationship. As LeAnn said, "I think most of the time, it's a time thing. It's got to take a lot of time." Addison made a similar comment, referencing the fact that it was the amount of time that she spent with her professor that opened the door to their sharing a deeper experience. Throughout their interviews, the participants often spoke to the fact that they were able to secure time with the faculty member.

For some students, this time was found before or after class; for others, it was spent during the teacher's office hours; for others, it was found through extracurricular involvement or outside of Lost Lakes all together. Still, for almost every student, they found an avenue to get personal attention from the faculty member. Subsequently, they were drawn in by the belief that their instructors were accessible, available, and interested in spending time with them as a student.

Their faculty members made efforts to communicate a message about accessibility to their students. Some of the messages were direct like inviting the class to come and visit them during office hours and some were more indirect like teaching at a smaller school with a culture that promoted student-faculty engagement. Collectively, the ideas that sent messages of accessibility included the perks associated with Lost Lakes having smaller class sizes, the instructor directly promoting his or her accessibility to the student, the instructor making the student feel welcome when they visited his or her office, the instructor making an effort to mentor the student, and the fact that the relationship carried across semesters subsequent to the initial meeting of the student and the teacher.

Perks of a smaller classroom. One of the criteria that the students credited with increasing the accessibility of their faculty members was the smaller class sizes of Lost Lakes. Autumn believes that the smaller community encourages faculty to spend time with their students:

I think because it was so small. If I would have went to State U. and you're a number there, I don't think I would have felt like able to go up to a professor and that I was going to be able to get in for office hours and that they were really going to be concerned. They grade so many papers and they read so many term papers and tests and everything that it's kind of just like, "Do you really care?" At Lost Lakes, when I was here, it was such a smaller feel that I feel like he could

take that time and have a special relationship with somebody, because of numbers (423).

This smaller classroom atmosphere allows instructors to promote their accessibility to students. Reflecting on the comparison of his experience at Lost Lakes and State U., Omar commented that the community college faculty tended to show more accessibility cues to students than those at the university. Examples of accessibility cues would be smiling while teaching, making it evident that the experience is enjoyable, presenting an interesting lecture that uses stories and inflection, and calling students by their names. As Omar said, “I would just...emphasize the fact that they’re here teaching the students. They are here for you. You need to take advantage of that opportunity because it’s a unique one.” In his experience the faculty at the university were more focused on “senior theses or higher level courses that go much more in depth” and thus less accessible to the general education students looking to connect with them.

Having fewer students allows the teacher more time for scheduling individual appointments during office hours, meeting with students outside of his or her office hours, and possibly even venturing away from the standard means of connecting with students in an effort to make the exchange more comfortable. In describing all of the teachers with whom he developed a meaningful relationship, Alex continued to return to the term “accessible” to describe them as people. Alex labeled teachers accessible who were available before and after class, dedicated the necessary one-on-one time to make sure the student’s concerns are addressed, and were willing to open themselves up to be contacted outside of the classroom and office hours.

In some cases, this accessibility can carry even more value than subject-matter expertise. While Darryl acknowledged the importance of the knowledge that his teacher,

Ariel, had and the material she covered in her course, he credits the development of their relationship almost exclusively to her personality. He consistently used the term “approachable” to define her personality. He defined approachable as “always putting herself out there, like, ‘If you have any questions at all...’” Sending a message of being approachable was easy; delivering on that message was more difficult. Fortunately for Darryl, Ariel did both:

She would stay after class. That’s one thing that I know. Every class that would end, she wouldn’t be jetting for the door or gathering up her stuff. She’d literally just leave whatever Powerpoint presentation she had, or whatever she was teaching for that day, and she would just stand there and say goodbye to everybody. Really like, “I’m here. If somebody wants to talk about anything as far as college...” because that’s what the class was about.

As the millennial generation arrives on campus, accessibility through a wider variety of traditional and new mediums will be valued as a key criterion of success for the faculty member. LeAnn promoted the idea that instructors who want meaningful relationships need to work at being accessible at the times and in the ways that students want them to be. Whether it is by distributing their cell phone numbers and inviting students to text them, doing something to require students use their office hours, or ensuring that they use a warm and positive tone when replying to student e-mails, instructors can show students how much they care by promoting their accessibility.

Promotion of accessibility. The students referenced the fact that most faculty members inform their classes that they are available to assist them and accessible when needed. As recipients of the message, the students also make quick decisions and develop perceptions regarding whether there is sincerity behind the teachers’ words when they extend this offer. In many ways, how the message is sent is equally important to the words that are chosen. For example, when Quinn’s math teacher told her, “Text me if you

have a question or call me if you need this. I'm always up. I'm willing to help you any time," she felt he meant it since he extended the offer to her personally. Receiving this offer in a one-on-one setting increased the value Quinn put on it since it was offered a second time and as a personal invitation.

A personal follow-up also worked for Molly. She lauded her professor for making herself available to get to know her students. Her teacher sent her students this message in some traditional ways such as being personable and friendly and giving off an inviting persona that made Molly feel welcome in the classroom. However, in Molly's case there was also a little bit of luck at work:

I continued to run into her after I passed her class, at work, because I worked at Denny's. She'd come in and see me all the time, every Sunday, she and her husband. And eventually I started to develop a relationship outside of school, but not only that, I'd run into her at school, as well, and she was always interested in how I was doing, what was going on, whether or not I was still writing...

Regardless of whether it was in class, at Denny's, around school, or during a visit to office hours, Professor Reid made it clear to Molly that she was willing to spend whatever time it took to foster a connection.

In the times when luck does not play a role, the faculty member can also promote his or her accessibility simply by being visible on campus. When describing her teacher, LeAnn offered, "throughout my whole time, I saw him all the time because he was always here." There was a clear assertion that the faculty member had to have a presence on campus and that this presence was created by being both visible and accessible. LeAnn shared a story about this faculty member holding his office hours in the student lounge because it made it easier for students to find him. By meeting students on "their turf" this instructor sent an important message about who he was there to serve. Keith

echoed a similar statement about his teacher. In Keith's words, "You know [he] is always going to be there. Or, if he's not there, you know where you find him. He's not hard to find. You know where he's at."

Another way that faculty members promoted their accessibility to students is through how they respond to the communication efforts of their students. Students perceive the timing of the response and the tone of the communication as criteria that speak to the teacher's investment level in forming a relationship with the student. In Alex's experience each of the faculty members he identified took the time to respond in a prompt and thorough manner. As he describes it:

If you make an effort to get in contact with them they will contact you back, which I'm always kind of fascinated by because they have so much stuff going on. [They] were implying that [they] have a lot of stuff going on but they still make an effort to get back in contact with [me], which is fascinating to me because sometimes I'm bad at e-mailing my friends back. It's a nice example and it really shows that (a) they care, but (b) they've got their stuff together. They're busy, they're still willing to make time for you and you're an ex-student. That's pretty cool, in my opinion. That's something that I would like to carry on and get better at myself.

The receptiveness to Alex's attempts to communicate with his faculty members sent an important message to him about his value in their eyes.

For many reasons, the responsibility to initiate the conversation about accessibility and convince students his or her outreach is authentic defaults to the instructor. Omar explains why he waits for the instructor to send this message first:

I think that's where the accessibility part comes in. You can have the nicest people in the world who just don't open themselves in certain environments and I think particularly when someone's in a position of authority, such as a professor, there's a relationship there but the professor is the one who's teaching the student. They're the ones who have to uphold and set a standard and enforce that standard. There's a certain window that has to be opened wherein, "I'm going to be this person who's in charge of teaching you but know that you can talk to me and I'm still going to be friendly towards you."

Keith's teacher showed his friendliness by promoting his accessibility to his students and by intentionally working to make the connection personal in nature. Through both formal means like telling a class of students that his office hours were important and informal means like seeing Keith in the hall and inviting him to stop by and talk, Alex (his teacher) repeatedly sent a message to all of his students that he was available to them.

While the students were split between those who got the message about accessibility directly or indirectly from their instructors, they all felt that there was sincerity behind the offer. One of the reasons that Professor Wiseman and Autumn's relationship happened was because she was comfortable approaching him, and they were able to spend time together. When exploring why this happened, Autumn offers a very simple answer, "I just felt like I could go to him." Interestingly, Autumn has no recollection of Professor Wiseman extending the invitation to her to come and talk to him. As she recalls, "I don't think he ever really said, 'It's okay to come talk to me.' I just got the feeling from the way he interacted and the way he spoke that it was okay to come to him." Professor Wiseman was able to send this message to his students through his natural mannerisms and approach to teaching.

Autumn sees the places that Professor Wiseman has impacted her identity as a teacher and a person. She has approached some of her interactions with students after what was modeled for her by Professor Wiseman. She believes that if more professors can adopt his style more students will have a truly meaningful experience in college. She also has some simple advice about how to get there:

Just be positive about your subject and just make it known to your students that they can come to you, because if you don't tell them, then they're not necessarily going to assume that that's what you want. I know a lot of times that I could assume that it's okay to go to his office hours, but maybe he actually is working on something during his office hours and he doesn't want me to bother him, but I really need help with this. Tell your students it's okay. You have a job to do to help students. You can stop that long enough to help someone figure out something they need help with.

For some faculty members, their natural style would not send the same message.

In that case, the individual must make the choice to extend the offer formally:

It would be okay to say to someone, "Come talk to me if you have a problem, if you have schoolwork, if you have something you just need to talk about." I think it would be really awkward to say that, but if that's the person that you want to be and people don't know that, maybe it's better to just say it because sometimes people don't come across as the most welcoming or warm person. You just have to let someone know that that's how you are.

If the teacher does not address this directly, the risk of being mislabeled as unapproachable increases. The chances of this label being put on an instructor also increase if the invitation to visit comes across as inauthentic. If students believe the offer was made because the teacher believes it is the expectation of his or her job, they will not take the message to heart. In Autumn's experience, she had a teacher who made this very mistake:

I wouldn't say that she yelled at us, but she – and I wouldn't say it's belittling, but there was just something about her that made me not think she was open. She just didn't seem like, "Come to me anytime." She didn't seem very willing. I just didn't get the same impression that I got from other professors. I feel like she was just like, "Okay, let's teach the class. Let's get it over with."

Darryl's experience also showed that a teacher could send a message about approachability without necessarily having to go overboard to get the point across. Darryl hopes he can incorporate that same level of awareness into his own approach as a teacher:

I feel like you can also be over the top like, "I'm here for you. I'm here for you. I'm here for you. I'm here for you." I don't necessarily have to get that through to

my students like, “Oh, I’m here. I’m the coolest. Come to me.” I just would like them to know that if something’s real, if something’s – if you want to talk about football and shoot the crap and all that kind of stuff, whatever. But if something’s real then you can confide in me, and I will take the appropriate action whatever that is. And that was real to me.

Students are very perceptive to the receptiveness of their teachers. Those who accept students openly and freely offer their time and support will reap the rewards associated with developing meaningful relationships with these same students.

Made student feel welcome during office hours. In a situation where the faculty member has elected to commit the necessary time to build relationships with students and has communicated that message to their students, the first visit outside of class is an important test.

When his teacher encouraged Keith to take advantage of his availability during office hours, Keith took advantage of the offer. Whether he visited him on official business like getting clarification for something that Alex had discussed in class or unofficial business like to see how his weekend was, Keith became a fixture in Alex’s office. Often, there was no real agenda: “Most of the time we would just talk about stuff kind of irrelevant to anything.” Regularly, Keith would sit there for 20-30 minutes just “discussing anything and everything, and losing track of time.”

It is a special feeling when a teacher can make someone feel welcomed during a visit. Jordan explained that when he sought out Dale in his office the first time, the message about accessibility and investment did not change:

I think a really, really special professor is one that if a student takes time to come to their office then they better make it as friendly and as personal as they can, because I’ve had a couple of teachers where I went to the office and I wasn’t even asked to sit down when I had a question. It was kind of like, ‘Oh yeah, well you didn’t do that,’ and out the door. You have other teachers who will not let you leave until they are sure that all of your questions have been answered. I think if

students see that those teachers are really pushing for them to do their best, I think that is probably what is really going to have the best connections.

In the exact same manner, when Autumn visited her professor in his office, the same sense of authenticity and interest in connecting with her appeared again:

I just felt it really easy to talk to him and talk to him on a personal level. I remember going to his office and talking about schoolwork or talking about what I wanted to do with my life and where I wanted to teach and what kinds of things I want to pursue. At that point, I knew that I wanted to do elementary education, but I wasn't sure if that's exactly the point I wanted to take. I didn't know if maybe I was interested in doing middle or what not. He helped me through a lot of that stuff. We just sat and talked and he just told me lots of stories from his past and his teaching career. I guess even just talking to teachers, not necessarily him, you just kind of get that passion and you really want to do something. When someone has personal stories about things, it just makes you want to do it even more.

This personal connection made Autumn feel more comfortable in the relationship right from the beginning. As a result, she would sometimes find herself just stopping in to visit with Professor Wiseman between classes to see how he was doing. It was an important experience for her the first time she visited Professor Wiseman without a real academic purpose. When he continued to present a warm and welcoming response to that visit, it further confirmed Autumn's belief that he was meant to play the role he was playing in her life.

In the circumstances when a student wants to keep his or her relationship with the faculty member strictly academic, the same set of welcoming gestures still applies. Colby saw her faculty members as resources and used her time with them as a means to an end. Even in their one-on-one exchanges, Colby approached them with a clear outcome in mind; she saw these interactions as a professional business relationship:

My one-on-one contact with him was not huge, but it was enough. I would go to his office – I've probably been to his office maybe a max of ten times, and usually didn't stay there that long, and we usually had certain things that we needed to

talk about or accomplish; fill out a form, or “Is this paper good enough to be submitted for the [scholarship] thing?”, things like that.

Colby wanted to be acknowledged as a serious student who was pursuing a specific plan and using college as a means to achieve those goals. Professor Brentley engaged in all the right behaviors and communicated all of the right ideas to send that message.

Robyn needed her visits to be focused on strengthening her mastery of course material. Since she struggled with learning some material, the faculty members who took note of this and worked to help her through it became special to her. Professor Curd was always able to do this. She would often encourage Robyn to visit her during her office hours and reinforced to her repeatedly, “We’re going to figure this out together.” Robyn’s math teacher provided an equally strong example of how to do this:

I struggled in math and Evan Humble got me through math just because I would go to him and I’d say, “I was in class. I sat in the front row but I didn’t get it.” So he would say, “Come back tomorrow during my office hours and we’ll try to figure out another way.” And that was really cool because he would teach you the same material but he’ll try to teach you a different way instead of teaching you the same way and then teaching you the same way and teaching you the same way and obviously it’s not clicking. So he would try to go around another route but obviously he took time to figure out how else he could teach it to you.

When both Professor Curd and Professor Humble sent Robyn the message that they were going to help make sure she understood the lesson, it paid dividends in increasing Robyn’s investment in her own education.

At the other end of the spectrum are the students who are looking for a personal relationship to complement the academic one. Again, the receptiveness to the first visit from the student can increase or decrease the likelihood of that happening. In Omar’s story, he sensed right away that the faculty member wanted him there:

With Dr. Toad, he was more than willing to talk to me. We had a lot of really good conversations in his office that often lasted more than an hour, sometimes two hours. We'd order pizza together, get lunch, and most of the time our conversations wouldn't just focus on what we were doing in class because history is such a broad topic. It could relate to foreign affairs, current events, that type of thing, stuff I'm interested in. And for me, that's really where I think the distinction is going to be made between dialogue that involves the classroom and the dialogue that's relevant to stuff you may be learning in the classroom. But, again, it's more interactive. It's two fold.

And for me, being able to talk with Dr. Toad like that established him both as someone I respected because he knew so much but also as a friend because he respected my time and even though he has so much more experience than I do and knowledge, we were still able to both have discussions where we were sharing views and not necessarily building a consensus but at least examining them together and he had equal respect for me as I did for him.

In Omar's case the framework of a traditional student-faculty relationship was stretched by a teacher who was willing to spend an extended amount of time getting to know him personally. As Omar offered above, their conversations often spread beyond that material in the curriculum and into the "personal realm" of the student. The dialogue has to move past the sole focus on academics and into the opportunity to "examine somebody's life" (40). In simpler terms Omar was seeking faculty members to connect with who would become life mentors for him as well.

Dedicated the time necessary to serve as mentor. This idea of mentoring came up as an unintended outcome for many of the participants. Keith's original contact with Professor Alex was in an effort to learn how to better navigate the college process. Through his responsiveness in identifying the resources that could help Keith overcome the obstacles that arose in his journey and by serving as his partner while he used those resources, Alex sent an important message to Keith about his value as a student.

Keith found himself in need of support multiple times during his first semester at Lost Lakes. Alex's consistent efforts to help work with Keith throughout the process

across multiple issues ensured that Keith knew that he had a partner in the process. Keith knew that Alex was committed to eliminating the stress involved in the process:

I remember when I first met him it was kind of – everything was crazy for a while, so I didn't really get to sit down and actually talk to him. He seemed pretty laid back and really relaxed, and didn't seem like he was a hard charger. He was just really calm, and everything. I was feeling so bogged down and stressed out, and he was like, "You know, it will work out. Just relax, calm down, don't be so stressed out over – it will all work out."

That idea of being a partner in the process was an important one to Keith. Alex showed his intention to be a partner to Keith in multiple ways. Whether it was helping him with financial aid paperwork, connecting him with a tutor, or introducing him to the librarians, Alex worked hard to help make sure that Keith had every opportunity to succeed.

Darryl had a similar experience. Although he was initially hesitant to reach out and ask anyone for help he was rewarded when he finally chose to do so. Darryl made the choice to reach out and his teacher, Ariel, stopped what she was doing to make sure his concerns were addressed. Ariel also impressed Darryl when she followed-up with him to see whether the steps they laid out to solve his concerns had worked. The fact that "she never left" and "was constantly checking in on me" sent a message to Darryl that he had a partner in the process and Ariel was committed to getting the matters resolved in a way that led to his long-term success.

To earn the mentorship component associated with a meaningful relationship, the student has to be willing to do his or her part as well. In LeAnn's experience, it took her a little extra time to see what her instructor was doing. In addition to being aware of the instructor's efforts, the student has to be open to receiving that mentorship as well.

LeAnn had to be aware of what Professor Humble was trying to do for her and willing to

accept that support. LeAnn was willing to accept his outreach because he had earned LeAnn's respect. Professor Humble earned this respect by knowing what would turn students off. "You can't act as if you are some high person up here and everybody is just lower than you because we're all students."

Once she realized that Professor Humble was someone to whom she could relate, his attempts at mentorship gained traction and his influence began to impact other areas in her life. Because she knew he was committed to him, LeAnn was willing to allow him to help guide her on a variety of topics. When considering how she knew he had become a mentor, LeAnn offered:

By being good role models and by being able to think, if this person was in this situation, what would they do? How would this person react to whatever? And being able to ask people, especially going through college, when you don't know what you're going to do, and you change your mind every single day, and not knowing where to go, and then to ask people who've already been through it, "What's your opinion? Just give me something," to be able to bounce ideas off of.

I have so many things that I'm changing and growing with, and I'll always have these people to look to, or look at, or talk to that it makes me feel that I have kind of like a security system, so that I know that I'm not just doing blindly and then questioning what am I doing, or halfway through realizing I'm doing something crazy, because I have these people that are there to be able to talk to, but then also look out for me. So if they think I'm doing something completely ridiculous, then they'll be able to tell me. So I think it's very much like people to look to as I am going.

When Professor Humble approached students at their level, with an air of superiority eliminated, he earned their trust. This was possible because Professor Humble had committed the necessary time to send this message to his students as a group and as individuals. In LeAnn's case there were some additional outcomes to his mentorship, since her desire not to disappoint her teacher, and achieve at the level of his high standards, followed close behind.

The conversations that happen once the student has become invested in the relationship and accepting of the mentorship components evolve very naturally. In some cases, they serve as the catalyst to extend the students involvement into broader parts of the college experience. Sometimes one or two conversations are not enough. In Jordan's experience, the first time Dale challenged him to get involved on campus Jordan scoffed at the idea. Dale had to be persistent in getting the message across and consistent in tying the potential back to specific qualities he saw in Jordan. And Jordan had to be willing to take to heart what he was hearing:

I think with some people all they would need would be the cheerleading – however you phrased that. With somebody like me who had said, 'When I walk through the door of LLCC I just want to take my classes and go home,' when he not only came up and told me [that I should be getting involved], but legitimately said, 'You have these qualities. You have this. I know you can do this,' and then he turned it back around and said, 'Why aren't you getting involved?'

See, that's a different dimension because a student can always really make excuses and say, 'I don't want to do it because I'm lazy' or 'I don't want to do it because I want to go home and be able to play on the Xbox at night,' but when someone turns that back around at you after saying, 'You've got this. You've got this. You can do this. You have the potential to do this. Why aren't you doing this?' it puts a spotlight on the student because they've got to actually answer why am I or why am I not. You can't just answer with because or twiddle your thumbs and try to give a half answer, and they're like, 'No, because I just said you have this.'

Those faculty members who continue to welcome students and offer deep connections will often get the opportunity to know their students on a personal level. It takes persistence over time from the individual, but that persistence also pays off. LeAnn believes that meaningful relationships need to be two-way connections. Faculty who persistently pursue a connection "can be my friend for the rest of my life" and "I could be a part of [their] life, too." In other words, the teacher would be let all the way in. "He

would be able to take part in all of my success and happiness in my life. I think that letting people into your life is a gift” (552).

In some of those cases, the relationship developed well beyond the typical interactions and in such a way that it added a new layer of meaning to the entire college experience for Omar:

I think it’s a really powerful, enduring thing, which for me has been a source of great comfort when I’ve needed advice or I’ve been going through a tough time in my life. I’ve gone back to several of the people here and talked to them about things that are really troubling in my life even though they don’t relate at all to what we discussed in class. It might be an issue of a relationship, it might be I’m really having trouble connecting with my parents, how to help them through this. It might be something that I’m struggling with at State U. But they are there as people I can go back to and I know I can trust and they’re people that have that experience before me and so I know that they’ve been there.

They’re not necessarily going to be Socratical about it but they’re going to help me get there in the way that I need to, still with that mentoring as opposed to teaching. “This is what it is. You need to know it.” “It’s okay. I’m going to help you through this and I’m your friend and look, you’re totally the same. I was going through this exact thing you’re going through beforehand.” And that, for me, is something that’s been powerful and really helped me.

Regardless of whether the style is Socratical or not, it requires the faculty member to dedicate a focused amount of time to help guide and direct the student. Each of the faculty members referenced in this study was credited with giving the required time to mentor the student.

Extension beyond the initial semester. Regardless of whether the relationship involved into a mentorship or remained more of a strictly business or academic relationship, the participants referenced the fact that regardless of how the connection was initiated its evolution into a meaningful relationship was the result of it lasting beyond the traditional confines of the academic semester. For nearly all of the

participants, adding length to the relationship was a way to increase its value. As LeAnn surmised:

If I have only been close to them for like six months, then it will kind of filter out and we won't really keep in touch. But if it's been a long relationship for a few years, then it would be more likely to continue on after.

From LeAnn's perspective, establishing a real relationship with her does not happen overnight; it takes persistence on the part of the instructor. The extended length improves the potential for depth since depth must be earned. She admits to a tendency to "test" people by giving "half blown-off" answers early in a relationship to see whether the other person will continue to pursue a deeper answer.

Josh, Darryl, Jordan, and Autumn experienced similar strengthening of the relationship over time. The successful development of Josh and Dr. Toad's relationship started in that first semester but reached greater depths during the second and third semester the two knew each other. This extended time invested in the relationship provided the exposure necessary to build a meaningful connection. Dr. Toad's approach to teaching, belief in challenging and supporting his students, and commitment to developing critical thinkers all served to make that connection last.

As Ariel proved that her concern for Darryl was authentic, she evolved into a "home base" of sorts for him. He started to use her more as a sounding board to help him make decisions. And these conversations started to enhance Darryl's experience outside of the classroom. Through this dialogue and the actions that resulted from the dialogue Darryl started to establish a network at Lost Lakes. And this network provided a foundation for Darryl right through commencement. "There were still things that she did up until the day that I graduated from here, and beyond."

Jordan began to see Dale's impact when he returned to LLCC for his second semester and saw that his commitment was still there. When he got back to school, he sought out Dale. In retrospect, he sought Dale out as a "little bit of a test" to see if the connection would continue." In his mind, he needed the answer: "I wonder if it's just a semester thing. I wonder if he'll still remember my name." It didn't take long to get his answer: "He still was like, 'Jordan, how are you?' Bam, right there, exact same vibe, exact same chemistry, exact same passion for students, whether they're in the classroom or out of the classroom" (468). Dale had passed the test.

Autumn was most impressed with the personal attention she received from Professor Wiseman beyond her time at Lost Lakes. Two years after she graduated from Lost Lakes, she had earned her bachelor's degree and was graduating from State U. On a whim, she sent him an announcement and was impressed by his response:

When I graduated from State U. in 2009 for my bachelor's, I sent him a graduation announcement and he sent me a gift back. He told me one day, he was like, "You know, I'm pretty sure you're going to be the County Teacher of the Year in like 10 years probably." It's just knowing that he had the passion to teach me and to believe in me just means a lot.

Professor Wiseman's personal attention to Autumn when she interacted with him as a former student validated everything he did for her while she was enrolled at Lost Lakes.

Summary of commits time. The participants recognized the time pressures that the faculty members deal with on a daily basis. They understood that the time that was dedicated to fostering relationships with them was a gift that the faculty members were offering. They also understood that offering this gift was more often the exception than the rule and they wished that more instructors chose to commit this time. Addison suggested that a full-fledged relationship does not have to result from the conversation

but that many faculty members are missing out by not putting some effort into making these connections so that more students had the opportunity to share a story like hers:

Maybe a good idea is that faculty members take every quarter 15 or 20 minutes with every student and just talk to them and be like, “What’s going on? Unrelated to this class, what is it? What’s going on? What’s rocking your world? What’s not rocking your world?”

Finding success in a meeting like this does not require a lot of skill. In fact, most times it just takes a willingness to listen:

I would just take time to get to know them and I would listen to them. She was a great listener. There again, she gave you an opportunity to make good on what you were trying to accomplish. She didn’t just assume that you were a bad child and you weren’t going to do the right thing. She just assumed that you were going to do the right thing. If you didn’t, she was going to question you and she was going to be like, “Hey, you kind of let me down here. You know this is how it should be.”

Committing the time necessary for the relationship to evolve and making the one-on-one time spent together valuable are two critical parts of the foundation for success in creating meaningful student-faculty relationships. Committing this time becomes easier when class sizes are kept smaller, instructors promote their accessibility to students, instructors make students feel welcome during office visits, instructors dedicated focused time to mentoring students, and the relationship extends beyond just one semester.

Connects to College

In addition to committing the time necessary to engage with students on a personal level, students wanted faculty members who made them feel connected to the broader community at Lost Lakes. Having this sense of connection allowed the student to be more comfortable in the environment and feel more confident in his or her ability to succeed.

Because the LLCC campus was a new setting for these students, they arrived with great anticipation about the opportunities that were now available. Over time, some came to see that they had arrived with fewer preconceived notions about the community college than some of their classmates. They heard some students express irritation with being at the community college because they were unable to attend a four-year institution. They heard other students complain because they did not have the chance to get further away from their parents. A third group complained that the school was too small and there was nothing to do there.

As a fair representation of this cohort, Jordan's enthusiasm was palpable concerning learning from faculty members, interacting with teachers outside of the classroom, and connecting with classmates. Upon arrival at LLCC, his plan for taking advantage of opportunities did not extend into more traditional means of involvement like extracurricular activities. His disinterest in involvement with formal means of interaction was less about not wanting to get involved in these ways and more about not being familiar with what the opportunities were and why they were so important. Still, he knew that he had to put out the same type of energy he wanted to get back from others:

I just think it takes the students themselves to actually be willing to open up to that, because this can either be a school, or this can be the place where you – where anybody can be the person that has the relationship like I do with the faculty.

Jordan knew he was walking onto the LLCC campus open to engaging with the faculty. Throughout his time being homeschooled and developing skills as a martial artist, Jordan came to understand the importance of having solid, meaningful relationships with authority figures. He arrived with confidence that if he transferred that same mentality to college the experience would certainly be heightened.

Jordan asserted the idea that he came to Lost Lakes with a different mindset than most arriving students. In his opinion:

I think you have some people who, they just – they don't really care. They're out for them. They don't really care about getting involved at the school. They don't care about doing anything but working nine to five, taking a night class, and going home.

Regardless of whether the student arrives at the college with the intention of getting involved or with the intention of just taking his or her classes and going home, the possibility of engaging them in a meaningful relationship exists. The likelihood of that happening is increased if the student has self awareness and is prepared for the college experience, if the instructor uses a broad approach to connect with the students, if the instructor endorses the student's self-concept and serves as a cheerleader for him or her, and if the instructor drove the student toward college resources. In the case of these students, those four factors integrated well.

Student Knew Self and Was Prepared for College Experience. To find success in college, these students arrived with a balance of being driven and wanting to have an enjoyable experience. Alex articulated both sides of this balance. He arrived with a keen focus on learning that he believes separated him from many of the other students:

I think some students, because their parents – this is just my opinion – but if a student is enrolled just because their parents want their kids to go to college, they don't have to pay for anything and there's no accountability at home then of course they're not going to care about their work. But I had to pay for my school. I worked basically as much as I could...I paid for Lost Lakes. I was invested. There was a reason for me to succeed."

At the same time, however, Alex didn't want to let that motivation prevent him from having fun at college and developing connections with his teachers:

It wasn't like I walked around being Mr. Serious. Most of the professors here would probably remember me as kind of goofy and outgoing. But you have to

engage with your professor. You have to be aware that they're a person, too. You can't just go around being disrespectful to them. You know that they have feelings. It sounds kind of cliché but I don't think a lot of students think that way or care. I'm not saying all of them but I think some students are just kind of like, "Yeah, whatever. I'm doing my thing." And I think that can prevent you from having a long-lasting relationship.

While instructor's first impressions of whether or not a student is serious about learning are often proved correct, Robyn asserted the idea that faculty members need to be careful before labeling a student as disengaged too early in the process. In her case it took almost the full semester before she really got comfortable and started to engage with her teachers:

It took me probably a few – probably towards the end of the semester to really open up and talk. Because sometimes people would talk to me and I just wouldn't talk. And it's not because I didn't want to. It's just because it's almost like I didn't know how to. [At the end of the semester,] I was finally comfortable enough and the anxiety went down enough to where I felt like this is okay. I guess with anxiety it's that the more you're exposed to it the less scary it is so I think that's why it took me a while.

The faculty members who were patient with her earned exposure to the authentic Robyn at the end of the semester. Robyn wants to be a teacher when she finishes her degree, and her personal experience will impact how she approaches students in her own classroom down the road:

I'm hoping that a lot of the timid students and stuff like that I'm going to try to talk to individually. I'm going to try to talk to everybody individually in my classes just to see how they are, not too personal but if they're planning on going to school and their feelings about higher education, if they're timid about it sharing my personal story and relating to them. Because I feel like if you can relate to them they're going to believe you. I guess you can relate to them in different ways, like if we both have a disability you can relate to them in that way. But you can also relate to them if you're both watching [the same television show].

Drawing the students into their own academic experience and encouraging them to develop as learners is a critical component of the long-term development of that student

as a lifelong learner. Robyn's professors helped ensure that she knew she was destined for academic success and that the faculty was willing to do whatever it took to help her achieve it.

Instructor Utilized a Broad Scope to Engage. Robyn's intention to try to connect with her students on this individual level is a trait that many of these students credited their faculty members with doing successfully. LeAnn was most drawn to the faculty members who were able to have a conversation with her about her. She wanted the teacher to work hard to get to know who she was, what motivated her to achieve, and what her life was like away from school. She wanted people who authentically took an interest in what she was doing. Learning about students at this level of depth is contingent upon faculty having an initial conversation with the student that makes an impact.

Reaching out to a student in an effort to find common ground shows the student that the faculty member has a personal investment in him or her and has a sense of pride tied to the student's success. LeAnn wanted the teacher who showed his or her interest in LeAnn was comprehensive. In describing her chosen teacher, LeAnn said, "He just took the interest in everything, not just in his class; in me as a person, as a student, the whole thing."

Often, this vested interest becomes evident when the faculty member reaches out to the student early on and makes an effort to minimize the traditional distance between some faculty members and their students. As Alex explains, Professor Humble did this particularly well:

He tried to meet the students. It really made a nice impact on me. We even talked about hip-hop music, old-school stuff like Public Enemy because I had a Public Enemy patch. And he would just try to find what kids liked and connect with them on that level, which I always appreciated...For example, he saw a Public

Enemy patch on my hoodie and so he was like, “Oh, yeah. I like Public Enemy, too. If you ever want to listen to them I’ve got the old cassette tapes...”

Not a lot of professors would do that. There’s a certain amount of distance typically. Not to a professor’s fault. Like I said, it’s a lot of times just their personalities. And they have busy lives, they have children, they have other commitments, they have to grade papers. I’m thinking about becoming a professor myself and I understand that. But I guess it depends on what the professor is comfortable with.

In the first half of his comment Alex brings to light the idea that Professor Humble reached out to him in a way that was personal and authentic. As he continues, he acknowledges that reaching out in this way does not come natural to some teachers. Still, he knew he was making an effort to reach out so he found himself very attuned to whether or not he felt the faculty member was making an effort as well:

I think there has to be a willingness on the part of the student but also a willingness on the part of the professor. I think with Brentley he was just always happy and upbeat and I think he took pride in his students’ work and if he felt like they had potential he would focus in on it and try to hone it or even if he felt like they were floundering – I guess that’s the mark of a good teacher.

When the faculty member can show that level of interest in the student the dynamic of the relationship will change. LeAnn explained that when an instructor sees her and asks how she’s doing, “I can either be just like, ‘Good,’ or I could be like, ‘Well, it’s good except for this class that I hate and this paper that’s driving me crazy.’” If the teacher appears inauthentic while asking the question, LeAnn will dismiss it; if she perceives the question coming from a genuine place, she will offer the more detailed response.

Sometimes the initial connection takes a little bit of luck to help the pieces fall into place. One day while Autumn was visiting her Aunt Janelle (who was a LLCC employee), the conversation turned to one of her Aunt’s favorite cars which she was

selling. After overhearing some of this conversation, a faculty member interjected in the conversation and recommended that Janelle just give the car to Autumn. That faculty member was Professor Wiseman and his offhand comment and the conversation that followed made quite an impact on Autumn:

So it kind of started out as a joke. I feel like that's when I started to notice him and want to actually take him in a class, because he just seemed like this down-to-Earth guy. He was really positive and just had a really good attitude and acted like he really cared about his students.

Professor Wiseman had some luck on his side when he overheard that conversation between Janelle and Autumn. For Addison, the initial connection was more intentional. Addison and Professor Hunger's relationship developed so quickly because it became a very personal one for both of them. Much of this personal connection was invited by Addison during her interview for the dental hygiene program:

For me it was very personal because I had interviewed with her. I started with her. I let her know personal information about myself because I wanted to get in the program and I just wanted it out on the table. I wanted her to know that this was it for me. This is what I wanted. I had been in dentistry for ten years. I was raising a child by myself since I was 18 years old. I wanted it to count. So I let her into a lot of really, really personal stuff. Then she was very, very invested in me. I could just feel that. Because she cared about you. She looked at you in your eyes and she just has a very empathetic way about her.

Addison's initial reaction to Professor Hunger was that she was a person who was authentic both professionally and personally. The more she was exposed to her teacher, the more her personal observation confirmed that initial belief:

I just got that sense just from observing [her]. I observe people a lot. So it was just nice to know that just in watching her actions with other people or paying attention to other scenarios and interactions that she had with other people, you never saw backlash from any private conversations that they might have had. Private, in the sense of if your girlfriend were saying that they had an issue with something and you knew they were going to present the faculty member with that and you never heard anything about it unless that girlfriend said something to you about it or this was the outcome or what have you. So I liked that about her. Her

whole demeanor, you could just tell she seems like a very loyal kind of personal, not outlandish and that kind of stuff.

Addison's interactions with Professor Hunger during the interview process gave them a baseline from which they could build. Many of these students referenced the benefit of the initial connection with a faculty member not taking place inside of class. Omar added an interesting point about the impact an instructor's out-of-class visibility has on his or her in-class persona. He asserted the fact that when you know the instructor outside of the classroom, it eases your comfort level inside:

I think you see them more as people as opposed to just professors who know more than you could possibly imagine. And when you're in a classroom you're worried about that grade. If I'm the kind of person that's really nervous about that and I slow down and meet them outside of the classroom I might actually develop a dialogue that isn't focused around that academic interest that might certainly be related to it.

But it gives you a chance to just see them as people and actually talk with them one-on-one. Again, you're removing that sort of authority-based relationship where, "I'm the professor, you're the student, give, take, give, take. And afterwards, if you get a good grade, I'm happy with you." It allows that chance for a wider dialogue.

And certainly when I took Professor Humble's math course I was really, really comfortable with him because I'd had him play chess with me a number of times and I'd seen him. He was one of the professors here who was really happy to just walk around and talk to everybody. And everybody knew it because he always had a smile on his face and he really had his office hours in the student lounge. You can't make yourself more accessible than that.

And I think that kind of shows the difference between what you develop in terms of a relationship with the professor in the classroom and what you develop in terms of a relationship with a professor who sees you outside of the classroom and is willing to have that dialogue.

The idea of reaching out to foster connections with students and inviting them to connect outside of the traditional classroom is an important one to understand. Still, in their attempt to achieve the same level of investment from their students, some instructors

risk crossing over the line of the professional boundaries that define the job. Alex witnessed this when one of his teachers went too far trying to establish student relationships:

He used to be a professor here and he was a great teacher. He could connect with students, but he went too far, in my opinion. He would always talk about break-dancing and he'd slip pictures of him break-dancing in the slides that he would be doing, which is funny, but I don't think (a) I didn't take him seriously because he was always joking around, but (b) he was like, "Yeah, guys, if you want to go have a beer after class..."

I think you can socialize with the student but to the point where you are acting like the student is another matter. Evan Humble was like, "I'll listen to Public Enemy with you," but it wasn't like, "I'm going to go out there and party with you." There's a difference and I never appreciated [the break-dancing instructor] for that. I thought that was inappropriate.

It kind of weirded me out because I did feel like he hit on girls and I guess that's his prerogative but it was just kind of weird. And I think he kind of started backing off of it by the time I was leaving but I did not approve of that. I didn't like it. And I didn't think he was a horrible guy. I just don't think he understood boundaries or he just didn't care... When you're dealing with kids and you're talking about going to have booze with them or going to get drunk with them or whatever, yeah. You're definitely going to connect to them but in my opinion, that's not a matter of professionalism. It seems kind of like a cheap way of connecting with a student. It's kind of lazy in my opinion.

The distinction between the examples is fickle. In Alex's opinion, the teachers who made an effort to come across as genuine and dedicated to his success have a clear advantage over those who utilized short-cuts to foster these same connections. The faculty members with whom he connected all shared a common understanding of this balance: "I think none of them crossed the line between revealing too much or not revealing enough."

Instructor Endorsed Students Self-Concept and Served as a Cheerleader. The students acknowledged the importance of the faculty member endorsing their perception of why they were and working to enhance their self-esteem. For some of them, they were not getting this reassurance from other sources. One of the criteria that made their

relationship work was that Professor Reid showed a genuine interest in getting to know Molly:

It was more just the fact that somebody was interested in me. I hadn't really had much experience with that. I was home schooled, so other than my mom and dad, I spent a couple of years where it was pretty much just me, and I'd gotten teased pretty badly, so I didn't stay in the home school co-op that I started off in. So the fact that somebody was interested in me for me was pretty monumental because it's like, "Hey, wait. Somebody likes me. Somebody's interest in how I'm doing, what I'm doing and why I'm doing it," and it just kind of progressed.

This personal attention was combined with the fact that when the two did interact, Professor Reid treated Molly with kindness and respect. Being treated in such a manner made it very easy for the students to reciprocate.

Addison also arrived at LLCC with some personal baggage. She felt like she had let people down in her past and although she arrived at school motivated to succeed she was not overwhelmingly confident in herself. Even though Addison was happy that she and Professor Hunger had developed a close connection she was less certain about why:

I don't know why she took to me. Maybe she took to me because I was someone that was definitely willing to work hard. I definitely have that circle background. I was a kid that got pregnant in high school and was definitely digging my way out because I felt like I had let down a lot of people. I was a good student. I was a good athlete. I was part of the star fishermen tour program. I was mentoring kids in high school. Then I got pregnant in high school. So, I felt like I was spending the last ten years of my life digging out and trying to rectify this thing that I had done.

So maybe she saw my work ethic. Maybe she felt my extreme desire to do the right thing, to be a better person. Maybe she saw that in me. I don't know. Probably. I would hope so anyways. I'm fun and make jokes and I try to keep things light. I'm very driven, very, very driven, very motivated. I think she liked that about me. I was willing to help my friends, my classmates. I just worked hard. I think I really worked hard. Whatever was asked me, I just did it, whether I wanted to or not. I normally did it pretty well or to the best of my ability, which, typically turned out to be pretty good.

So, yeah, I hope that she saw that in me. I'm assuming that she did. Also, there was just some emotion connection for some reason. I think she maybe felt for me.

My childhood wasn't great, like who had a great childhood? I don't know anyone that did. You know what I'm saying? I don't know. I don't know why she felt that way.

The fact that Professor Hunger established a comfort level and sent a message of acceptance to Addison from early on made a noticeable impact on Addison's self-esteem as a student.

At times, the teacher can use even more direct avenues to help boost the student's self-esteem. Professor Reid celebrated Molly in the classroom in an effort to accomplish that goal. She "encouraged me I'm not a failure for failing the test," and "she would use me as an example, my work as an example, whereas she didn't so much do that for the other students." This extra attention led Molly to develop an affinity for Professor Reid. This affinity had an important payoff in that Molly has an "absurd desire to please everybody that I actually really adore." Because of this, she pushed herself to work harder academically so that she could impress her teacher and continue to yield the rewards associated with doing so. Molly's desire to perform at a higher level combined with Professors Reid's faith in her abilities to allow Molly to continue to excel in the classroom. This success caused a transition in Molly from a "mouse" to a confident adult.

Darryl arrived at Lost Lakes equally in need of a vote of confidence. Fortunately, Ariel's subtle approach resonated well with Darryl's style. She convinced him that it was time for Darryl to start believing in Darryl. This was a message that Darryl desperately needed to hear:

At that point in my life, I definitely was not sure, if for all those years my parents were right and I really was just being lazy and a knucklehead and all that kind of stuff, or that I was maybe not up for it, because I never gave it – after sixth grade, the light switch went off and didn't come back on for a long time. So that's a lot of years of feeding yourself negative reinforcement at the educational level. Cs

and Ds, Cs and Ds, and not doing my homework and not studying for tests, but “I’m just not as smart as those guys are.”

And my parents sitting there like, “No. You just don’t do anything. You’re perfectly smart to do it.” And I wasn’t sure. I believed them, but I’d never proven anything to myself like that, so she was just this – I don’t know. Sometimes when strangers tell you something, you take it in a lot better than when your own folks do. I don’t know why.

Ariel made every effort to be authentically approachable in the classroom and strategically showed her own vulnerability. These decisions helped her gain the trust of her students. Once this trust was established her efforts to develop their self-esteem increased in impact.

Sometimes an instructor’s effort to help boost a student’s self-esteem leads to a change in the way the student looks at the relationship. As the initial attention invites the student to get more involved with that faculty member they start to view their interactions as beyond the scope of the traditional student-faculty design. Several of the students categorized their relationship with the faculty member as a “friendship.”

According to Robyn, there were several reasons that she could label her connection with her teacher in that way. First, “she was just there for me when I needed her,” and she had an open door policy where Robyn knew she could get the help she needed. Second, “she would remember things specifically about me.” Third, her decision to get involved on campus outside of the classroom gave her exposure to faculty members in new and different ways. This exposure was made especially clear through her example involving a club advisor:

You could go to him during his office hours and he would give you extra help and those kinds of things. But I think it was during the leadership conferences and all those other conferences that if you were a student and you were lucky to go to, you really developed relationships with them. And then they’re no longer your

professor. They kind of get more laid back and you have I guess more friendly conversations than just classroom conversations – personal conversations...

All of a sudden there's no longer those social roles. I'm a student and he's a professor. All of a sudden it changes in the fact that the goal is success and for there to be success people have to be comfortable enough to talk to you and these relationships change like that.

Quinn found her extra time with a teacher by becoming a regular visitor during her office hours. Visiting her instructor in this environment put Quinn in a situation where the instructor was willing to share more than she otherwise might have:

She shared with me trials in her own personal life and I think that she shared those things with me because she felt like her own experiences could help me with my experiences and with my hard times and I liked that...

When I was in her office that day she kind of showed me that she had a heart. It made me feel good that she felt comfortable enough to share those types of things and the trials in her own personal life with me. It made me feel like she thought that I wasn't just another airhead students that she had, like I was really a person and that she believed in me. I think that's really important.

In many ways the one-on-one attention was what made it feel like a friendship to Quinn. However, she was quick to offer that a friendship with a teacher is not your typical friendship:

I don't want to say that we weren't friends but it's not the kind of relationship you have with your girl friends or your guy friends that you go and have a slice of pizza with. It wasn't that type of relationship. The relationship that we have was she was there to help and it was like she was someone that I could look up to and someone that I can strive to model my own actions after.

Instead of as a friend, Quinn started to look at her teacher the same way she looked at her mother. It developed into a mother-daughter relationship where she was being guided both in the classroom and through life in general. Quinn learned that she reminded her instructor of a younger version of herself and this led her to know that Quinn was strong, independent, and destined to make something of herself. Over time,

her teacher also took on the motherly role of encouraging Quinn, frequently telling her, “Everything’s going to be okay. You’re going to figure it out. You’re strong. You’re going to be able to do this,” or “You’ve got more willpower and you are going to strive to be the best, and I think that even if you don’t become a teacher, whatever you decide to do you will be the best at that.”

Similarly, Addison’s belief in her own ability to succeed increased when she recognized that the faculty members were partners in her process of completing the program. This became very evident when Addison experienced her own hardship and crisis moment as a student:

The faculty members here were just like, “We’ll figure something out. It will be okay.” It [was] just, “We’ll figure it out. We’ll get through this. Don’t worry. Take this time off the next three weeks, rest, study for your boards, take care of your family, do what you’ve got to do. We’ll figure it out. It’ll all be fine.” In the end, it was.

It was like three weeks of like serious just frustration, depression. It was very, very stressful, very miserable, because I was stressing the whole time. I couldn’t enjoy my time off. My studying was interrupted by, “Why am I even doing this right now? Who knows what’s going to happen? I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Although her crisis was still an incredibly stressful event, it became easier to navigate when she took advantage of the fact that the faculty members were willing to do whatever it took to help her move forward.

When students feel they are in crisis, the perception of a partner who is helping them resolve the issue can make all the difference. One unique attribute of the dental hygiene program is the requirement that they maintain a high pass percentage rate in order to keep their accreditation. As a result of this pressure, many faculty members were

under extra pressure to get their students through. Sometimes this pressure would boil over into the faculty member's interaction with students:

When we did communicate with them about an issue, they were so rigid and cold. They were very cold in their return. Their e-mails were very rigid. Phone conversations were very cold. It was just shocking, actually. Had they just taken a minute to say, "I understand," just been empathetic to what our situation was. They may not have been able to change what our situation was. The rules are black and white. There was no bending them and we know this. Just being empathetic at times is all that someone really needs to then calm down and sort of problem solve.

The coldness of these interactions often led to the students developing a disassociated presence from the faculty, and subsequently from the program as a whole. Once the student transitions to a disassociated presence, the likelihood of meaningful relationships emerging is greatly diminished.

When this warmth is present and a relationship is invited, there are few factors that stand as major barriers to that connection evolving. Even though Quinn classified her relationship with her teacher as "mother-daughter," she did not believe that her teacher's sex was a precursor for what developed. The fact that both Quinn and this particular teacher were female was not a significant reason their connection blossomed:

I think that you can still build the same type of relationship with a male teacher if you're a female or if you're a male with a female teacher. I don't think that it really matters the gender of that person. If you feel a connection with them and you feel like you're comfortable enough to share things with them the relationship can be beneficial to both parties no matter if you're male or female.

Her relationship with Professor Wiseman is an example of a cross-sex relationship being equally successful:

Wiseman encouraged me not only with psychology, because he was really excited when I wanted to change my major, but with school in general. He wanted to see me succeed. He wanted to encourage me to move on to the next level to get my four-year degree, that type of thing.

There is one more subtle way that a teacher's endorsement of the student helps improve the college experience. Alex also credits these specific faculty members with making his time at Lost Lakes enjoyable:

I think they just made it enjoyable to come to a school environment and learn, grow as a person, mature as a young adult. And I don't know how I would have developed. I think I eventually would have. But they were definitely a big aid in helping that along.

I remember coming here right out of high school and I thought about going to a four-year institution but I didn't think I was ready and it was just kind of starting a new chapter in my life. Actually, I met my wife here. Who knows? I think I would have continued but someone people might not continue, especially if they have a bad experience. Why subject yourself to something, especially if you're at a young age where either your parents are forcing you to do it or you're not actually here to learn, you're just kind of here for a social thing. But if something grabs your attention and pulls you in maybe that changes your whole outlook.

I think it would have been difficult to come here if it hadn't been for them. I think I would have still managed but they totally made my college experience worthwhile. I enjoy State College for different reasons but I think intimacy-wise, Lost Lakes was the best for me.

Alex's connections with faculty members that he believed saw the authentic him and accepted him as he was transformed his educational journey.

Instructor Drove Students towards College Resources. Although many of these students had more than one teacher who worked to help confirm their decision to be in college and improve their self-esteem, what made the teachers they identified in this study more unique was the fact that these teachers combined that effort with the encouragement to foster these relationships across campus and get involved in other rewarding opportunities that were available to them. Robyn credits the counseling team for helping instill her with self-confidence and the willingness to identify and accept the resources that were available to help her:

It's just like that foundation the counseling built for me. [They] taught me how to be resourceful. They taught me all the tools that I needed to succeed in this life and university life and now my professional life. Because they took the time and said, "We're going to teach you about how to get scholarships. We're going to teach you how to learn." And they did. They taught me how to learn. They taught me those things (752).

The counselors taught Robyn to be resourceful. In particular, based on how she had already reached out to her, Robyn started to look to Professor Curd as an important resource for her on campus. "Our relationship changed and she was more of a go-to person, like, 'How do I do this?' She would tell me how to do it and she would give me extra help." After adapting this transformation of thought, Robyn saw her relationship with Professor Curd really begin to evolve into something special.

Darryl's relationship with Ariel also changed when Darryl recognized that Ariel had the ability to connect him with people and services that could benefit him across campus. One of the reasons that Darryl felt comfortable approaching Ariel when he knew it was time to ask for help was because he viewed her as a competent teacher. Part of what she taught in the student development class was the available resources on campus. Darryl started to view her as "a walking Lost Lakes" who knew everything there was to know about the school. As a result, when Darryl needed help with a school-related issue his confidence in Ariel made her a natural choice to ask. Molly shared a similar story about how the development of this one deep relationship opened the floodgates to an entire new world at Lost Lakes:

By proving that this isn't just some nameless, faceless organization that doesn't care. Even if you just make a relationship with one person, it shows that there's a heart and a soul, and that even if it doesn't seem that any of your other professors – if you're taking six classes, five out of the six don't care, but there's that one that does, and there's that one that takes the time to say, "Hey, Molly. Are you doing okay? You look tired. Is everything all right at home? Is everything all right? Do you need anything?"

By showing that there was a heart and a soul here made me take a minute and look a little bit deeper, because it seems like there's a couple of layers here. There's the outside layer, which is the one that most students see because they don't take the time to stop and go, "Hey wait, there's a crack here. What happens if I peel behind it?" And then there's the one where you have the student-teacher relationship, or the student-faculty, student-whomever relationship, and then you stop and you go, "Hey, there's a layer behind that, too."

And that's what happens if you get involved and you start to see, "Hey, maybe if I go to tutor for an hour, not only am I helping them out, because there's a shortage of tutors, but I'm changing somebody's life, just like this teacher changed mine, even by just stopping and saying, "Hey, are you okay?"

And then from there, it just goes – it's kind of like roots back to the garden. It takes a little bit, but the roots go down and they find water and then it stops growing, and then they have to go deeper until they find more water, and then at the end of it, there's this great, big, beautiful tree. So getting to each layer is important to trying to bridge that gap, because without that first vital connection, there's no motivation to go any further. But if you make that connection, and even if you make it with two or three people, you can go, Hey, wait. This can be so much more."

Professor Reid's decision to invest in Molly increased Molly's willingness to open her eyes to see what other parts of the school were available to her. As the students became acclimated with LLCC, it became clear to them that the school worked hard to ensure the best experience possible. One of the avenues that Lost Lakes utilized to meet this commitment was providing a variety of involvement opportunities such as the tutoring center, the student government association, an honors society, a student leadership organization, and an athletics program. Additionally, LLCC established a culture where the faculty members were expected to serve as ambassadors for involvement with these programs.

The need for faculty members to serve as ambassadors is particularly important when dealing with students who are in their earliest stages of college. In reflecting on her initial experiences at Lost Lakes, Quinn remembers being a freshman and being totally

unaware about whom she could go see and ask questions. At the completion of her degree her mindset had transformed, as evidenced by the advice she offers for incoming students. “If you know that you’re struggling...find the resources. Go talk to the teachers. They’ll help you. If you need [help, they] will find it.”

Professor Wiseman was a major factor in Quinn’s evolution of mind. From the first day of class when he told the students that his door was open, and they could come talk to him any time to the first time Quinn approached him for help and he responded, “Come down to my office. We’ll set up a time. We’ll meet about this and that,” Professor Wiseman had started to play the role of resource for Quinn. He was able to step into this role because in Quinn’s eyes he was familiar, he was willing to help, and he had a track record of providing her with good advice. In addition, from that very first appointment Professor Wiseman showed Quinn that he was committed to getting her needs met:

He’s willing to work with you, willing to point you in the right direction. He’s even walked me down to other people’s offices, like, “Go talk to this person.” And he’s introduced me to different people here at the school and told me that I need to talk to them about whatever it is that I had a question about as far as like choosing to go to State A & M and what kind of classes I needed to take here to succeed there. He was very helpful with degree progress and anything you needed as far as classes. And type of thing that dealt with school I felt like he was the person that I could go to talk to.

Professor Wiseman’s awareness of the resources at the college allowed him to promote Quinn’s use of these tools. As their level of trust was increasing, Professor Wiseman was wielding an increased ability to influence her decisions.

Faculty members were asked to serve as ambassadors for extracurricular involvement through two avenues. First, they had to be aware of their students’ motivations and desires. Second, they had to promote avenues of involvement that aligned with these interests.

It was through knowledge of LeAnn's values and interests outside of the classroom that one teacher convinced her to get involved in student activities. "She'd be like, 'I think this can be a really good opportunity and I think you will get a lot out of it. I'm not going to try to waste your time.'" The instructor's deeper knowledge of who LeAnn was as a person gave her an advantage in connecting LeAnn to the extracurricular opportunities that helped strengthen her experience as a student.

Jordan had a similar experience in which his teacher's comprehensive understanding of Jordan was a key factor in the teacher's ability to push Jordan towards a deeper involvement with Lost Lakes. From very early in their relationship, Dale worked hard to become keenly aware of Jordan and what he was looking for in his college experience. As he explains it, "I could tell that he was analyzing me a couple of times." It was not until later that Jordan realized that Dale's analysis was an effort to determine where Jordan fit in the overall fabric of the school.

Still, being aware of the students' needs only represented the first half of the equation. Dale had bought into the college expectation that all teaching faculty knew what resources LLCC had to offer. Dale was familiar with the student organizations, knew their leaders and invited them to come and speak in his classes, and promoted their value to students in the classroom. Still, it was Dale's ability to single people out and approach them personally that made the most dramatic impact on Jordan.

Because Dale had passed Jordan's test for teacher authenticity, Jordan had a stronger baseline for interpretation when Dale approached him and asked him to consider getting more involved with student government. For Jordan, it was an idea that had never even crossed his mind. But when Dale spoke to him, the reasoning made sense:

The reason for that is because I think Dale could see the drive that I had for everything else, and he just kind of thought, 'Why don't you want to do SGA? Why don't you look into Phi Theta Kappa, or something like that?' It's not so much that I didn't want to; it was just that I hadn't really thought of it. I thought of myself owning my own company, but I couldn't picture myself as the SGA president. I didn't even know what SGA president was.

Dale invited the current student government president to come and address his class.

Afterward, he talked to Jordan about getting involved with what they were doing.

Although Jordan still was not aware of why Dale had singled him out, it caused Jordan to think about it more deeply than he would have otherwise:

That's when he pulled me aside after we'd been together in class for a while and he actually said, 'I want you to start looking into this kind of thing.' I basically blew it off at first...and I went and talked to him about it more, and then I thought, 'Why not?' and I pushed it, and here I am now.

I didn't win the first elections, but I'm very glad of that because after I saw how busy it was I wouldn't have been ready. Now I'm SGA president, I'm a vice-president of Phi Theta Kappa, I'm involved in Phi Beta Lambda, I'm involved in the leadership club, and I attribute all of that to Dale pushing me in that direction. So yeah, I think [his pushing] definitely changed my experience.

To be clear, Jordan did not elect to get involved simply because Dale pulled him aside and encouraged him to do so. Rather, their evolving relationship increased his willingness to listen:

I had no idea he was going to be able to develop me. I had no idea he was going to ask me to be SGA president, or run for SGA period. I had no idea that he was going to tell me, 'You should get involved in extracurricular activities.' I didn't know. I just knew that there was somebody who was taking the time out of their day to make sure that I was getting everything that was being taught, and it just went on from there.

This personal attention helped make sure that Jordan heard Dale in his first efforts to communicate this message. This conversation alone, however, would not have been enough to get Jordan involved. Dale's approach centered on making it clear to Jordan that there were a multitude of benefits associated with getting involved and that he had

qualities which would allow him to find success after joining. However, he made it very clear that the choice remained Jordan's to make:

Dale didn't force me into the SGA. I had to make that choice, but I was able to make that choice because he was able to show me why I should make it. He didn't force me into it, but he showed me the capability that I had, and then he put it back in my court and he said, 'You got this, why aren't you running with it?'

In the long run, this encouragement paid off. Jordan admits that he did not know that he had the drive. But he also realizes that there was a benefit in finding that drive. Once Dale identified it, and Jordan embraced it, "Dale could have turned [me] into the next face of LLCC, just because that's what he can do."

Sometimes the resources that students need help connecting with are not extracurricular opportunities but vital services to keep the student enrolled in school. Towards the end of his first semester, Darryl ran into trouble lining up how to pay for the next term. He did not know what other options existed, but he did know it was time to ask for help. "And I just didn't know what else to do. I had exhausted all of my other options and then I just basically asked for help is what it was, and that's who I felt comfortable asking help from." Ariel was able to help Darryl find financial support to cover tuition for the coming semester and get him a work-study position on campus.

Over the remainder of his time at Lost Lakes and beyond, Darryl's relationship with Ariel evolved into something both highly personal and deeply meaningful. This transition from the student who could not identify his instructor by name during the second week of class to the student who counts Ariel among his closest friends came about because Ariel was a resource who helped Darryl overcome obstacles that stood between him and the successful achievement of his goals. What stood out to Darryl was how quickly Ariel's initial influence had made a difference:

[Suddenly,] I was able to take in what had even just happened. My financial aid was all of a sudden in order. I had a job. I could go quit the sixty hour a week job – and pretty much have the same amount of spending money with the seven dollar an hour, twenty hour a week job here with the financial aid and all that stuff. I was just able to breathe. And I think after I was able to breathe, it was just like, “Why did this woman help me get here, and why did it happen so fast?”

Keith had a similar experience as Alex worked to help him get his financial aid processed. Although Keith acknowledged that it was Alex’s job to help Keith ensure that all his paperwork was correctly filed and reviewed, he also knew from their very first meeting that Alex would end up playing a much more significant role in his journey through college:

The first ten – it was actually the first ten minutes when I sat down and talked to him, I already felt – even though I was still rushed and pressured – I felt a lot of weight go off my shoulders when he said to me, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it. You’ll be starting class, don’t worry. Everything will be taken care of.” He said – even he said, “There’s deadlines, but I can find loopholes.” He’s like, “Don’t worry about that, I’ll find loopholes. Don’t worry about it.”

That ten minutes kind of just made me feel a little bit more at ease, like wow. Everyone was telling me, “No, it ain’t going to happen. You’ll have to wait until the spring to come.” I was like, “That’s not going to happen. I want to go to school right now.” I told Alex that, and he’s like, “I’ll find a way. You want it, I’ll find a way.” And he found a way. I kind of felt really good about it.

Everyone was telling me that I got one week and nothing’s – my FAFSA wasn’t even done. Nothing was done. I just out of the blue, “I want to go to school,” and he said, “We’ll get it done.”

Almost immediately, Alex was able to establish himself as a resource that would be critical in helping Keith successfully securing the funding he needed to attend college. In the same way that Ariel did for Darryl, Alex secured himself as an important stress-relieving figure along the college journey for Keith. Once everything was handled for Keith’s first semester, Alex invited him to follow-up with him the next semester to renew the information. That invitation became a pattern:

He'd always say to me – even from that point to now – “You have any questions with the V.A. stuff?” But now I go back in time actually to think why we did have the connection because we both had said – he said, “I know you're leaving here, you're graduating, but if you need anything, even with State U., you can just come to me and ask me for help. I'll help you out.” And I told him I'd definitely keep in touch with him, which I have. I went to see him the other day.

Professor Brentley and Colby's relationship also progressed to a new level when Professor Brentley helped reduce Colby's college-related stress by assisting her in the application process for a significant external scholarship. Prior to their conversation, Colby was completely unaware of the scholarship. Professor Brentley stepped forward and, “he was really the person who said, ‘You should do this,’ and then walked me through the process and made it happen for me.” Over the course of applying for that scholarship, Professor Brentley and Colby got to spend one-on-one time together and their relationship began to develop. In many ways, Professor Brentley's awareness was one of Colby's most important resources at Lost Lakes. He gave his advice to her freely, and she did not take that for granted. Colby was very firm in the fact that students are aware of which faculty members are there to work with students and which are not.

Along the journey, Professor Brentley introduced Colby to other resources at Lost Lakes. He “did make me more aware of everything there was in this school and all the different people.” As she started to get to know more people at the school like the staff in the tutor center and student activities office, she found herself getting more involved. This involvement and her one-on-one work with Professor Brentley combined to improve her impression of Lost Lakes.

The desire to feel comfortable in the college environment was an idea that these students spoke to at length. When faculty members took the time to endorse their self-image and expand their connection across campus, the student experience was

significantly enhanced. Robyn credits the development of these factors as the key reasons that her spirit came to life while she was a LLCC student:

My experience here as a student was pretty awesome. I think that if you met me ten years ago, you wouldn't know me. I didn't talk or anything like that when I came here and I met with some counselors and they really helped pull me out of my shell. They were kind of the people that built the foundation for me to succeed... They were the ones who pulled me aside and said, "You really can do this and we're going to give you the tools to succeed."

Interestingly, Robyn credits the counselors with helping her come out of her shell. As opposed to her high school experience where her circle of support was small, the counselors showed her that the whole Lost Lakes community wanted her to succeed.

Once she had confirmed this commitment and found her voice as a student, she saw the opportunity to better connect with members of the faculty across the school. Darryl noticed a similar change in himself:

Pre-Ariel Darryl was very uptight and rigid about his schooling. I made straight A's when I came back here my first semester and throughout the summer. I was also working anywhere from 48 to 60 hours a week while I was doing that and I was just determined that I was going to prove to myself that I could go to college because, as I mentioned before, I came in when I was 18 and 19 and I wasn't focused.

I wasn't ready to go to school at all, so I had a lot of that stuff hanging over my head and I just wanted – I was very uptight. I wasn't – I was enjoying the classes, but I really wasn't enjoying my experience. I was paying for everything. I was working all that time. I was making the money that I needed to do to pay for my books for school, for gas, for insurance, for anything. I was working my tail off just to pay to go to school [and my investment level was different]. It was me and I was very – there was no room to kick back, relax or any of that stuff.

I really liked Lost Lakes. I liked the teachers that I was bumping into, this, that and the other. I liked the students. At this school, it's great because you've got a wide variety of age groups and I'm not even close to one of the older students at this school. So all that stuff was great, but as far as enjoying it and getting into the school and finding my place at this school, that wasn't even happening at all, which, after I met Ariel, all that stuff happened. I found a place here at the school. I got to meet a lot of the faculty. I wouldn't have known any of these faculty if it

weren't [for her]. I wouldn't have known any of the faculty that work, that run the school.

I got to know all kinds of people that I would have never – I mean, I could have saw these guys walking down the hallway before I met Ariel and just been like there's that. I would never have thought who they were, what they did, what's their job at the school, and not that all that matters. It just made me feel more connected.

In Darryl's estimation, Ariel propelled him into being a part of the Lost Lakes community. Through that process, he transitioned from a spectator to the driver of his own college experience. That process of helping the student get integrated into the community was one that was repeated across the participants.

Summary of connects to college. The students credited the faculty members with helping them feel like an integrated member of the college community. The students arrived at Lost Lakes prepared to engage in the community by knowing themselves and being prepared for the college experience. The instructors took notice of this maturity, utilized a broad scope of interests to open the door for connection, affirmed the student's self-perception and served as a cheerleader for him or her, and drove the student towards additional college resources that provide valuable assistance on his or her journey.

Creates Culture

While dedicating the necessary time to build a relationship and connecting the student with other individuals and services on campus were listed as valuable attributes by the student, there was also a major focus on how the teacher worked to create meaningful relationships within the confines of the classroom. The participants frequently referenced the fact that the faculty members with whom they had fostered meaningful relationships were well-equipped in establishing the appropriate classroom culture to drive academic growth. Specifically, culture was created by building the ideal

atmosphere for learning, treating students as valued members of the learning community, having an effective in-class approach, and maintaining control of the classroom.

Building the Ideal Atmosphere for Learning. These students have specific expectations about their learning environment regarding what attributes make comprehension easier and which characteristics present barriers to learning. By the time they enrolled in an institute of higher education, these students also had the ability to gauge whether a faculty member is focused on building the appropriate environment to help the student achieve his or her goals. Several participants offered vivid recollections of how this environment was established. Interestingly, this set of examples demonstrated how each of these faculty members was able to create a culture that resonated with the student while maintaining the integrity of his or her personal identity and teaching philosophy.

Kennedy sensed from very early on that Professor Kendall approached teaching in the classroom in a very passionate, engaging manner. He worked hard to establish a very specific teaching environment and made sure that the students understood what this environment was the very first day:

He'd tell us – he goes by the standard, "Know your subject; Love your subject. Know your students; Love your students." And he writes it on the board the very first day. And he says, "I wholeheartedly believe this and I follow this. Not only do I know my subject..." and that's when he talks about, "...I studied this, I studied that, I have my doctorate in this, but I love my subject," and he gives examples of why; the book he has published and some other things. "I know my students and I love my students, and here's why. Because I'm here to help you, and here's how I'm going to help you." So he lays all that groundwork day one, after he writes it on the board. He's a writer. No pun intended being English. He'll go and he tells you flat out, "I'm here to help." And I think that would be the first thing. Tell your students. Know your subject, love your subject – because if that doesn't apply to you, you have no business teaching anyway.

A hallmark of this teaching environment was Professor Kendall's philosophy on approachability. Everything Professor Kendall did was designed to help his students feel comfortable in the classroom. He put comics related to course material on exams; he brought treats to class to share; he regularly made references to pop culture; he sang "Happy Birthday" to honor his students. He came to class early and stayed late. Professor Kendall built his culture around the students' comfort and that message came across.

Whereas Professor Kendall established an environment centered on the students' needs, Dr. Toad focused more on balancing the student focus with his desire to demonstrate his personal competence. Omar was impressed by the way he allowed the students to see that he was competent as an instructor and took the responsibility of teaching seriously while at the same time not taking himself too seriously. According to Omar he showed both components of his style from the very beginning:

That's what stood out at first. He really knew his stuff. He was serious in the respect that he knew what he was talking about. He cared very much about the academic detail and significance of what he was doing but he also was kind of lighthearted. He's the kind of professor who'd be more than willing to talk to anybody and he would. He'd often play music at the start of his classes just to kind of lighten the mood.

The lighthearted approach that Dr. Toad presented for the course transformed the learning experience for the students. Dr. Toad's excitement became a contagion that influenced Omar significantly. Indirectly, it also led Omar to expect similar classroom cultures to be established by other instructors. When these other teachers did not show the same energy but instead exuded an air of authority and inapproachability, Omar's enthusiasm for their class would wane.

Fortunately for Quinn, Professor Wiseman's strength was making students feel comfortable in his classroom, and the atmosphere in his course promoted a completely different learning experience than in some other classrooms Quinn had experienced:

He gets you involved and he asks you questions and he gives you scenarios and he's telling jokes about psychology. But when you're taking his exams and you remember the joke that he told about that specific thing then you know the answer to it. It's little things like that and there's certain things, even in my classes now -- I'm taking upper level psych classes at State A & M. On exams or in papers and stuff like that I still remember his jokes or sayings that he had in the classroom that stick in mind, or conversations that we've had in the classroom between me and other students and him or projects that he gave us to work on. Everything that I did in his classroom really stuck with me.

One of Professor Wiseman's strengths was his ability to create an environment in the classroom that made it easier for his students to relate to him and the material he was teaching. This teaching style resonated with Autumn:

He had a really, not -- I won't say firm, but he had a really good style of teaching that when you went to his class, it was almost like, not going to be a comedy, but going somewhere where you wanted to be. I enjoyed being there and I didn't feel like, "Oh my gosh, I have to go to this class and I have to sit through it for an hour and it's going to be the most boring class of my life." He threw in personal stories in his class, maybe a teaching story or maybe even something that was going on in his family, with family. I think that helped a lot because it made him not just a professor. It made him seem like he had a life outside of college.

Based on his ability to develop this culture in the classroom, Autumn immediately labeled Professor Wiseman "positive and motivating" and added that due to his influence, "I just felt like I wanted to learn. I wanted to know more."

When Jordan describes Dale as an instructor, he offers that he knew Dale wanted him to learn. Dale established an atmosphere in the classroom where he could laugh with his students, those who participated in class could do so without fear of being criticized or shut down, and he related to students on a personal level while maintaining his professional standards. Jordan came into Dale's class after having a negative experience

in his first college course. He arrive skeptical, but that hesitancy did not last long. “[My negative impression was] completely wiped away when I had Dale’s class. He was fun, he was interesting, and you could really tell that he actually – he cared about the students.”

Dale brought an engaging, passionate approach to the classroom and that resonated soundly with Jordan. This passion was an important factor that drew students into the conversation and made them want to learn. As Jordan says, “If you have passion for your subject, you can have a connection with any student who’s at least trying.” Although the passion needs to be based on the appropriate discipline it must also extend beyond it:

I think that in order to get to Dale’s level [a] teacher better be really passionate about their students though, because that’s what sets him apart, in my opinion, from most other teachers is because he’s not just teaching the class, and he’s not just passionate about the class. He’s passionate about helping the students themselves.

Dale’s outreach to Jordan served as the catalyst to Jordan’s belief that he could be academically successful in the college environment. In other words, as teachers create a culture that students seek, the students’ investment in their own experience increases.

These students’ opinion of the culture of a classroom was decided based on the first impression of the faculty member. Although it is possible to change a first impression, it is far more likely to be confirmed in that student’s mind as time progresses. Making a positive first impression serves as the baseline for developing any sort of deeper connection with a student. In LeAnn’s perspective:

First, a student has to like you. When a student walks in classroom in the beginning, I think generally they’re just evaluating their teacher as a person first. “Do I like this person as a professor?” So first they have to like you, and I think

that would be the first step is being able to do that. And then being able to make a connection with the students.

Sometimes the way that a first impression is made is a little bit of a mystery. While attending her freshmen psychology class, Quinn met Professor Seth Wiseman. From the moment he walked into the classroom wearing a bowtie and carrying a briefcase Quinn knew the course was going to be fun. Although Professor Wiseman likely made an intentional decision to wear a bowtie and carry a briefcase, it is less likely that he realized those were the sole factors Quinn would use to settle on her first impression of him. It is also unlikely that the majority of students made their decisions based on the same criteria.

Sometimes first impressions are a matter of luck. Interestingly, Kennedy's initial meeting with Professor Kendall came after a last minute course-assignment change. Their connection, and all of the benefits that resulted from that relationship, almost never happened:

The class I had signed up for was supposed to be a woman instructor and I was dual-enrolled at the time. So I came to class and this is the first time I had been on campus, and so I was really nervous. And then he walks in – he's not a woman – and he walks to the front of the class and we're all just kind of looking at him and he said, "Physics 202?" And we're all, "No," and we're looking at him because we know it's a woman. The name was Susan or something, where it was definitive, and we're all looking at him, and he went, "Oh, just kidding. English 111." We're just looking him. "Yeah. Do we have you all semester?" It just really made an impression. Also, because he's bouncing in and we just weren't expecting any of that.

And I remember going home that first day, because I wasn't driving yet, dual-enrolled. I was in the car with my mom and she asked me, "Well, how was your first day?" I said, "Well, he's a she." She went, "What?" I'm like, "Yeah. Some guy came in and he's teaching the class now. There was a last minute switch." She said, "How is he?" "Oh, well, he seems nice. We'll see." And sure enough, like everybody else in the class, a couple of weeks later, I realized, "Oh, no. This guy's good. I'll stay in the class."

From his efforts to break the ice in their very first interaction Professor Kendall impressed Kennedy and showed her that he was there to make this a positive and fulfilling learning experience.

And sometimes first impressions are about intentional decisions the faculty member makes in the hopes of making just the right impact. Alex's ability to establish a personal connection with his students starts through his asking students to refer to him using his first name: "I liked it when he said, 'Don't call me Dr. White; don't call me professor; just call me Alex, because that's my name. My name's Alex.' I like that." He continued:

I kind of like this. You're a person just like me, and even though it's respectable to call you professor or doctor, it's like you know what, I want you to be comfortable. I'm Alex. We're all people here. We all have names. This is who I am."

Removing a layer of expected formality was one way that Alex made an effort to make a positive first impression in his classroom. Alex felt drawn in by the way Dr. Brentley worked to engage him as a student; still, he also felt drawn in by the fact that he was learning new material and saw how much he was growing as a student. Alex discussed the idea that the first impression a teacher makes is very important and can have a lasting impact on the perception he will hold of that person. Whether his first thought is of the person as a competent educator or a barrier to his cognitive growth, it takes a lot to make him change his mind.

Dr. Brentley was also referenced as an example of a teacher who made the right kind of first impression. Alex felt that first impressions "definitely set up things." As he recalls, "He would just say, 'Good morning, class.' And like I was talking about cynical kids, they're kind of like, 'Argh. Good morning. Good morning...' That's the main thing

I can think about. He was always upbeat.” And there was a consistency to this impression that was formed by Dr. Brentley continuing to start each and every class meeting the same exact way. “I took four of his classes so I guess it’s hard for me to pinpoint my first memory of him. But always ‘Good morning, class. Good morning, class.’ And if they didn’t say it [back], ‘Good morning, class,” [again,] smiling.” Dr. Brentley’s efforts to create the right first impression, and recreate it in each subsequent class, helped establish the environment he wanted his classroom to be.

Treating Students as Valued Members of the Learning Community. The culture that Alex asserted Dr. Brentley maintained was a culture that centered on ensuring that students felt like valued members of the learning community. The idea of respecting the students as co-creators of in-class learning surfaced in the stories of many of these students. One way faculty established an environment in which the students felt valued was through remembering students’ names.

Remembering someone’s name sends an important message about their value. As Jordan asserts, “If you can remember somebody’s name that means you did your part to make the relationship.” In speaking to her academic success in college Robyn addressed the importance of the faculty members knowing her name. Being able to refer to students by name is important since “even just knowing somebody’s name kind of gives that reputation or illusion of whatever you want to call it that they care. They care enough to know my name. They care enough to remember this detail about me” (544). Robyn was keenly aware of which of her faculty members at the community college and at the university knew her name and which did not. Not surprisingly, she always felt a stronger connection with those who knew her name.

The teachers who took the time to learn Omar's name made an impression on him, and he credits this awareness as part of the reason he was willing to engage in more depth with those instructors. When Omar arrived at Lost Lakes, he experienced a somewhat difficult transition into college life. Due to his home schooling background he believed he was not adequately prepared for the experience and often felt that he was "in over his head." Some of the moments that provided him hope were when he started to feel that Dr. Brentley and Dr. Toad were investing in him as an individual. He got this feeling when he noticed that both instructors knew his name. In Omar's opinion knowing a student's name is critical since, "If you don't know who I am then how could you ever really care about what I'm doing and therefore how would I be able to approach you about it?"

For some faculty members learning students' names is difficult. In these cases the student may have to make an additional effort to help the process. During her first semester, Robyn took an art class with Professor Angela Curd. In Robyn's opinion her relationship with Professor Curd started off "a little rocky" because Robyn was struggling to make the transition from being a student who struggled in class to being a successful college student. Over the course of the semester, however, Robyn began volunteering to assist around the art studios. As a result of her volunteering, Professor Curd learned Robyn's name and began using it. As a result Robyn and Professor Curd began fostering a more meaningful connection both academically and personally.

Another avenue through which faculty can make students feel like valued members of the learning community is by inviting students into the classroom conversation or referencing comments they made in prior classes. Dr. Toad respected the

fact that many LLCC students arrived at the school with their own stories and perspectives to share. He worked hard to ensure they were given the opportunity to do so:

He did like to stop and ask for student opinions and if anyone thought something seemed similar to something else that they could bring it up. And he would try to set aside a period or two where it was just nothing but group-driven discussion where he might throw out a topic and then it was just the rest of the class moving in their own ideas.

Dr. Toad felt that students' exploration of their own ideas was a valuable part of the learning experience. He infused these opportunities into his courses and provided students with a safe venue to voice their opinions.

Alex had high expectations for Keith's individual performance and this extended to his service as a leader inside the classroom. "He'd always try to get me involved in discussions in class that he knew that I would actually have an insight on." Keith offered that being acknowledged for the experience he brought to the classroom was an important part of the college experience for him.

Omar voiced a similar receptiveness to being encouraged to extend his participation. Drs. Toad and Brentley validated his contributions to the conversation and the learning that was taking place in the classroom:

[They showed] they're genuinely interested in the students. They're committed...They did it really well and they'll remember when you're saying something in class and bring it up later. And that makes an impression on you. You're like wow. This person, who's got all these years on me, all this experience and they're still in that authority-level relationship with me, still remembers who I am and what I'm thinking and what I have to say. And for someone whose confidence may be lacking because it's their first time in a community college environment and academic standards are higher, that really is reassuring. It's like wow.

When students feel valued for their contributions in the classroom, it changes their investment in the experience. Dealing with faculty members they feel knew that

they would excel served as a good motivation to do their best and made them feel more energized as participants in the classroom.

Having an effective in-class approach. Remembering students' names and getting them involved in the learning process is an important step in showing their value in the learning environment. However, the faculty member also must ensure that culture is an effective environment for student learning. One of LeAnn's early instructors presented a great model of the ways for a teacher to get his or her classroom approach totally wrong:

He was the worst. He was my history professor, also my first semester here, and he was really – he treated all of the students, regardless of age, as if they were all in 9th grade. So some of the people could be older than him, but he would yell at you if you got up to go to the bathroom during class. He'd be like, "Go to the bathroom before class." He was really kind of disrespectful to everybody.

I'm not really saying that the professor has to be – no, I am saying that the professor has to be respectful to the students because it's hard to learn from somebody that's treating you like that. He also was very opinionated about history, which I don't think you can really be. You have to tell everybody the facts because there's so many different views on what happened during history that you can't be – if you're teaching it and you're teaching it very opinionated, then you're only giving people one side and that's not fair. And everybody kind of knew that. It wasn't like he was trying to hide it. So then everybody kind of felt like, 'How do I really know what to believe, because I don't know what you're saying is in your opinion and what is fact?'

He didn't talk to the students at all. For tests, he would be like, "Okay, here are the marked papers. Here's your grade." And if you wanted to say something about it, then he was just like totally closed-minded. He was like, "No. This is what I gave you. This is how it is." I don't want to hear it. He didn't want to talk to anybody and he was just very – kind of like he had himself up on this high pedestal and he didn't want to even – he just wanted to talk and we'd all listen and he didn't care what we did, as long as we were just being quiet. He was just not a nice person. He didn't connect with the students at all.

LeAnn's interpretation of her instructor's behavior posed a series of problems. Aside from a diminished likelihood she would foster a meaningful relationship with this

teacher, there was a high risk that she would not be able to learn the course material either. Jordan had a similar experience with his first instructor: “He was there to teach history; he wasn’t there to teach history and make sure students got it.” In Jordan’s experience, personality was important, but it was equally important that he learned the material. These stories are strong examples of a myriad of behaviors instructors can use to ensure they do not risk fostering a connection with their students.

Keith praised Alex’s ability to make a special connection with the students by portraying himself with an in-class persona that resembled more of a peer student than a faculty member. More importantly, this effort to connect came across as genuine to the students in the classroom. Keith felt that the Alex that was lecturing him in the classroom was the same Alex that met with him during office hours and the same Alex that he was outside of work. There was an authenticity about Alex’s presence that resonated with Keith.

Quinn’s experience was also far more positive in terms of teacher effectiveness. Although she did not recognize how much of a personal impact Professor Wiseman was going to have on her from those earliest days, she was inspired from that very first class session by his ability as a teacher. Quinn prided herself on being able to quickly evaluate whether a teacher “really knew what [they] were talking about.” Although she adds value for being able to make the class fun, interesting, and enjoyable, Quinn believes the most valuable attribute a teacher brings to the classroom is a solid understanding of his or her material.

Still, having a firm understanding of the materials does not automatically bestow upon a teacher the ability to successfully communicate that message to students. As

Quinn asserts, anyone can teach a subject and make it interesting, but it takes someone special to ensure that the students are learning. Quinn had previously experienced the negativity that abounds when this type of teacher is not available:

The first day the professor – I could just tell right as I walked into the classroom and as soon as he started talking and explaining the syllabus to us he kind of did it in a way where he was almost making fun of us. He acted like he had to read it to us because we were too stupid to read it on our own or to understand what he was looking for.

And over the course of the time that I was in the classroom with him he would make jokes about students. If you answered something incorrectly, he would kind of laugh at you or make a joke about it. And it wasn't a funny joke. It was like an inappropriate joke that made you feel like he was making fun of you. It's not like he was laughing with you. He was laughing at you. Especially with me, blonde jokes all the time, which really made me angry, and it made me dislike him as a person so I disliked the class, and it was just kind of a miserable time for me to be in there. I'd go and sit and do the best I could, but you don't enjoy any of it.

And I think a lot of the students felt like he wasn't approachable. And we would send him emails, and he wouldn't get back to us, or if he did get back to us, he would have a snarky comment to make about it or it was almost like he was intentionally trying to make us feel like our work wasn't good enough for the class.

And I really disliked him by the end of the course and I hate that because I feel like I'm a pretty easy person to get along with and I don't like to think badly of anybody or dislike anyone. You're not going to like everybody but still, it really was just an unenjoyable class. After I left the course I was relieved that I didn't have to go back. And like I said, now if you gave me that same history test that he gave us on the last day of class I probably couldn't answer it because I didn't really take anything away from the class other than the fact that they guy was kind of a jerk.

I feel like he liked history and he knew what he was talking about. He went to college to study history. I can only imagine him being in his twenties and saying to himself that he loved history so much. But once he got out he was like, "What am I going to do with history? Oh, I'm going to teach. Only problem is, I hate people." That's the vibe that I got from him. He's like, "I hate kids." And we're not even kids; we're young adults.

But at the same time I felt like he thought because he had gone through so many years of school and because he knew all this stuff about history, which is great—if you work hard to get your Ph.D. or your Masters or whatever it is you should be

proud of that. But I don't think that you should feel like you need to have your students feel inferior to you.

Quinn's negative experience with this instructor stuck with her. In her mind, his entire in-class persona worked to undermine his teaching efforts. Rather than drawing students closer to him he was driving them away.

Fortunately, Quinn continued to pursue classes after her negative experience. Similar to Quinn, Jordan was called upon to demonstrate persistence to find what he was looking for from his professors. After Jordan's very first class at LLCC where he met the history professor referenced above, he was looking for someone to reenergize him to the idea of learning. His second class was with Dale, and it did not take long for Jordan to realize that Dale was the type of person who could teach him fairly effortlessly. In his mind the two teachers were as different as night and day. As Dale's student Jordan knew he cared about him and that passion came across in his lectures. Still, it was the ability to combine that showmanship with competence and the ability to ensure the student is learning that meant the most to Jordan.

Another trait that students connect with effectiveness is organization. The concept of being organized came up repeatedly throughout Colby's interview. She talked about how important it is for teachers to be organized and the variety of ways through which that organization becomes evident to the students. Even in describing her least favorite instructor, Colby quickly came upon the fact that "the real problem with her was that she was not organized." A high level of organization has to be present throughout the class experience. As she explains:

I want him to say, "Here's how we organize my class and we're going to do this this week, and we're going to do this this week, and I'm going to assign you four papers, and I'm going to assign you two this and three that. And if you do those,

you're going to do great. And if you show up for class, you're going to do great." So I know at the beginning of the semester, there's going to be this many papers and there's going to be this many assignments, and it's not one of these things that the professor makes it up as the semester goes on, and so from week to week, I have no idea what kind of homework load to expect. That drives me nuts because I can't really predict how and decide how to plan ahead.

Being organized helps lay the groundwork for the student learning the material, but it has to be combined with a faculty member's commitment to making sure his or her students integrate the knowledge. LeAnn felt a stronger draw from teachers who showed a passion for helping students all the way through ensuring that the students left with a full comprehension of what was covered in a given lesson. Even if a teacher has a reputation for being "tough," he or she will stay connected with students if they can teach the material well and ensure that the students have all of the information they need in order to do their best.

An effective in-class approach is also reliant on the faculty member's ability to prove their competence. Demonstration of competence is determined based on the way course material is presented. According to Darryl, when your lecture comes across with confidence the students will perceive competence. In some cases it's about presenting with no notes or while being relaxed enough to insert jokes into the conversation. In other cases it's about being able to give a complete, accurate answer to a question in the moment. In all cases, it's about doing whatever it takes to make sure that students have fully comprehended and retained the material.

There is a risk that the teacher can rush over some material and assume that the students are retaining it. After all, "they already know it, and I think they kind of forget that we're all learning it. So it's easy to them. They already know it. But it's hard for

students.” Keeping in mind that the instructor often starts the conversation with a far more advanced foundation than the student should help serve as a reminder to simplify as appropriate.

Repetition is another great technique to ensure student comprehension. In LeAnn’s case, “he would always say things that he thought were important three times.” The instructor would repeat the information three different times to make sure that all members of the class were clear on it. While some instructors may fear the risk of alienating the students who understood something after the first reference, LeAnn presents a different interpretation:

So even if I understood something, he would always be like, “I know that some of you guys understand it. Just do it anyway. It’s good practice. You’re going to understand it better. Just stay with the class, stay with what we’re doing.” So we did, and with math, even if I got something and he was making us do it five times, and I was like, “Got this,” but it was still kind of rewarding to get it and every time get the right answer. So I didn’t really mind that much because even though it was like, “Okay, I got this,” it was still like, “Ha, I got it,” every time.

According to Addison, Professor Hunger’s skill set also centered on both connecting with students and translating this connection into student learning. Her teaching strengths were providing thorough explanations for concepts and breaking complex topics into smaller pieces. First, her explanations were thorough:

She teaches through very thorough explanation. She really does explain it. Then she lets you actually demonstrate it. She’ll show you and then she’ll have you demonstrate it back to her and then she’ll remediate what you’re doing if it’s not right...She would have explained it and then she would have clarified it. She would ask for us to give her the information back to make sure that we had it, which was really good, because you could just say, “Uhm hm. Yeah, I got it.” Moving on. Next.

Second, she was able to simplify complex topics in an effort to make them easier to understand:

Ms. Hunger was really good at this...taking big concepts and breaking them down so simple so that you can get past all the really big words and scary portion of it and just see like, “Oh, this is all it really is? Oh, and, that’s how it ties into that and that’s why this is that. Oh, okay. No big deal.” She simplified things. She simplified our lives during the time that we were here as much as she possibly could. That was awesome...I think that’s what she did is she just simplified and it’s just like – it’s so basic.

We’re all so basic. At the core of it, we’re all very, very basic. Kids are so amazing. They’re so smart and they pick up things because if we simplify and make a concept basic, well, they get it. There’s a reason for that. It’s when we try to make it sound like something that it’s not or something bigger and better and then people are like, “I don’t get it.”

LeAnn and Addison were in college to get an education. For their instructors to have the opportunity to connect with them on a personal level, they had to prove their value in the classroom first. If they showed competence as an instructor, the door to a deeper connection could become available.

In almost all cases it is simply about not getting in the way of your own class.

Darryl offered an example of how one of his former teachers hurt himself by doing just that:

Really liked him as a man. He’s a funny guy. He told a lot of stories. He didn’t teach. He didn’t teach the subject. He would just stand in front of the class, tell stories about his awesome life – he had some fantastic stories about being a fighter pilot and jumping out of airplanes and doing all kinds of crazy stuff, but it really didn’t have anything to do with geography. I’m not one of those students that’s like, “Oh, man. I want to learn. I want to learn.” But I’m like – and then he would give us a test on geography, and we didn’t learn anything that had to do with geography. So there were all these other ways that you had to go about – I felt like the teacher got in the way of the class. All of that translated into the way I looked at him.

This geography instructor is a great example of what can happen when a teacher gets caught up with the idea of being the performer in front of the room as opposed to the teacher of the discipline. When the entertainment trumps the education, the likelihood of true learning and the associated relationships following is deeply diminished.

The final component the participants offered pertaining to effectiveness as a teacher was the ability to handle student questions. Alex advocated the idea that “usually students will test you – the good ones, anyway.” He tested faculty members by asking relevant questions during lecture and evaluating the teacher’s response. He was looking to make sure they did not constantly answer with “I don’t know,” and when they did say that whether they followed-up the next class meeting with the correct information. Interestingly, Alex also made a point of talking to the instructors one-on-one to make sure that his “testing” them did not bother them.

Professor Kendall welcomed students to ask questions in front of the class or one-on-one. “If you have a question, you can go up and you can talk to him about it. If you don’t understand something, you can ask him and he’s there to help you.” This open access approach resonated with Kennedy and stood out in stark contrast from a negative experience she had before with a different instructor:

When you asked him a question, he’d kind of give you a brush-off answer, would tell you to look in the book. ‘Okay. Well, I already looked in the book and I don’t understand. Would you please explain this to me?’ ‘Oh, well, if you don’t understand it it’s because you don’t understand some other concept.’ ‘You’re correct. I didn’t understand the other concept. Would you please explain that to me?’ ‘Oh, no. You just have to look it up.’ And it was more like independent study than a class.

Handling student questions sometimes requires a level of humility on behalf of the instructor. Addison credited Professor Hunger with making a habit of being very honest with their students in those moments:

With our faculty members here, if they didn’t know something, they just said, “I don’t really know. So, let’s figure this out together.” That was very, very cool; so never seeming like they were above an answer or they had to have the answer for us always. That was very – what’s the word? Humbling, almost – for them to put themselves in that situation.

Many faculty members are willing to show vulnerability in the classroom by admitting they do not know the answer to a question. Fewer are committed to following up with the correct information at the next opportunity. Fortunately, Professor Hunger consistently came back to close the loop both inside the classroom and with program issues outside of class:

You knew that they were helping us and they were. “I’m having a problem with this.” “Okay, let me find out about that for you.” They always got back to us, always, even if it was a couple days later through an email or through our research area, like, “Go look at this,” or whatever. We could just tell they were committed through their follow-up. That was huge. I think that a lot of students and people, and professionally

I’ve found this to be true, that when you’re invested with your patient or you’re invested with your student or you’re invested with your child, that’s going to be self-evident through your actions and the way you follow-up with them. That was just really clear with them. So it was really, really nice.

Being effective in the classroom is a result of the instructor being competent in his or her discipline, working tirelessly to ensure that students have comprehended the information, and handling student questions completely.

Maintaining Control of the Classroom. The classroom culture will also be evaluated as students look to see whether the instructor will let unruly students take advantage of them. Alex asserted the idea that the faculty members’ effectiveness as a teacher is their ability to control their classroom. As he said:

You knew they weren’t over-domineering like I’m afraid they’re going to hurt me. Sometimes there’s a fear factor with teachers. They didn’t have that but you knew you couldn’t or shouldn’t push their buttons. I never saw them get angry or lash out at a student but there was kind of this mutual respect but also an understanding of, “Hey, they’re just trying to do their job.”

I did see Brentley send one student out the entire time and she was just very belligerent and very combative and he didn’t want it to disrupt the other students so he sent her out of class. He basically dismissed her. I felt bad for her because I knew her and I think she had some things that were off. I think Brentley was

aware of that but he couldn't have her disrupting the classroom to the point where he couldn't teach and be effective with all the other students. And I do appreciate that. I wish a lot of professors would not be afraid of doing stuff like that. I guess with lawsuits and what not – he didn't physically remove her but he told her to get out. He wasn't disrespectful but he was firm and you could tell he meant business.

When Dr. Brentley took the necessary time to address a student who was a distraction and preventing others from learning, it sent an important message to the rest of the class about his level of commitment to ensuring that the learning environment was built for their success. In a subtle way, he showed the students that he was able to see what was happening in the classroom in the same way they did.

Part of Dale's success in knowing his students stems from his ability to interact with them at their level. "He intentionally brings himself down to the students' level just so they can have that relationship with him." However, he is careful not to let that interfere with his role as an instructor:

I think there were a couple of people who were in my class who tried to test him a little bit, just because he was so open with students. I think they wanted to see how much they could get away with. He, in his extremely smiling, friendly way, made it clear that he was still a professor. If they were pushing it too hard he would call them out in class and ask them to do an assignment, or ask them to make this demonstration, or something like that – and it wasn't in a mean way, but it was in a way where it was still made clear that just because you had a really good connection with him, he was still a professor and you still had to treat him with the respect that he deserved.

The students in the class had no question about who was in charge. This established authority by both Brentley and Dale allowed the learning environment to be a better one for Alex and Jordan. Outside of improving the learning environment, it also increased Alex and Jordan's interest in connecting with their teachers on a deeper level.

Authenticity. When the student reaches out to the teacher and the response is positive, the student will immediately evaluate whether that positive response seems

forced or authentic. Dr. Toad's authenticity served as an important baseline for his approach to teaching. According to Josh, students knew not only that he was very knowledgeable about history but that he also held a passion for history that brought it to life. "It's like the *joie de vivre*. Some people just have it and some – even though they're passionate about their field they just don't have that same kind of vibrancy." Dr. Toad's passion for his subject and life experience made him a phenomenal storyteller. He often used pop culture and science fiction examples to help relate information to today's students. They would listen in amazement as he spent an entire class period telling a story to help them better understand a historical period or event.

Josh also sensed an authenticity from Dr. Toad and believed he was not making any effort at all to be something that he was not. The sincerity that Josh felt with Dr. Toad in the classroom allowed him to feel comfortable approaching him outside of class. Josh intentionally began asking Dr. Toad about more and more ideas in an effort to increase his rapport with Dr. Toad and to further strengthen his passion for history.

The fact that Dr. Toad taught history was one key factor in Josh's decision to approach him to build a deeper connection. Josh knew that Dr. Toad's subject matter was critical because he sensed the same level of authenticity from some other instructors but never made the same attempts to build a stronger relationship with those teachers. In his words, "They're really nice guys and they really love literature and English stuff, but it's not my cup of tea." Dr. Toad demonstrated the authenticity that Josh was seeking and passion for coinciding interests. With both of these factors in place Josh decided that Dr. Toad was destined to become a mentor in his life.

Jordan looks for authenticity through early interactions with a teacher outside of the classroom. He analyzes what he sees outside of the classroom as a confirmation of what he witnesses directly as a student:

I think another connection is that a teacher has to be alive outside of the classroom. I don't think it's really fair for a teacher to act interested in a student, but then you pass them in the hallway and they look at you like you're a brick. I think it's important for that student to know that they're still there for them, they still remember them, they're still involved with them – especially one-on-one. A teacher who is going to take time after class to say, 'do this and do this.' I think that's going to build a connection immediately.

When that authenticity is present it opens the door for the student to grant the teacher access to more parts of themselves. This allows the student to start focusing on the opportunity to learn both the direct and the indirect lessons the faculty member is offering. Quinn experienced this first-hand while attending class with another teacher:

She taught an education course and I learned so much about education but I also learned about what kind of person that I want to be and what kind of teacher I want to be in the classroom and in life, in general. And being in her class helped me in other classes and building that relationship with her I think changed the way I look at other teachers, as well. Even if they're tough, they still have a heart and they'd still help you if you needed it type of thing.

In a culture where student learning is the focus, students will nearly always rise to the occasion. As this happens, the students' willingness to embrace deeper relationships with the faculty members involved becomes a natural evolution.

Summary of creates culture. The idea of creating an effective culture in the classroom is a fundamental baseline measure for student success in college. The strongest cultures are built when the teacher establishes an environment centered on student learning, treats students as valued members of the learning community, utilizes an effective in-class approach for transferring knowledge, maintains control of the classroom, and engages with students authentically.

Challenges Performance

In addition to a classroom culture that lends itself to student learning, the student wants to walk away from the course having learned the material and being challenged to extend beyond their own expected boundaries of learning. The faculty referenced in this study made a concerted effort to push their students to perform at this higher level.

Another common trait that these students assigned to their relationships with the faculty members was that the teacher challenged them to perform at a higher level than they were accustomed to achieving. The higher levels of performance resulted from the fact that the faculty members held the students accountable for their part in the learning process, clearly detailed their academic expectations, and made the learning experience personal. Additionally, they used their passion to establish a tone, encouraged students to rise to that higher level, and used effective feedback as a motivator.

Held Students Accountable for Doing Their Part. These students each spoke to the idea that the student has a role to play in the effort to ensure that the learning experience is a positive and meaningful one. Alex provided a good conceptualization of the students' responsibility to the learning process. Students must successfully play the role of student in the classroom by being both committed to the learning process but also laid back and friendly. More importantly, Alex championed the idea that students cannot fear faculty. Instead, students must look to faculty as resources for learning. He advocated that regularly seeking faculty members out to serve as this resource was an essential skill for both student and faculty success.

Outside of committing the necessary time to teach their students and establishing a culture that maximizes the opportunity for learning, exceptional faculty members have

a skill in holding students accountable for their performance of this role. Quinn struggled with math at both the community college and four-year level. Yet, she found her struggles to be less severe at Lost Lakes than they were at State U. For her, the difference was that her faculty member at LLCC held her accountable for her actions:

He knew that I struggled with math and that I was not a good math student. I had his class on Wednesday and he would see me in the hallway on a Monday or on a Thursday and be like, “Did you start your homework yet?” or “Is your homework done?” “Are you ready for class on Wednesday?”...that type of thing.

By asking her as simple of a question as “Did you start your homework yet?” Quinn’s teacher sent her the message that he was aware of what she needed to be doing and was going to hold her responsible for ensuring that it got done. Holding students accountable in this way is one of the more important avenues through which faculty members can both challenge and support their students. When Josh missed an important deadline in a class, the teacher did not give him the flexibility he had hoped for in terms of turning the work in late. Initially, that lesson did not sit well with Josh:

At first I really didn’t like her because there was something due, and I had something else – I can’t remember what happened – but in the end I felt really pissed. And then I said, “You know, it was in the syllabus. I’m just wasting time. I should just get this done to the best of my ability.” And I did and I pulled out with, I think, a B so I was happy.

Although that teacher may easily have been able to extend the deadline for Josh, her decision to stand by the expectations in the syllabus sent an important message to him about the responsibilities associated with effectively performing the role of a student.

Every student experience does not work out exactly the same way, though. In fact, Omar shared two distinct experiences that provided valuable, yet costly, learning lessons for him about the expectations associated with playing the role of student. First, with Dr. Toad:

There was one instance where I turned in a final late and it was worth 20 percent of the grade. Now, mind you, I had – I think it was for 30 percent, something like that. It was worth two letter grades. And I had been going through a very tough personal situation and I didn't have any prior dialogue with him, letting him know, "Hey, I'm having this trouble." And I ended up turning in the final past the deadline. I had it stamped and turned it into his mailbox. And I had a perfect grade in that class up until that point. I was expecting an A. Well, the final being worth what it was, I ended up getting a C.

And when I explained to him what happened, he said, "Look, Omar, you know me well enough to understand that I want you to succeed. But even though you've known me for a while, you're still a student and there was a deadline on this and you missed the deadline. And had I known beforehand, had you told me, then it probably wouldn't have been a problem. But you didn't so I had to give you the goose egg." And I took the class again and I got my A and the C was erased off my record so it's still a good lesson but it didn't affect my final grade for that course after I took it again.

I think that's one example of where he was someone who, even though we were open he was still the authority there. He was still the professor. And even though that was something that might not necessarily have pushed me harder, it was still like, "Hey, I still expect you to follow the rules."

I was like, "Come on. It's not that big a deal." But I understood and, of course, I understand now that he has a standard he has to uphold and rules are rules and you can't make a special exception for somebody just because they eat pizza with you.

Omar's final comment in the story, referencing the idea that he was not entitled to any special exceptions just because he and Dr. Toad were developing a personal relationship, speaks to the maturity he was gaining as he learned that the standards were going to be enforced consistently. Omar's second story involved Dr. Brentley:

He ended up failing me for my first semester and it was because I didn't follow MLA format when I was writing my research paper. It didn't meet the requirements, etc... And when I went to him and explained, "Look, what can I do?" because we had like two weeks left in the course after that. He said, "I would try to withdrawal from the course." I said, "We're past the withdrawal deadline. I can't." And he said, "I can help you with that because if you were my son I would tell you to do this and then retake the course after you've had English 111 and 112."

And this was during the time when I'd go into his office practically in tears, being really upset, and it's my first semester. I've gotten an F. Nobody wants to see that. And he was just really, really comforting and reassuring and said, "Look. It's going to be okay. You're going to get a W. You're not going to get an F on your transcript. If it were my son, this is what I'd advise him to do, so I'm advising you to do it. Go ahead and get your things in order and then come talk to me again when you're ready and I think you'll do well." And that's what ended up happening.

In both cases, the faculty members proved their integrity by staying true to their expectations and standards. Also in both cases the faculty members did so in a way that still sent the message to Omar that they were committed to his success as long as he was able to do his part to achieve that success.

This high level of accountability may be something the student has not been exposed to often, if at all, prior to arriving at college. The personal attention in this manner was something that LeAnn was not accustomed to and it changed her academic experience as a college student. She found herself trying harder to perform at the level she was expected to:

It just seems like how hard I tried would be different and having somebody holding me accountable, that would be different. It would be different on my grades, I think that, and it would be different in knowing that – having somebody knowing that they think you can do a certain – they set the bar real high for you, then that changes everything, than if I was just going by myself, so I have the bar I set for myself, which is not as high as it could have been, so I would not be performing as well as I could have, and I wouldn't know – maybe I would never know that it could way higher because I was never challenged and told, "You're bar is actually way up here. So I don't know what you're doing."

When it became clear that she was going to be held accountable for her performance as the faculty member became an equally vested partner in her success, the learning experience began to transform.

Clearly Detailed Academic Expectations. Once the student embraces his or her role and gets engaged with the institution at this more in-depth level, it gives the faculty

member the opportunity to start challenging the student to reach for some higher-order personal goals. The foundation of this challenge is the faculty member's ability to clearly detail his or her expectations for high performance from the earliest stages of the evolving relationship. When Quinn was challenged in this manner, she took to it well:

She challenged you but it was in a good way. She had a saying, something about you can't look at things like a threat. You just have to look at it as a challenge and you'll be able to pull through it and do your best at whatever you're trying at. Strive to do the best job that you can even if you feel like you're going to fall apart sometimes. It was very tough. In the beginning it was really tough but by the end of the course I kind of felt like I could read her and knew what to expect. And once you learn what a professor's expectations are from you it's easier to make it through the course.

The high expectations became a motivator for Quinn and led to her increased investment in the course. Autumn also experienced this increased investment when she recognized that Professor Wiseman had high expectations for his students' performance:

He had a lot of standards. He had a lot of expectations for us. I don't think he would get upset if you didn't meet them, but he just wanted you to do the best that you could. Obviously, he wanted everyone to make an "A" and to get the topic, but he was willing to help you if you didn't. I think a lot, especially in college, it's really important for you to be open like that.

In other words, Autumn is asserting the idea that students will rise to high expectations from a professor as long as that instructor earns the student's engagement in the course and ensures that he or she has the information he or she needs to excel at that level. Fortunately for her, Professor Wiseman did both.

Colby echoed the idea that students will evaluate the instructor's ability to provide resources that aid learning as they make a decision about how to engage with that teacher. In her opinion, assigning "busy work" that does not increase understanding of the course material is the quickest way to lose the students' confidence:

I hate busy work. So even if they give you fairly substantial assignments, they only give you so many, and then they give you intervals throughout the semester to work on them. I like that so much better than the professor who hands out worksheets, three or four every time you go into class, and then you have to turn them in the next class. That drives me nuts. And usually they're just these silly little meaningless things that just keep you busy all the time and take up all your time and make it hard to get anything done in the rest of your life, and take up your weekends.

I like it better to have larger, more substantial assignments – there obviously can't be that many of them – that are spaced throughout the semester, instead of having, every time the class meets, you hand me three pieces of paper and I have to go spend two hours a week filling out these pieces of paper, or something. That drives me nuts.

Colby wanted to be pushed to extend her learning beyond the minimum expectations. She also expected that her instructor would provide her with the resources she needed to achieve at that higher level.

The idea of the faculty member providing the necessary resources to help students achieve these expectations was mentioned by Josh as well. Dr. Toad was able to challenge his students to perform at their highest levels because his students saw him as both clear and competent. When discussing his expectations, he provided clear details about what he wanted and how to earn the highest grades. He was also forthcoming with students by telling them that he expected them to have to stretch to achieve his standards. In addition to being clear about his expectations, Dr. Toad made sure that the ways he challenged his students were appropriate. He enhanced the learning experience by structuring challenges directly related to the way students think and experience the world around them. Still, Dr. Toad was able to balance that challenge with the support necessary for students to excel in that culture. When he sensed a student was reaching his

or her personal limit, he would support the progress that was made and redirect the conversation to another topic.

Stories regarding high expectations that were clearly communicated crossed through many of these students' stories. The most significant avenue through which Alex challenged Keith to excel was through Keith's academic performance. Keith mentioned that some of the instructors he had over the course of his college career would accept work late or give him good grades based on his past performance. Still, Alex consistently told Keith he expected assignments to be submitted that reflected his very best work.

Ariel communicated clear expectations for performance to her students by asking them directly to rise to the challenge. For one assignment in particular, Darryl recalls "she had told us before we did the assignment that she would really appreciate it if we put the effort into it." By letting the students know that this assignment was particularly meaningful Ariel established her expectations that they would take it seriously.

Establishing a clear set of expectations for students was an important part of developing personal relationships. Still, how these expectations were communicated was often equally important to what they were. During her first semester, Colby was caught a little off guard by the process one faculty member utilized:

When I first came to Lost Lakes, it was a bit of a culture shock to me in that I would sit in a classroom and the teacher would tell all of us that we needed to pay attention, and if we didn't, we would have these consequences. We needed to show up for class, and if we didn't, we would have these consequences. I felt like, "Excuse me. I'm an adult and I know these things. I paid money to be here. Why are you treating me like I'm a kid?" I was a little insulted at first that first semester until I saw the behavior of some of my classmates and realized that some of them actually needed to hear that. I didn't understand that when I first got there because as a home-schooler, I had been expected to work independently and to behave like an adult for a long time already.

Over time, Colby came to value the teachers who explained in great detail what their expectations were and how to impress them. With Professor Brentley in particular she remembers him explaining his grading system, his policy on absences, and the other idiosyncrasies within his approach. She also specifically remembers him saying, “If you do this, I will be extra impressed. If you don’t do these things, I will be extra under-impressed.” Being aware of these standards the first day of class gave Colby a good perspective regarding what the course experience was going to be.

Knowing, in no uncertain terms, exactly what it would take to impress Professor Brentley put Colby in a position to better accomplish her goals. Both for the student who simply wanted to pass and the student who wanted to excel, the path to get there was overwhelmingly clear.

Made the Learning Experience Personal. After clearly communicating his or her expectations, the faculty member must make an effort to ensure that the learning experience is a personal one for the student. There are a wide variety of ways faculty members can accomplish this. Sometimes it is about treating the student like an adult or respecting a learning disability; other times it is about clearly connecting the course material to other events and circumstances in the student’s life.

For Colby and Robyn, a personal learning experience was about being treated the way they expected to be treated. Colby appreciated Professor Brentley because he approached her, and all of his students, as an adult. From her perspective, “I was paying for these classes with my own money, and I expected to be treated like an adult, and not like I was a high schooler. So he treated us more like adults and I appreciated that.” In Colby’s mind, being treated like an adult was demonstrated through Professor Brentley’s

understanding that she was highly goal-oriented student and looked to him as a resource to help her achieve those goals.

Robyn's fight with learning disability issues made her learning experience different from the students who did not battle these same demons. As a result, a personalized learning experience for her was the result of an instructor acknowledging that these barriers existed and that they were going to help her succeed just the same. Professor Curd was making her own efforts to reinforce the idea that Robyn was a capable of learning just the way she was, and her approach was making an impact. In class, when Robyn would present with the same behaviors she did in high school, the response she received was totally different:

In high school you always got kicked out. You had to go to the office or you were a troublemaker and I just never felt like that here. I felt like I was finally okay...[Professor Curd] took me aside and said, "If you just need to take a break just go out and then come back in when you're fine." I didn't feel like I was crazy.

Professor Curd's warm outreach was particularly well-received because it was not the same experience Robyn had from all of her teachers. After presenting her accommodations letter to one faculty member, she responded, "Nobody's going to give you these accommodations in your real life," and continued, "I'll give you these accommodations, but the world is not going to give you these accommodations." In that case Robyn felt her best course of action was to immediately drop the class. In the majority of her classes, Robyn had difficulty getting the faculty member to willingly grant her the accommodations she was legally guaranteed. Luckily her experience with Professor Curd was different or Robyn may have dropped out of Lost Lakes altogether.

For some of the other students, the personal learning experience was delivered through a challenge to meet higher potential, a direct link to personal learning goals with a connection to everyday life, or one-on-one attention from the faculty member. These three types of additional attention improved the learning experience for Jordan, Colby, and Kennedy, respectively.

Jordan arrived at LLCC with a good track record of success and a belief that he was destined to do something great. He was less confident that anyone else looked at him and saw the same potential. This changed when he started to attend class with Dale. Dale recognizes that each of his students arrive at college with a set of skills. Jordan sensed from very early on that Dale was looking under the surface to see what Jordan could do:

He looked at me and he didn't – he actually looked at the potential I had by, I guess, seeing my enthusiasm in class, the questions that I was asking, and he was able to delve into me enough to, I guess, look at my character to see that I had the potential to do other stuff. I really think – again, I think every professor can do that if they try.

Once he was able to analyze his student and gather this additional information, Dale was able to work with this knowledge to build the journey that would challenge his students, make the experience personal, and connect the material to their individual motivations:

He wasn't afraid to ask relevant questions. I think that was one thing in that class. They ask questions about you, and I loved that he was able to do that. I also liked the fact that when it came to specific assignments he wasn't afraid to delve deeper into the students, to find out how it could personally help them and not just make it very broad. From my personal experience, at least, he was able to look at – like I said, he was able to look at the passion that I had, and he was able to transcribe it to somewhere where it could actually be applied, and not just – like I think a lot of people would – just say, 'Oh, you're passionate. Thumbs up. Good job.' He was actually able to say, 'Take that, slap it on to that, and then just maximize it.'

Knowing these triggers was a key factor in Dale's ability to connect with Jordan. Their relationship developed in such a way that "if I don't pass him in the hall and give him a handshake or hug he's going to give me dirty looks." Still, this tongue-in-cheek response is indicative that Dale had tapped into Jordan's additional potential and was watching to see what he would do with it.

Colby's goal for a personal learning experience was less self-reflective and more practical. To lead her to invest in the class, Colby needed to clearly understand how the learning was relevant to her personally. Specifically, she needed to know how what the instructor was teaching "relates to the real world and how it makes a difference to real people." She also needed to know, "what does it mean to you and why is it important to you? Why are you teaching the subject?" Once she understands how it relates to her on a personal level and why the instructor personally believe the material is important, Colby is more likely to invest her energy into making the class a successful experience.

Professor Brentley answered each of these questions well. He understood how to bridge the gap between what was being taught in the classroom and how students would apply that knowledge to the world outside:

Brentley was saying, "This is going to make a difference for you in your professional life. This is going to help you with your job," and then we were learning all of these skills and techniques, and I would go to work the next day and be, "Yeah. This is helping. I'm doing what I learned yesterday." So that was exciting to me...learning something that I actually used the next day, not literally but figuratively speaking, on the job was way more meaningful to me than sitting down and reading a story about some stupid woman who had problems with her husband and – she's stupid. I don't really care about her.

Dr. Brentley also had a little bit of luck on his side:

I think the other thing that helped me to connect with him was the fact that he had worked for the Library of Congress for, I think he said 20 – at least 20 years, or

something like that. I work for a public library and hope to go into the field of Library Science and work in libraries, myself. So here was this guy who had worked for the biggest library out there for 20 years, and I was just really impressed by that.

In a time when so many priorities were pulling for her attention, Colby needed an experience that was personal to her. She needed an experience that told her what she was learning was more than a rite of passage; it was an avenue through which she was gaining skills that she would use in her future. Professor Brentley's approach of sharing his own experiences and designing the curriculum so students would use it outside of school at the same time achieved this outcome.

Professor Kendall provided a personal learning experience for his students by regularly scheduling one-on-one conferences to review their progress in the class and see how he could help. He entered the conferences prepared for the discussion and this approach made an impact on Kennedy:

I walk in, "Hi, Kennedy. How are you?" "I'm fine," or "not fine," or "tired," whatever the response was for the day. I'd sit down and then he'd say, "Okay," and he'd pull up my papers, and he'd pull up everything and say, "Okay. Here's where you are," and we'd go through. I know maybe – I don't know. Say my pop quiz average was low. "I know that you're tired when you come to class, and it's reflected in your pop quiz grade. So how about you come to class, you review quickly before we start, and then that way, when I have a pop quiz, you'll do better. That'll help raise that average because it will refresh all those details – because I know you're reading it because you talk to me about it afterward," that kind of thing.

And then I'd have papers and I'd go to him and I'd ask him, "Would you please explain this" or "Would you look over this section and tell me is it persuasive enough, did I use my commas incorrectly," or whatever the case. He's, "Sure," and then he'd go over it.

Taking the time to meet with Kennedy individually gave Professor Kendall a good opportunity to look her in the eyes and review their progress, bridge the learning material back to her personal life, and build a plan to help her be successful. Of all the things she

experienced over the history of taking his courses, the student conferences were consistently the most meaningful.

These students were looking for a learning experience that was meaningful on a personal level. Whether that meaning was found through a teacher working through the unique circumstances they arrived in the classroom with, developing untapped potential, or meeting one-on-one to discuss why the course material matters, each of the identified instructor put an extra effort into making sure that the student had a firm grasp of how personal this experience could be to him or her.

Used Passion to Establish a Tone. These students arrived at Lost Lakes looking for passionate faculty members who could effectively communicate their discipline. Based on their life experience, they knew that their learning would increase if they could feed off the energy of the instructor. In defining a passionate approach to teaching, Colby offered:

It's the professor who comes in and he obviously is really revved about the first day of the semester and he's all up there and he's saying, "This is going to be so cool. And we're going to talk about this. I just love talking about this." He projects that he wants to be there and he's enthusiastic about the topic, and he expects you to work hard, and he's going to be just as enthusiastic about it as he expects you to be, and that he's passionate about this, whatever topic it is. And he's not going to take it real well if you have kind of an attitude that you really don't care and you just don't want to be there. He's going to really be happy with the students who respond to him.

When instructors approach a course with this level of passion it becomes a very simple process for the students to engage with them.

Professor Reid had a true passion for teaching and that came across to Molly. At times when the material might be considered dry or boring, Professor Reid's passion compensated for the blandness and helped draw her students in:

[Her] passion is there and it's almost palpable. It's so prevalent that you can't help but miss it, especially when [she's] teaching the lower level English classes that deal with punctuation and comma splices and grammar and all of that. Because that's one of the most tedious things for me, I imagine it has to be pretty tedious for most other people. So they can take the time to stop and go over every little one and say, "Hey, wait. You, Student A, are not doing this correctly. Here's how you need to do it." That to me demonstrates a very deep love for the subject that can't really be lost by their lack of – there's so much interest there that it can't be dimmed by doing the tedious stuff. It's like having a garden. Nobody likes pulling weeds, but everybody likes the big, beautiful flowers that bloom in April and May. So to have a true love for it, you have to be willing to go out there and pull the weeds.

In Molly's experience, when an instructor demonstrates a passion for teaching in the classroom, it changes the entire culture of the classroom environment. Students begin to want to come to class, and they also feel an enhanced comfort level while they are there. Once this higher comfort level can be established, students have the opportunity to "blossom a little faster than" they may have. In a sense, the passion offered by the instructor becomes a catalyst that makes the students co-owners of the classroom. This shift causes many of the pressures of learning to be lifted.

For Keith, Alex's passion for his subject matter became the baseline for his entire teaching approach. Every part of the way Alex approached his class sent a message to Keith that he loved what he was doing. This passion was combined with an ability to relate the material to "real life" issues. Keith credits this passionate energy with making Alex a good lecturer: "His teaching method is really smooth. He's probably one of the few professors I have where I can just – I can hear him lecture, and I feel like I'm just floating. I'm relaxed. It's all going in."

Autumn had a similar perception of Professor Wiseman. Professor Wiseman's ability to be engaging in the classroom was predicated by the fact that he was so passionate about his discipline. His theoretical and personal experiences regarding

teaching had developed a passion within him that was easily evidenced by the students in attendance. Autumn noticed this about Professor Wiseman early and wished that some of her other teachers had felt the same way about their subjects:

I feel like if they care about their subject area enough, like if they are really motivated about it, I feel like they can [create this culture] because they're going to want you to learn it and they're going to want to help you... The fact that he didn't act like he was in class and he was like, "All right, we're going to learn this today." He wasn't dry. It was like he always was speaking with a passion. I feel like that's what he did. He made it fun and told his own stories. I can't really describe how I could tell, but I know that he loved doing what he's doing.

This teaching element, a transferable passion for the subject, is one of the most important lessons Autumn learned from Professor Wiseman, and she believes it is her best chance to reciprocate and thank him for investing in her by paying that passion forward to the next generation of learners.

Kennedy developed a goal along the same lines as Autumn's based on her time with Professor Kendall. She committed to sharing the same level of passion with the next generation of students and also extended that goal beyond the walls of the classroom. When reflecting on the comprehensive impact Professor Kendall had on her life, Kennedy said, "I've taken his enthusiasm and applied it to other aspects of my life. I really feel like he has had a positive influence and has affected and shaped who I've become."

The passionate teacher also brings another benefit to the classroom. Often, passionate teachers become content experts in their disciplines. The logical assumption is that these individuals have been passionate about their subjects for an extended amount of time and thus put the necessary energy into refining their knowledge base.

Encouraged Students to Rise to a Higher Level. The participants spoke often about the impact these teachers had on their performance. While the instructors were credited with having high expectations and holding students accountable for delivering on those expectations, the faculty members were also said to have targeted these specific students and challenged them to set the bar for their particular performance even higher. While the students made the effort to meet these higher goals for a variety of reasons, the end result was almost always finding success in the endeavor.

Sometimes, the interest in achieving the goal was the result of the affinity that the student had developed for the teacher. In the middle of her first semester, Kennedy found herself starting to work harder to further develop her strengths and address her weaknesses that Professor Kendall had identified for her. She also found herself increasing her personal investment in the class. In particular, she remembers a time when she misunderstood the directions for an assignment and did it incorrectly. She got a “C” on the assignment. It was the first “C” she had ever gotten in one of his classes. Interestingly, her frustration was less about her own performance and more from her fear of having let Professor Kendall down. “I felt terrible for two weeks because I had gotten a “C” in his class, and he knew I could do better.” Kennedy was driven by her goal to impress Professor Kendall and she was willing to work as hard as she had to in an effort to make that happen.

The affinity for an instructor can also be combined with a student’s understanding that they are being challenged to stretch him or herself. Josh wanted to reach the higher goals set before him because he had grown fond of Dr. Toad as an educator. Josh also viewed Dr. Toad as a challenging professor. He did not think he was “easy;” yet, he

looked forward to rising to the challenge of succeeding in his class. As he learned that the course would challenge him to stretch himself, Josh's affinity for Dr. Toad "made me want to try better." This same phenomenon of Josh's affection for his stricter teachers crossed over into other relationships as well where he learned to push his own limits because he wanted to achieve the high expectations that were set on him.

Alex looked at the rising bar as an avenue to add more enjoyment to his time in school. The fact that certain teachers were challenging served as an extra motivation:

We were definitely challenged but I kind of looked at it as if I'm going to be challenged I might as well enjoy myself and they enabled you to do that. They weren't so much of a hard-ass, I guess you could say, that you couldn't go into the class and work hard but not have a good time, as well.

From Alex's perspective challenges that are proposed in a setting that is fun and enjoyable are more likely to grab his attention and encourage him to stretch his capabilities.

Kennedy described her experience with Professor Kendall in much the same way. Although she knew early on that she liked Professor Kendall, she could not distinguish what made their connection work. Once the semester had settled in, she started to realize what was happening:

After the first few weeks went by and we started doing work for him, we realized not only is he going to be fun, but he actually is a good teacher because he's asking the most and expects the most and he's going to help us achieve the most, and that was worth sticking around for.

More specifically, Kennedy recalls that during the first or second class meeting he told his students, "And I know what you can do and I'm going to help you do that, and then I'm going to push you a little further so you can achieve the best you can." It was clear

that Professor Kendall was expecting optimum performance from his students and was going to hold them accountable for delivering to that standard.

As with the other student experience, there was an added component to the relationship than just high standards. Kennedy had worked with faculty members with high standards before. She has vivid memories of faculty members who pushed her incredibly hard. She recalls feeling like the faculty members were essentially saying, “Here’s the bar set ten feet high, but I’m only going to help you up the first two feet. You’ve got to jump the other eight by yourself.” It was a helpless feeling for Kennedy to be facing expectations which she considered not to be high, but unrealistic. The difference between the two is the willingness of the faculty member to provide the support necessary for the student to jump those other eight feet to meet those high standards.

There are circumstances in which that encouragement to stretch known capabilities can impact the student outside of the just that instructor’s course. Many teachers pride themselves on being labeled as “tough” and challenging their students to excel. If those teachers have fostered a connection with their students and gotten to know them as individuals, the students are highly likely to achieve the higher-order goals. These faculty members have a special opportunity to challenge their students to excel in other classes as well. By setting a high standard for performance in his or her class, the teacher sets a bar for the student to achieve across classes.

In LeAnn’s story, Professor Humble consistently asked what grades she was getting in her other courses and would not accept the answer if it was anything lower than an “A.” Professor Humble’s approach to inspiring LeAnn worked because he knew how

to communicate with her. He held LeAnn accountable for her performance, “but it wasn’t like a harsh [approach]. It was a very caring [one], like, ‘I really care for your success, so do the best you can or I’m not going to be okay with it.’” She further explains how he earned the right to push so hard:

Because he held me to a really high standard. So when I didn’t do well on a test, he’d be like, “What happened here? I know you can do better.” I guess it’s mostly that. He knew that I could do what I could do, and then if I didn’t do it, then he’d be like – not in a mean way, but – “Do better.” “I know you can do better and I’m sorry that you weren’t able to, but what can I do to help you to do better.” “If you don’t understand this, let me know” or “Just keep practicing.”

He would always tell me what he thought would be the best way for me to keep doing whatever I had to do to get an “A,” whatever I needed (167)... So I was like, “I don’t care if I get a ‘B’ in science. It’s stupid anyway. Nobody cares about that.” But he was like, “You have to get an ‘A’ because I know that you can. So work harder because I know you’re just slacking because you hate it.” So it was like he was not taking any bullshit.”

Whether the teacher used a direct or indirect approach, a personal or group approach, or an intense or calm approach to driving high performance, the impact on the students was never understated. As a very real litmus test for how meaningful rising to the high expectations of a preferred professor can be, Quinn later sought out this same professor when she had a choice of teacher for a future class. When her mom questioned her selection and reminded Quinn she would make it as hard on her as possible, Quinn replied, “Yeah, but I’m going to take more away from that experience than I would with any other teacher.” Her teacher pushed her to find a new level of her own performance; once she saw what she was capable of, she was willing to do whatever it took to achieve those results consistently.

Used Effective Feedback as a Motivator. Although the students referenced many abstract ways that faculty challenge their performance such as teaching with

passion, making the experience personal, and holding them accountable, the interviews also consistently referred to the importance of high quality feedback as an avenue through which faculty could offer them the opportunity to do their very best. Colby provided a nice overview of how the participants valued feedback:

To me, feedback is important and it's almost more important than the lecture because it really tells me what I personally need to be paying attention to and improving on. So he was doing that, perhaps not as much as I would have liked, but a lot more than a lot of my other teachers. So that's important to me because, yeah, I can sit there in the lecture and listen to somebody all day long, but if I write a paper and then somebody actually writes notes on it all the way through and says, "I like this. This you could change this way. That's really good because of this. This part is weak. You don't state your argument clearly here. Your grammar is poor." That [specific information] really helps me to grow as an individual.

Jordan and Kennedy also referenced the importance of the feedback associated with the course being very specific. Jordan credited Dale with pairing meaningful assignments with solid feedback that was based on helping Jordan better understand what was being taught. As an example, Jordan offers, "After a test, as opposed to just handing out a 'D,' actually talk to the students and say, 'I saw why you did this. Let me help you out.'" Kennedy offered several memories of Professor Kendall giving her specific feedback that helped her develop: "I see this as a problem. Let's work this out," "I see this as a strength. Have you perceived this?" "This is good. Here's why," and "This is not good. Here's how you can correct it."

Kennedy found herself wanting to do whatever it took to meet the high standards that were being set for her. This effort was tied to Professor Kendall's recognition of the efforts his students were making:

If you're putting out 100 percent of the effort then you want that acknowledgement, and you want 100 percent effort back, just like if I write up a

five page paper and then I give it to my professor and I just get a blanket grade and I don't get anything back, what's my incentive to do so well next time, because well, he may or may not be reading it. I just got this red letter on the top. But if I go through and I see all the detail and that he actually read everything that I wrote and paid attention to it, I'm going to be more careful with what I do next time and put more effort into it because I know I'm giving 100 percent and so is he or she.

The moment Kennedy decided that Professor Kendall was committing 100 percent of himself to making the course a success she elected to join him in that commitment.

When the student has developed a deep personal relationship with the faculty member, his or her expectations for meaningful feedback get even higher. For Omar, Autumn, and Colby, quality feedback played a role in their self-confidence as a learner. Since academic feedback was very important to Omar as a reassurance that he belonged in college, he was particularly attuned to what he was hearing back from his teachers:

Feedback for me is really important. It's like taking those times when I was reading assignments, or essays, whatever it was they had to turn in, to give them feedback, that was a unique fashion as opposed to "Great Job!" or "Solid!" You'll see that...and students will talk to each other. They'll look at each other's essays and if they see the same remark even though you might have talked to the professor – I'm thinking of one that I'm taking for the literature courses at State U. right now. Even if you know the professor on a personal level and you've talked with them about assignments, if they write the same comments on both of your essays it makes me feel like you just whipped through it. And it's like, "Here's this to make you feel good," as opposed to analyzing your thoughts, breaking down what you worked on and submitted and then giving feedback on it.

I really can't overemphasize how important that is for me, knowing the professor cares about my work and what I'm doing and I'll keep a lot of my essays because of that, because I enjoy seeing that feedback. And I'll draw confidence from it later, be like this is something that I did well.

Autumn believes that one of Professor Wiseman's signature traits is the personal attention he provides to all of his students through his use of feedback. Starting with the way he intentionally designs his assignments to require creative thinking, Professor

Wiseman pushes his students to challenge the traditional ways of learning. And he used feedback on submitted work as an opportunity to reward those who rise to the occasion.

Professor Wiseman put comprehensive, detailed, helpful feedback on all of the projects he returned to his students. Autumn found this behavior to be in stark contrast from other teachers that would simply put a check mark or the word “good” and a grade:

It’s kind of sad that it’s good enough, because “It’s good enough” isn’t necessarily what I want to hear. I want you to give me feedback on it because it could have taken me hours to read the thing and critique and write a paper about it and all you’re going to tell me is it’s good enough? I want a lot more feedback than that. I want to know what I can do to improve. I want to know if I’m really hitting the mark, that sort of thing. Give me a little more than it’s good enough.

Autumn was the first person in Professor Wiseman’s class ever to ace his midterm exam. When he gave her recognition in front of the class for that achievement, Autumn felt very special for being singled out and celebrated. It also made Autumn feel smart, which was not a feeling she was accustomed to having. When she reflected on the experience, and the fact that she didn’t have to do any extra studying to get that grade, it helped her realize that her love for the teaching field played a big role and it served as an important milestone in confirming her vocational choice.

Professor Brentley’s influence had a major effect on Colby’s development. “Through what I learned in his classes and the feedback that he gave me, it gave me more confidence in myself that I could handle professional writing and I could use it as something to make me valuable in the workforce.” In many ways, there is no better gift that a faculty member can give a student than increased self confidence.

When a teacher presents a course that has challenging material and high expectations for his or her students, feedback becomes even more important. Colby thrives in those courses, “as long as [the teacher] is willing to interact with me and give

me good feedback and guide me.” Professor Brentley excelled in this area. In fact, he was so good that when the end-of-semester rush prevented him from giving his usual level of feedback on an assignment Colby sent him the submission again asking him to provide his thoughts after things had settled. His feedback was helping her develop and she had begun to rely on it.

Providing worthwhile feedback to students is a necessary skill for all teachers. While some students are driven to receive the grade and less interested in the comments regarding the submission, more students want to understand how they earned the grade they got. “I’d like to know what I did well or, more importantly, what I did wrong because if I know what I did wrong then I won’t do that again. Dr. Toad took the time to provide comprehensive feedback to Josh. He also invited Josh, and any of his other students, to visit him during office hours to further discuss a project or assignment if they chose. Josh often took advantage of this opportunity to understand his mistakes and correct them for the future. The importance of providing quality of feedback cannot be overstated. In fact, in describing his worst teacher in college, Josh simply offered that “the teacher could not give feedback.”

Providing honest, detailed feedback carries indirect benefits as well. In Josh’s case, Dr. Toad’s feedback further increased Josh’s passion for history and his desire to learn as much as he could. He shifted away from the student who was not reading, looking to do the minimum to get by, and essentially “just there,” and shifted towards being a student who actually wanted to take things a step further. This decision, combined with his growing relationship with Dr. Toad, made a profound impact on Josh:

Some of the things that I’ve just started noticing about the world he’s noticed for a while and then he’ll just nudge me in directions and then I’ll discover whole

new things just by watching the news and reading older books and things like that...I would read the old books but I wouldn't put the information together. I wouldn't correlate events that are happening today and events that happened very similarly in the past. I wouldn't have done that or I wouldn't have seen how an event that happens in Pakistan could just ripple across the world or any other country.

Josh's worldview was expanding because of the comprehensive model of challenge and support that Dr. Toad provided him. For these students, having the faculty member identify and challenge potential was a key factor in the evolution of their relationships to the next level.

Summary of challenges performance. Once an effective culture for learning has been designed and implemented, the students expressed an interest in performing beyond the minimum levels required for the course. They appreciated the opportunity to challenge themselves and excel. The student's ability to excel relied on his or her teacher holding him or her accountable for doing his or her part, providing detailed expectations for his or her assignments, and making the learning experience a personal one. These three attributes had to be combined with communicating a passion for the discipline, encouraging him or her to excel, and using feedback as a motivator.

Consistently Cares

The instructors' focus on committing time to the students, connecting the students to college resources, creating a learning culture and challenging students' performance will not result in meaningful student-faculty relationships alone. The foundation for the five structures is the students' belief that the teachers are authentic in their desire to make a connection. When the students believe the interest being shown in them is genuine, the opportunities to develop a symbiotic relationship increase significantly.

There is an axiom which says, “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care.” While there is an inherent triteness in the comment that makes it border on cliché, these students showed that there is also a reality within. The students’ belief that the faculty members care about them represents an important foundation for the relationships that may be to follow. LeAnn summarized the importance of this factor in no uncertain terms:

What’s most important for that professor is to show the student they care. Because if the student doesn’t think they care, that they have an actual interest, they actually care about how this person’s going to... If the student doesn’t think they care, they why would they have this relationship with them? I think that’s kind of the foundation for the student being able to go and seek out the professor and trust them. I think that it’s being able to say, “I know this person cares about my success and I know they care about how I’m doing because they showed it.”

In other words, LeAnn proposes that if the instructor does not care about the student there is no reason for the student to care about the instructor or the information he or she is looking to impart.

Showing students that you care is sometimes a difficult message to send in that different students look to receive that care in different ways. For most students, sending a message of value starts through the faculty member’s remembering their names. It made an impact when a teacher was able to call on “Quinn,” “Addison,” or “Omar” every single time, but it also extended beyond that. Faculty members can send a message of caring to the students by showing a personal investment in the student, showing vulnerability as a teacher, and acting in a fair and equitable manner. Demonstrating care at this level has the potential of causing a fundamental change in the student.

Show Personal Investment in Students. These students sought out faculty members they felt were invested in their individual success. The teachers expected the

students to be invested in the course material and it seemed fair for the students to expect the faculty members to invest in them. One of Professor Kendall's strengths was his ability to show his students that he had care and compassion not only for what he teaches but also for whom he teaches. Regardless of how he was feeling at any given moment, he worked hard to make sure that his students felt comfortable and capable of learning. He was invested in his students' success and they knew it. Kennedy voiced her respect for his approach:

He was so invested in us as students personally...I think that's what meant something. Because we knew he knew our academic story. He knew our strengths and weaknesses, and how to help us strengthen our weaknesses and our strengths, and because he gave that amount of detail and attention to those aspects, the small aspects that didn't necessarily seem as important as the big goal everybody had, "I just want to get an 'A' in the class." I think that small attention to detail and the dedication he put into that showed that he really meant what he said and he really was confident in us because he was helping us grow in the small ways, and of course, the big ways in class, with that attention to detail.

This idea that the student could sense sincerity from the instructor who came across as caring was evident throughout. Quinn sensed that Professor Wiseman wanted her to succeed. She could feel that each time they interacted. She was also confident that she knew why she felt that way. Professor Wiseman was aware of something that Quinn hopes more instructors will come to understand. The fact remains that, "if you're going to teach you have to love teaching and you have to love the students. It's not just about loving the subject matter." From their first encounter forward, Professor Wiseman worked tirelessly to show Quinn that he cared for her and was invested in her success.

Dale was equally successful in sending a message of investment to his students. Jordan offered a simple parallel when describing the way Dale showed he cared. He did

so by relating to his students on this personal level. In many ways, this distinguished him from other professors:

People always remember their elementary school teachers. You always hear about guys who had a crush on Mrs. Smith back in the day, or all the girls had a crush on Mr. Smith back in the day. I think one of the reasons for that is because...you have to relate to the kids. You have to really and passionately try to help the kids because they can't do anything on their own. They can't – they don't know how to do math, or science, or stuff. It's up to you to not only teach them, but just because they're kids, they're really young and they're really fragile, so they need help – personal help – from the teacher to make sure that they've got it.

I think it's important for a teacher to take that elementary school attitude and apply it, because I think that the reason so many elementary school students are so close to their teachers is because the teachers went out of their way to make sure that the specific student got the best experience.

Dale's ability to capture the magic of the elementary school teacher's connection with his or her students and translate it into the college environment resonated well with the students at Lost Lakes.

An additional component of a personal investment in the student is the understanding that he or she arrives at school with experiences and ideas as well. The faculty member has to keep an open mind in terms of listening to and learning from the students as well. This concept was highly evident in Josh's story. Josh's relationship with Dr. Toad was the reason Josh liked LLCC as much as he did. He enjoyed his Lost Lakes experience more than he did his time at any other school and he credits Dr. Toad with being a big part of that. When considering why their connection worked as well as it did, Josh credits the fact that both he and Dr. Toad approached establishing the relationship with one another with an open mind. Had either of them had a closed mind, it never would have happened. As he explains:

If you're a professor with a closed mind, thinking that you have the knowledge and that you're just there to give it out, you're limiting yourself. Because even if

you do have a doctorate or X number of years in the field or X numbers of however many jobs in a foreign country, you can always still learn something, even from a student. And if a student has a closed mind and thinks that they know everything then it doesn't matter if the professor's willing to help them. It will be just like slamming your face into a desk. It's just not going to work. I would say both parties have to be receptive.

Omar also found himself seeking out continued conversations where he felt they were reciprocal:

As opposed to a give, take, give, take, we had some really good, serious, in-depth and friendly conversations about everything ranging from general history to what's been going on in the Middle East since 2001, beforehand with the Soviet Mujahedeen struggle. These are all things that he was involved in from a career level and I've been fascinated by. And these are things that we could talk about that I could lend my perspectives on and that he would lend his perspectives on so in that respect we were having really an equal dialogue, which I would imagine could be called reciprocal.

In some cases, the academic circumstances make it easier for the faculty member to establish a reciprocal relationship with the students. One of the strengths of the dental hygiene program is the small cohort of students accepted. Capped at just 18 participants, the program fosters a "family" feel among the students and the faculty members since they share the experience. During this shared experience, engaging in behaviors that show care and concern is almost inevitable. While they spent a good deal of time together, Addison carefully observed Professor Hunger to see what she could learn. What Addison confirmed through her observation was that Professor Hunger was the exact type of calming influence she needed to succeed in the program:

She was just wonderful. I don't know. There's so much. She's very special. We were just full of stress, just stressed-out women. You know what I mean? She just really kind of was very assuring and calming and was so nice. She just has a lot of experience and has taught at University in another state and this state. She just has all this really amazing experience and she's never trying to tell you all about it in a kind of condescending or boastful way. I really like that about her. It's very much who she is.

Professor Hunger's calming influence was not unintentional, however. She had reason to act the way she did:

She was in it with us. She really knew. She could understand. She could empathize. She'd gone through it herself in her lifetime...Nobody can understand what we went through except for those that went through it. So, for her it was more relevant. It had a relevant value versus at home it was, "You're my mom. Of course you're going to cheerlead me. That's your job."

Regardless of the academic circumstances surrounding the relationship, students still seek reassurance that the faculty member trusts them. Professor Hunger provided this reassurance as an avenue to enhance her relationship with her students:

So [she] just gave an opportunity to trust us and we made good on it. So I think that for [her] that was huge. Trust was good. [She was] so overly willing to help us with whatever. [She was] very invested in us. [She] wanted to see us do really, really well. I think that was huge. Getting us through the programs, getting us through our clinical and national boards. [Her] investment level, I think, was pretty special. I don't know if that would be the difference between just being a regular faculty member at a college because we were so small, we were such a small group of people, whereas they didn't have maybe 200 or 300 or whatever, however many hundreds of students. So, that might be the difference. It was just the trust factor and their investment level with us was so great. You could see that. You knew that.

Establishing mutual trust is a cornerstone to an effective relationship. Offering that trust from the outset is a good way to show students that you care. Sending that message is of the utmost importance. As Robyn offers:

Caring, unfortunately, isn't really part of the job description at this point. I think that when universities and colleges go to hire somebody I think it will be part of that criteria, like, "Did you participate in outside events?" or those kinds of things. I think it will eventually be a part of the hiring process but I think as far as adjuncts and those kinds of things it's just a matter of is there a choice not to have the class or to have the class. And sometimes you just have to hire somebody to have the class so people can get their degrees.

In other words, students want to know you care, whether that trait is in your job description or not. As Robyn continued, meaningful relationships happen when "you

choose to love them no matter what. If you choose to love your students like you love your [family] you're going to have those relationships because you care."

Showed Vulnerability. The idea of the faculty member showing vulnerability as evidence of caring is as much about the faculty member rejecting his or her own opportunity for formal authority as it is about him or her being transparent. When a faculty member removes a layer of formal authority that typically exists between him or her and the student it comes with a series of risks. Among them are risks to his or her own self-esteem and teaching effectiveness. Vulnerability appeared throughout the stories in a variety of ways such as treating students like family, being authentic as an individual, sharing personal stories, and offering life-lessons outside of the course material. Each of these choices demonstrated vulnerability for the instructor as he or she took a chance in the hopes of drawing students closer.

When describing what Alex does that other faculty should implement, Keith offered: "Treat them like they're your kids. That's all you got to do. Treat them like they're your kids." Keith made it clear that his relationship with Alex was never about the discipline Alex taught or the role he played at Lost Lakes; instead, it was about Alex's being completely focused on the students and making them his priority. Throughout the interview, Keith talked about how Alex made him feel as if they were "friends" with one another. He showed his vulnerability as a teacher by relaying stories of his college experience and what happened that caused him to have to seek out certain resources at various times. Keith found himself drawn in by the vulnerability that Alex showed because it lowered the expected barriers that often arise between a student and a person

of authority in that individual's life. Multiple other students also referenced the benefits of instructor vulnerability.

Dale showed his vulnerability by consistently being himself. His upbeat and jovial style made him relatable. He came across as genuine. He took a chance by owning his weaknesses and admitting when he did not know the answer to a question. In the moment, he would make a joke about not knowing and follow-up in a later class. These behaviors opened the door for connecting. "If you can't joke around and laugh with your students teaching a class about what your life has to be, then I really don't want you as a teacher." When Jordan sensed Dale's authenticity, it made it much easier to approach him and interact in a meaningful way outside of class. During these outside of class, less-pressure interactions, Dale's vulnerability became even more apparent:

It's amazing to me how many times, when a class ends, how you legitimately talk to the person and not just the professor in the classroom. When you talk to him, the only thing I could say that was different was that he was more personal, which just even more so just made it kind of like, 'This guy is really, really cool.' He didn't say, 'I don't have time.' He didn't brush you off, he made sure – even when he wasn't in class time, he made sure that, 'This is what you do, that's what you do. How else can I help you?'

You could just tell that he was really there for you. He was there for the students. It was really cool to see that opposed to somebody who was just – after you talked to them after class, 'this, this, this...' and then they walk out the door and back to their office. He didn't do that whatsoever. It was just – it was really exciting.

Dale's ability to send a consistent message about who he was and what he stood for to Jordan helped increase Jordan's trust level. Jordan saw that Dale was taking the risk of showing him everything Dale had to offer. Jordan accepted that and it increases his willingness to engage with Dale in a meaningful way.

Quinn also paid careful attention to the times when an instructor invited her to share a personal moment. When asked the most important gift a faculty member can give

a student, Quinn proposed, “I think being a mentor and to encourage your students is really important.” As she describes it, the mentor’s role is to lead students in the right direction and help them to get where they want to be or to help get students through the day and figure out what their next step is going to be. The faculty members’ ability to provide these services is based on their ability to connect with the student one-on-one. The instructor often presents a different, more vulnerable persona in these more intimate settings:

You spend one-on-one time with those people and they’re not the same people that they are when they’re up in front of the entire class. You get to know them more personally and it makes it a different kind of relationship. I don’t think that I would have spent that one-on-one time with her unless it was about the class or if I needed to go to her office to meet with her. But after having spent that one-on-one time with her, now I feel like I could go to her office and ask her about anything.

In a slightly different way than it happened with Dale and Jordan, Quinn perceived the instructor’s vulnerability surfacing when she met with her teacher one on one. These one-on-one conversations often also serve as the spark for more sharing of personal stories and information between the two individuals as the comfort level increases. As the student and instructor spend more time together they learn to confide in one another.

Addison had a similar experience as her relationship matured with Professor Hunger:

We actually sat together and talked a lot about dentistry and families and that kind of stuff. I don’t know. I really liked her. Her presence was kind of calming and it was great to get to know her throughout school, because there were lots of stressful times and she always seemed very calm. Then she’d pull me aside sometimes and be like, “What’s really going on?” So we just kind of bonded there. Though she was very quiet, she had a very kind of quirky sense of humor, which was neat to discover about her.

Professor Hunger used stories from her past to help relate to Addison and assure her that everything was going to fall into place. The willingness to share this personal information

combined with Professor Hunger's ability to ask probing questions showed that she was perceptive and willing to take the risk of sharing her own stories in an effort to encourage Addison to offer her own. She combined this outreach with being "very open, very gentle, and above and beyond" when Addison came to her with questions in a way that solidified her as the key resource for Addison's success.

The stories that Professor Hunger shared helped convince Addison that Professor Hunger had experienced similar trials and triumphs in the past. This strengthened connection gave Professor Hunger the opportunity to teach Addison some life lessons in addition to the didactic curriculum of the dental hygiene program. As Addison claims, in her fifty years of experience Professor Hunger had gotten a firm grasp on what types of issues were important and what types were not. As a result, she was able to delicately communicate the message to Addison to let some frustrations go:

That's what I got the most from Ms. Hunger was that it was her life experiences, it was her life lessons that she was kind of showing me and talking to me about that helped me actually be successful because, like I said, didactically and clinically I was one of the top students in our school but emotionally I wanted to be like, "Forget this program," because it was so mentally debilitating.

It wasn't that I couldn't handle it clinically or couldn't handle the bookwork. It was just feeling like someone had their thumb on your forehead all the time and saying, "Because I said so. Because I said so." She just let me know, "Let it go. It doesn't matter. You're right. You're wrong. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. You know, just let these things go." That was priceless for me, really very, very priceless.

The only reason that Addison took what Professor Hunger said to heart was that she felt her life experiences gave her the wisdom to guide her in the right direction. By valuing her as an individual first, and then as a student second, Professor Hunger taught her a key principle for the dental profession and for life in general.

Addison's experience in the program demonstrated how she matched many other college students' status, being simultaneously so fragile and incredibly resilient.

Professor Hunger used personal vulnerability as an avenue to prove that fragility is a shared component of the human experience. Sharing this understanding allowed Addison to welcome Professor Hunger in as a co-learner in the experience.

Led by the instructor's example, the student may also experience a desire to show his or her own vulnerability. Based on Alex's willingness to share stories about himself early in his relationship with Keith, Keith felt a strong connection with Alex. This connection helped Keith feel supported on his journey. Keith established a comfort level with Alex that allowed Keith to share information of a very personal nature in return. Whether it pertained to his experience as a Marine, his family situation, his financial circumstances, or any other pertinent issues, Keith never felt the need to have a guard up when he talked to Alex. This comfort level showed Keith's belief that Alex was there to support him and help him be successful. These attributes represented key pillars in their shared relationship.

Darryl's return of vulnerability came through his completion of a course assignment. When Ariel asked Darryl and his classmates to put their best effort into a project, many of the students blew her off and did the minimum. Darryl put an extended amount of time and effort into completing it at a high level. When probed on the reason he did so, Darryl referenced the fact that Ariel had taken risks in showing herself to the class, and he was just looking to return the gesture:

I really took it into consideration and gave it a good effort. I don't know why, but I did, and she really responded very, very caringly to that. And it just made me, from then on, feel like somebody at this school knew some stuff about me that other people didn't know. It's not like it made me special or anything. It's just

that she knew me. I felt like she knew me more at this school than anybody else would have, and from then on, anytime I had something going on here, it was Ariel.

This assignment was the first time Darryl had opened up to being vulnerable in a classroom setting like that. He credits Ariel's leading by example as one of the reasons he was able to do that. He always felt that, during class, she was showing them a real person. She talked about being an instructor, a mom, a wife, and a daughter. She shared parts of who she was with the class and it made them feel comfortable doing the same in return. The conversations that Keith and Alex and Darryl and Ariel shared played a more significant role than simply allowing Keith and Darryl to feel supported. Their teachers consistently sent the message that they *wanted* to make a connection with them and were willing to take some risks to do so.

Acted in a Fair and Equitable Manner to All Students. There is one risk involved with personal attention and vulnerability that instructors must keep in the forefront of their minds. Faculty members naturally gravitate towards some students over others and have to be mindful that they are not sending exclusive messages about their accessibility. In opening the door to connecting with some students there is a risk that other students in the same classroom may get alienated:

From the student perspective, it would be along the lines of, "Okay. This person obviously gets along better with older students. What's going to make him connect with me? I'm fresh out of high school. I work part time at Subway...So what do we have that's going to be common ground?"

Being able to find common ground to serve as a connection with the majority of students is an overwhelmingly difficult, yet vitally important, step in opening the door for a meaningful relationship.

Quinn felt there was a delicate balance between providing support to students individually and “playing favorites.” Her math teacher had the ability to make sure that the majority of his students felt they were receiving his personal attention:

It’s funny. He’s got so many other students but he was like that with every student. He knew which students he needed to talk to and which ones – it was just certain things that he knew about you like if you were a procrastinator or if you were going to struggle with such and such problem he would ask you about it. And I think that it’s interesting that he takes the time to remember you as a person but he remembers your style of learning and how you’re doing in his course. Because what person can remember 200 students’ names, their grades, what they’re doing in class, what they got on their last exam, what areas they struggle in? I think that he tried to make a connection with all of his students.

Often this ability to remember information comes from a sense of pride the faculty member has in his or her students. Alex references that pride as something that he saw Dr. Brentley show for all of his students. Seeing him make the same effort to reach out to the students who were struggling with the course material as he was with the students were excelling modeled a method of teaching that resonated with Alex:

Even the kids who kind of misbehaved or kind of ignored stuff in class, he would pull them aside, be like, “Hey, look. You’ve got to get on top of this. I believe in your ability to do this. It’s just that you’ve got to do the work.” And the only reason I knew most of that stuff is because a couple of the kids that got pulled aside I knew and they would tell me, “He talked to me. Brentley talked to me...”

I think that [this student] was amazed that given [where he was] – in his juncture in his life he was drinking heavily – and to see that someone cared about him I think it made somewhat of an impact. I think [the student] gave more of an effort for [Brentley’s] class than he would have any other class. I can definitely say that. I think it did make an impact.

Professor Brentley’s personal attention to his students made an impact on their desire to succeed as invested partners in their own learning. Robyn offered a similar message about not being too quick to write someone off as disinterested in the class:

Pay attention and [don’t] judge too quickly because sometimes people are just a little different. And help them, even if it’s just saying, “Take a break and come

back,” or if that’s staying a little after your office hours, even though it’s your personal time. We realize that. Try to develop a relationship with us. If you see us struggling say something or if you see us excel, say something, even if it’s just after class because it’s just that positive reinforcement that’s going to get us motivated.

Giving students the benefit of the doubt and working to meet them where they are in their desire to learn is a valuable gift given from teacher to students. The student also has a responsibility to do his or her part to accept that gift. Prior to her leaving for State A & M, Professor Wiseman reminded Quinn to reach out there in the same way she had at Lost Lakes. He said:

Make a connection. Develop a relationship with that teacher. Go to their office and ask them some kind of question, something so that they know your face, they know you, even if it’s not really relevant. Get to know your professor so that if you do have a serious question and you really do need help that you can go and seek them out and they will help you.

When this gift is applied and accepted using as wide of a net as possible, fewer students will find themselves feeling like they are outsiders of the college community.

The process of not playing favorites becomes even more difficult when taking into consideration the student’s goal of having his or her relationship with the instructor feel unique. The students want to know that what is happening is personal and that the relationship being established with them is not something that happens with every student who enters that faculty member’s classroom:

It wouldn’t seem genuine if it was every single person. It would, but it wouldn’t really mean the same. It would just be like, “Oh, well, I’m one of one thousand and it’s nice, thank you. But if I let you down, then you still have 999 other people.”

As soon as the student feels like a number, the chances of a meaningful relationship evolving are practically eliminated.

Changed the Students. When a faculty member shows that he or she cares about his or her students, embraces vulnerability as a means of shortening the traditional gap between teacher and student, and shows integrity by giving each of his or her students an equal opportunity to engage with him or her, the student's perception of his or her ability to learn increases significantly. This ability transcends a given discipline and allows the student to learn life lessons and formulate key components of their identity. In other words, the student was changed.

Sometimes the change the student experienced was an increased confidence in a decision he or she had already made. While Autumn arrived at Lost Lakes knowing what she planned to do when she grew up, Professor Wiseman helped increase her confidence that teaching what she was meant to do. Along the way, she was convinced that she was pursuing something she really did want to do and that she could excel in that arena. She did not take this influence lightly:

Sometimes I'd like to think that college professors have helped me shape who I am. I think I figured out who I am before I came to college. I knew what I wanted to do and they just kind of pushed me along, they just kind of helped that.

Reassurance that she had made a good decision regarding who she was helped Autumn feel more comfortable with the other choices she made as a result of those beliefs.

Kennedy also arrived at Lost Lakes knowing that she wanted to become a teacher. Professor Kendall's influence helped shape the professional she is today. As a teacher Kennedy has worked to bring Professor Kendall's approach to teaching into the classroom with her. She works hard to be enthusiastic, be fun, be relatable, and serve as a mentor to her students. She looks for little ways to energize the class and "exude her love of the subject," like using a variety of colored markers when writing on the board or

embedding graphics into her presentations. She learns personal information about her students, hosts one-on-one conferences to discuss strengths and weaknesses, and provides comprehensive feedback in a timely manner.

As a person Kennedy also learned several important lessons from Professor Kendall. She recalled one particular time when he sent an important message about integrity:

One time he called me at my house because he had misplaced my paper grade. He had already graded it and given it back to me, but I guess he had forgotten to record it. So he called me. And I had gotten a “B” on that paper, and I was so ashamed. And he asked, “I don’t have your paper recorded. Would you please tell me what grade I gave you?” I said, “Yeah. I got an 86 on it.” He said, “Really?” I said, “Yeah” He said, “Are you sure? On the last paper?” I said, “Yeah. 86.” He said, “Oh, okay. Well, thank you.” He could have said, “Well, she probably got a 92,” and put that in there. But he didn’t. It’s the small things that count. I think that’s what it was.

The way Professor Kendall lived his life made Kennedy want to be like him. She wanted to impress him. She wanted to prove him right when he told her he believed she could excel. Even when she felt that she had proven what she could do, she kept pushing herself to move the bar even higher. Professor Kendall was the teacher she wanted to become and she was focused on doing whatever it took to achieve that same level of success.

Sometimes the change is about enhancing self-esteem. Robyn credits both Professor Curd and some other members of the Lost Lakes faculty for helping her evolve into the adult she wanted to become. These individuals made this evolution possible by helping to transform Robyn’s view of her own identity, coaching her towards success academically, and authentically opening themselves up to a relationship with her. Each of

these components individually, and their work collectively, made a long-lasting impact on Robyn's experience at Lost Lakes and beyond.

And sometimes the change is about accepting that the student is surrounded by people who want to help and embracing a loyalty towards those individuals. Ariel's help provided Darryl with a maturity in his own desire to help others and the evolution of his willingness to ask for help. Since Ariel had provided such a high level of support to Darryl, and since he was working as a work study in her office, he felt the need to pay her kindness forward to the other students who visited the center. In his mind, Darryl was representing Ariel and the tutoring center as a whole, and he owed it to them to be consistently helping others to the best of his ability.

Darryl's relationship with Ariel also showed him that there comes a time when everyone has to ask for help. Before he spent so much time with Ariel, Darryl had a pattern of hitting rock bottom before being willing to ask someone else for help. As he offers, "When I ask somebody for help, I've exhausted my knowledge." Once he saw the benefits of turning to other people for support, Darryl recognized that it had a payoff in lowering his personal stress level:

Before I met Ariel, nobody would have told you that I wasn't a hard worker because I was working my tail off and going to school here full-time but I wasn't enjoying it. I'd tell everybody I was, but I really – inside I was like, "I don't know how much longer I can do this. I'm going to burn out fast."

And then me and her, I was able to – I asked for help, but I haven't asked for help a lot in my life. So I asked for help and that just kind of – once the help was given and it sent me on this whole different path, I just now – I want to ask for help. I really do. With certain people. There's certain people that I feel comfortable just walking up like, "You probably have an easier way than I do," and instead of beating my head up against the wall twenty times, I only do it three times now, and then I'll let somebody who's done it before or seen it before show me an easier, softer way. That's something I think about, too.

When Darryl saw that he could get help without feeling guilty or defeated, it changed who he was. Suddenly, he was keenly aware of all the resources that were around him and more than willing to use them for help and support.

The concept of change was evident across cases. Many of the students mentioned the impact that the faculty member had in transforming them to a different person than they were when they first met that individual. According to Addison, Professor Hunger “definitely elevated me emotionally and personally” and helped confirm the identity Addison was building. This thought of elevating the students to the next level is a common theme among the teachers that create these relationships.

Molly experienced this same transformation as Professor Reid helped her quiet the doubting voices that crept into her own head from time to time:

She changed my life and changed me...She encouraged me and showed me that the thing about which I am most vulnerable and the most scared is something that I actually do quite well. So in doing that, she showed me, “It’s okay, you can do this,” and made me shut the really annoying, own worst enemy part of me off, at least for a little bit.

Professor Reid’s belief that Molly could achieve in the classroom superseded her insecurities about her own performance.

Many times the change that the student experienced was so dramatic that he or she felt indebted to the faculty member. The easiest way to deal with this feeling was to commit to pay that service forward to the next generation of students by serving them in the same way. Addison offered her pledge:

I want to be that person in someone’s life. I want to be that Ms. Hunger...that is that outlet for the students to decompress if they need to decompress, to have an avenue to point them in the right direction to find out information, and just kind of be there for them. As cliché as that sounds, that matters. That’s what she did.

That's what Professor Hunger did for Addison. And, that willingness to do the same for someone else is probably all Professor Hunger ever really wanted in return.

Kennedy made a similar pledge. When describing what separates Professor Kendall from other teachers, Kennedy just chuckled and offered, "I think it's magic." She reiterated all of the distinguishing traits that made Professor Kendall so special and added the idea that she teaches the way she does because she owes it to Professor Kendall to pay his gifts forward:

He made that much of an impression on me and I wanted to make that much of an impression on somebody else, and I wanted to influence and affect somebody's life in such a positive way, the way he had mine.

In her mind, Kennedy can think of no more fitting tribute to give to Professor Kendall than to pass his love forward to the students that enter her classroom.

Giving students a consistent message of care takes work. And the students were aware of the fact that what these teachers did for them is not something that comes easy.

As Alex shared:

As I get further and further away from it I really appreciate the effort that they made and the commitment they made to students. I want to be a professor one day but even as a person in any line of employment just be competent, caring, respectful, all that stuff. I got that from them.

However, faculty members who commit to doing that work often reap the benefits of their efforts. Consistent care creates change. Quinn proposes that as early as orientation faculty should start to encourage students to meet with them and start a conversation.

While many students do not naturally think about developing those relationships, Quinn credits their existence with making quite the impact on her experience. As she said:

It's hard to put into words, in an hour, how much these three people have impacted [my] life... Wiseman must have had a really big impact on me for me to change my major and change the course of my life just by being in his class.

In Quinn's opinion, the caring nature of her teachers increased her connection with these individuals. This increased connection led to several major changes in her life that may not have happened without the effort of these teachers.

Summary of consistently cares. These faculty members were credited with using care to gain influence and subsequently using that influence to change students for the better. Whether it was a change in major, a change in maturity, or a change in self-perception, the faculty members drove the students towards an enhanced way to view the world around them. The instructors accomplished this goal through showing a personal investment in their students, showing personal vulnerability, acting in a fair and equitable manner with all students, and changing the students.

One signature example of this transformation was Jordan. Dale's vested interest in Jordan changed his college experience forever. It opened doors he never realized were right in front of him. In Jordan's words:

By him looking and seeing what I can do, it showed me that I don't have to wait until I have a degree before I can be doing jump shots from all the way at the other end of the court. I can be doing it right now.

There is no greater gift a faculty member can offer a student than the belief they are capable of accomplishing major goals and are capable of doing so starting right now.

Part 2: Summary

The collective stories of the participants merged to form five distinct structures which provide the framework for the experience of establishing a meaningful student-faculty relationship. These five structures were the commitment of time, making connections with the college, creating an effective learning culture, challenging student performance, and consistently caring. As a unit, these five structures come together to create

the circumstances in which meaningful student-faculty relationships are most likely to develop.

Part 3: Textural Structural Synthesis

The structures of commitment of time, making connections with the college, creating an effective learning culture, challenging student performance, and consistently caring emerged as the five core components of the phenomenon of the establishment of meaningful student-faculty relationships. In this section, each of the five ideas is summarized followed by a synthesis of the five components as a collection.

The commitment of time structure details the advantages of a smaller institution in terms of the accessibility of the faculty member. This advantage is combined with intentional efforts by the faculty member to promote his or her accessibility during class, make the student feel welcome during visits to office hours, and work to mentor the student as they experience the identity-developing moments of college. The commitment of time structure is also marked by an extension of the relationship beyond the end of the semester in which the student and instructor first met.

The structure of connection to college operated with the assumption the student knew him or herself and arrived at college ready to be an active participant in the experience. This awareness combined with the instructor's ability to utilize a broad scope of interests to form an initial connection with student. After fostering the first connection over a shared interest, the instructor endorses the student's self-concept and serves as a cheerleader for his or her success. In this process the instructor uses his or her knowledge of available resources at the college and works to put the student in touch with the resources that would best complement his or her needs and goals.

The emergent themes paid equal respect to the instructor's effectiveness inside of the classroom. The third structure involved the faculty member's ability to create the ideal culture for learning inside of the classroom. Creating this culture required the faculty member to treat students as valued members of the learning community, utilize an effective in-class approach for transferring information, and maintaining control of the classroom. An important component of the effectiveness inside of the classroom structure was the instructor's ability to demonstrate authenticity to his or her students.

The fourth structure involved challenging students' performance. The faculty members were credited with challenging student performance by holding students accountable for doing their part to learn, detailing clear expectations for student academic performance, and making the learning experience a personal one. Instructors also used passion as a method to energize the discipline and encouraged students to push their own boundaries in terms of rising to a higher level of thinking. The capstone behavior in the challenging students' performance structure was the use of high-quality, timely feedback as a motivator to continued exploration of an idea or topic.

The fifth structure was the faculty member's ability to show the student they consistently care about them. This idea of consistent care was established through the faculty member's personal investment in the student and his or her willingness to accept the risk of being personally vulnerable as a way to help move the relationship forward. Additionally, the care must be available in a fair and equitable way to all students. When care is offered unconditionally, it has the potential to impact dramatic change in the student.

The Role of the Faculty Member

As a unit, the five components of the phenomenon outlined what students are looking for in terms of traits and behaviors from the faculty members. Within their design there is a minor acknowledgment that the student must bring a certain amount of maturity and effort to the table to make the connection a success. Still, the vast majority of the responsibility for ensuring the relationship development does rest on the faculty member. And the phenomenon cannot be adequately understood without first paying regards to the varied goals of the student as a co-owner of the relationship. The intents of the students varied as some saw their teachers as guides, some as experts, some as friends, and some as educators.

Teacher as guide. Keith, Colby, and Darryl centered their stories on the idea that the faculty member served as a guide on their journey. Connecting students with additional resources such as financial aid and scholarships helped the students secure the support they needed to be successful. In reaching out to faculty, these students had a specific goal of securing assistance.

Teacher as expert. As Autumn, Josh, and Alex told their stories it was clear that their goal for the relationship was to strengthen their understanding of a given course discipline. While they were interested in making a personal connection with the faculty member, that intent consistently returned to the goal of better grasping education, business, or history.

Teacher as friend. The idea of teacher as expert is in stark contrast to the experiences of LeAnn, Molly, Omar, and Robyn. For these four students, although the instructors' discipline was helpful in opening the door for a connection it almost

immediately became a secondary piece of the connection. LeAnn, Molly, Omar, and Robyn were looking for cheerleaders to help support them on their journey as they navigated both success and failure.

Teacher as educator. For the final four students, Jordan, Kennedy, Quinn, and Addison, their intent for the relationship became about learning broader life lessons from their faculty members. As two examples, Jordan sought out Dale to help him release the potential he had inside and Addison looked to Professor Hunger less to learn the principles of dentistry but more to mature her approach to interacting with patients and disconnecting from the anxiety associated with the smaller stresses in her life.

Summary of Textural Structural Synthesis

For these relationships to have developed as they did, it was an imperative point that the default style of the instructor aligned with the intent of the student. If the student was seeking a teacher as friend arrangement with a faculty member whose strength was as a discipline expert, the relationship would likely be doomed to fail from the start. An example of the consequences of this misalignment can be found in Sam's story at the beginning of this chapter. In the case of our 14 study participants, their intents matched up with the relationship approach of the identified faculty members.

Once the relationship goals align, the impact of the five structures becomes evident. If the student and the instructor want the same things from the relationship, the identified elements evolve very naturally. The initial connection leads both parties to want to spend more time with one another and feel comfortable doing so. As they spend time together and learn more about one another, the teacher's new knowledge about the student will combine with his or her awareness of campus resources that can assist the

student. The instructor's preference for connection will likely translate into them creating a culture in the classroom that matches the student's expectations. Once the student feels this comfort level in the classroom they will be more receptive to the instructor's efforts to challenge performance. These elements come together to reassure the student that they have found a partner at the college who cares and is invested in his or her success.

Collectively, these attributes cause a positive impact on the student's identity development, learning, and self-esteem.

Each of the five structures is implementable through an intentional effort of the teacher and do not require significant skill development. After an awareness of the issues is acknowledged, it requires only a focused effort to develop the weaker areas of the instructor's style. This awareness and effort to develop can, and should, be passed down to new teachers as they enter the field. Alex proposed a simple method to accomplish this outcome:

The teachers that people do connect with, have them attend a class. Be like, "This is how you do it. Learn by example." And tell them, "You don't have to be like them but take note of the things that they are effective with. Being upbeat and positive and giving the impression that they care."

Using the teachers who excel at creating these relationships to mentor those coming into the field will ensure that the scope of these relationships continues to expand and their impact does the same.

The return on investment for the teachers who make the effort to develop these skills and implement them into their approach is dramatic. When Jordan reflects on his relationship with Dale, he is impressed by how quickly Dale evolved out of the role of a professor and into the role of a mentor for him. He is also well aware of how his journey would have been different had that mentorship not been present:

My GPA would have gone down. If I had [all] professors that I just wanted to bash my head into a wall, I probably would have just looked at this just like a school, but because I didn't have that experience I look at it as a place where I can develop my leadership skills, my academic skills, and somewhere where I can look back in a couple of years and say, 'Even after getting my Bachelor's at State U. and going on into the career, I can still thank LLCC for a thousand different things.'

Robyn took that sentiment one step further in acknowledging that the impact extended beyond just her GPA and into her ability to stay enrolled at Lost Lakes altogether.

Professor Curd's involvement in Robyn's life helped convince Robyn that she could achieve in college at a high level. This relationship provided two benefits for Robyn.

First, it kept her engaged with the school as some others slipped through the cracks:

But my friends that didn't have that relationship and did not have an open door for communication, those kind of things, they didn't finish their degree here and they dropped out just because other life got in the way or academic issues or money issues and stuff like that. Some of these issues could have been avoided with the correct tools for success.

When I spoke to them and tried to encourage them to reenroll they would say, "The college doesn't care if I cannot afford books, or if I have a sick child and cannot make it to class. If I cannot get the help I need it is just the matter of fact information – you are in or you are out. I am out." Unfortunately days can be long and red tape rules effect our black and white grading rubrics on our colorful world.

I do believe fairness does not mean everyone gets the same; fairness means everyone gets what he or she needs. But I think they developed a relationship they would have been retained in the system.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the influence of her teacher inspired her to share that inspiration with someone else:

When you experience something like this it's like somebody lights a fire in you and you can't keep that to yourself. You just want to share it with other people because people helped you unlock the doors inside you and you just want to share that with other people...

Once you get that fire inside of you, you can't keep it to yourself. You want to help other people just because you remember how scary it was being in the dark.

When this cycle of people paying inspiration forward and lighting the fire in one another reaches its highest levels, society as a whole will reap the rewards.

Part 3: Summary

The emergence of meaningful student-faculty relationships was framed by the way the instructor's *commitment of time, connection to the college, creation of culture, challenging performance, and consistently caring* interfaced. The students were highly receptive to each of these instructor behaviors and they established a base from which to further develop the interpersonal connection.

The likelihood of the relationship developing successfully was increased when the goal of the student aligned with the intent of the instructor. Relationship bases of teacher as guide, expert, friend, and educator emerged from the student stories. Sharing a common idea about the nature of the relationship enhanced the impact of the relationship, frequently resulting in a drastic change in the student's college experience and plan for life after school.

Part 4: Essence

In reflecting on the students' stories of their experiences in building meaningful student-faculty relationships and the core structures that emerged from analysis of those stories, the broadest understanding of the phenomenon becomes clear. Students often arrive at a higher education institution with a clear set of expectations regarding their interactions with faculty members. Often, these expectations for the faculty members are that they will play the role of guide, expert, friend, or educator. Regardless of the expectations, the students will make a determination of whether there is a good fit with faculty members based on their earliest interactions. When these interactions are strained

and the students' expectations are not met, a wedge emerges that prevents both sides from coming together in a meaningful way. This wedge represents a long-term barrier to building meaningful relationships. As was evidenced through the stories students shared about behaviors that help and hurt the chances of relationships developing, the initial impressions that are formed about faculty members are seldom changed over time.

When these initial interactions show an alignment of goals, both parties are likely to show interest in continuing to foster the relationship. As the relationships continue, the students will be looking for the faculty members' *commitment of time, connection to the college, creation of culture, challenging performance, and consistently caring*. When these factors are present they increase the likelihood that the connections will progress to a deeper level. While not every theme was present in every relationship, those relationships that showed evidence of more than one theme did show a compounding effect in terms of impact.

Sustained Partnership

While the progression of every individual student-faculty relationship is marked by a unique set of interactions and experiences, the evolution often follows a general pattern. In many cases, the relationships start with a "test" phase where both sides are testing one another to explore strengths, weaknesses, and compatibility. When exploration in the initial phase is met with a mutual interest in deepening the relationship, each person increases his or her focus on the behaviors that enhance the relationship and help it blossom.

The behaviors most likely to add meaning to a student-faculty relationship are the core structures identified in this study: *commitment of time, connection to the college,*

creating culture, challenging performance, and consistently caring. The individuals involved have to be willing to commit the time necessary to make the relationship matter. The extended exposure is a key component in establishing a shared comfort level. The commitment of time characteristic emphasizes the idea of sustainability as a relationship has to withstand the test of time before any significant assignment of meaning can be placed on it.

As the relationship deepens, the partnership shifts towards connecting with the college community. The faculty members take responsibility for educating the students about the resources that are available to assist them on their journey and getting them integrated into the social environment at the school. Simultaneously, the faculty members' focus has to remain on building a learning culture that is both effective and satisfying for everyone involved. Aside from just learning a specific course discipline, the students are often looking to further solidify their personal values and leadership philosophies as they look to the faculty members as role models. As the faculty members make the effort to help the student get acclimated to the environments across the college and in the classroom, the students must be receptive to their guidance. As both individuals do their part, their investment in the relationship increases as does the impact of the partnership on their lives.

The next step is challenging performance. In the *sustained partnership* model, performance is consistently challenged as each partner pushes the other to reach new levels of knowledge and achievement. The students challenge the faculty members through thought-provoking dialogue and the faculty members challenge the students by focusing on the ways the students like to be motivated and offering the support necessary

for the students to reach greater levels of personal accomplishment in the classroom and with their personal process of identity development.

Finally, both the students and the faculty members must be able to demonstrate consistent care for one another as an individual and as a member of the partnership. In many ways, showing consistent care is about acknowledging the efforts of the other person and continuing to be invested in the long-term success of the relationship. The *sustained partnership* also has a symbiotic component. In the greatest sense of the terms, the members of the *sustained partnership* accept responsibility for taking care of one another. Members put effort into ensuring that their partners feel like valued members of the connection. They maintain one another through an acute awareness of the other's feelings and needs and what it requires to keep them functioning at his or her best. Similarly, showing care is about recognizing the impact that each partner has made on the other and sharing the credit for the growth and success that came as a result of that impact. On the other side of the experience, taking care of one another also sometimes requires offering forgiveness when an expectation is not met, as Colby did when Professor Brentley was unable to give feedback on her poem.

Partnerships which show evidence of all five structures have an increased likelihood of achieving the level of *sustained partnerships*. *Sustained partnerships* are about investing in change and driving towards success. They contain a unique synergistic element in that both partners involved are driving one another towards greater levels of achievement. *Sustained partnerships* require strengthening through both the celebrations and the difficult moments that are experienced over time. They also require the parties

involved to be willing to take the risk of showing their own vulnerability in the hopes of opening the door to a deeper bond.

Additionally, the essence of the *sustained partnership* involves a level of sophistication and maturation which extends beyond the expected behaviors between students and faculty members. When Addison arrived at Lost Lakes, she felt that she already “knew everything about everything.” Professor Hunger’s first task was to bring Addison to a point where she understood that there was plenty of additional information she could add to her knowledge base.

This example involving Addison and Professor Hunger provides good insight into the fact that sustaining happens on a continuum. The student population arrives at college with a diverse set of skills, abilities, and interests. They also have a set of expectations about how they will interact with faculty members. While these expectations are based on the idea that the faculty members will serve as guides, experts, friends, or educators, the expectations also extend to include the level of depth the students want these interactions to reach. The faculty members have to understand where the students are on their personal journeys as the first semester student who comes from a home-schooled environment has a very different set of needs than that same student would have three years later. The *sustained partnership* relies on the faculty members’ ability to effectively engage with students across the continuum.

Finally, the *sustained partnership* has the potential of changing the entire shared experience. When the students are fortunate enough to find and engage with faculty members who light a fire within them to master a subject matter, impart life lessons on them, and help crystallize their personal identity, it helps them recognize that they have

found a partner for their journey. Knowing that someone else is taking the journey with you makes the process seem more manageable and often adds joy to the experience. Understanding that the other member of your *sustained partnership* is committed to reaching the same goals you are makes those goals seem more easily attainable.

In many ways, being able to build a *sustained partnership* is responsible for changing an entire experience for the better. And sometimes the members of the *sustained partnership* remain unaware of the nature of the relationship and the impact of this partnership in the moment. Once they have been separated from the school and afforded the opportunity to reflect, the influence of the *sustained partnership* starts to become much more apparent.

Part 4: Summary

The essence of the title phenomenon for this study is a *sustained partnership*. As the core structures of *commits time, connects to college, creates culture, challenges performance, and consistently cares* came together they created an environment that lent itself to fostering high-impact connections. The student-faculty relationship required both parties to make an effort for the arrangement to be a success. When this mutual investment does develop, creating a *sustained partnership* that is labeled as meaningful to both the student and the faculty member is a natural next step.

Conclusion

Use of a phenomenological research design presented the independent stories of 14 students' perceptions of the development of meaningful student-faculty relationships that had been confirmed by the faculty member involved. This chapter introduced the study participants, reviewed the core structures of the phenomenon, presented a textual-

structural analysis of the structures, and ended with a presentation of the essence of the experience, *sustained partnership*.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

Chapter five presents a summary of this study's review of the development of meaningful student-faculty relationships. The phenomenon was analyzed through the voices of the students who had engaged in relationships with faculty members who were confirmed as meaningful by both parties. Conversations with the participants focused on providing a holistic exploration of their experiences to provide insight into the research questions that drove the study. These research questions are:

1. How do relationships between students and faculty members get established?
2. What are the specific benefits that students perceive they receive from the relationship?
3. How do students perceive their college journey would have changed if this relationship had not been developed and nurtured?

To address these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 current or former community college students who built meaningful relationships with one or more faculty members while they were enrolled at Lost Lakes Community College. After conducting a thorough review of the transcripts, results emerged that both confirmed some anticipated elements of the phenomenon and introduced some unexpected ideas.

In total, five key structures emerged from the data. These structures were *commits time, connects to college, creates culture, challenges performance, and consistently*

cares. The interplay of these five structures combined to establish the essence of this study, *sustained partnership*.

Chapter five is organized in four sections. Part one is a response to the study's research questions. Part two returns to the literature review and compares the outcomes from this study to the current literature on the topic. Part three offers a personal perspective on the outcomes of the study. This section offers both implementable recommendations for improved practice related to this topic and opportunities for future research. Part four closes the chapter with final reflections on the dissertation.

Part One: Response to Research Questions

Prior to being able to respond to the research questions that provided guidance for this study, the assumptions and biases that accompanied the research must be outlined. After these issues are identified, the findings are connected back to the research questions for the study.

Researcher Assumptions and Biases

In a phenomenological study, the researcher serves as the instrument. As a result, he or she must have a firm grasp on his or her personal biases related to the study prior to determining findings pertaining to the topic of interest. While some of my professional biases were detailed in chapter one, other biases became clear through the process of collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data. Among these additional biases were the ideas that faculty members should want to get engaged in a meaningful way with their students and that some of the actions described by the students as extraordinary on behalf of the instructors were behaviors that are fundamental components of a teacher's job description. Part of the foundation for these assumptions is the set of professional

experiences I have had to this point and the fact that I have been on both sides of meaningful student-faculty relationships and have witnessed first-hand the positive impact these connections can have on everyone involved.

With these biases acknowledged, the data analysis process led to the emergence of five core themes which provided the framework for the phenomenon. This framework allowed the answers to the research questions to be constructed. This construction of the results demonstrated that the relationships develop through an interweaving of all five themes. The goals of a particular student drive which theme has more priority at any given time. For the sake of discussion, however, the core structures have been paired with specific research questions individually. The section on how relationships get established further explores the themes of *commits time* and *creates culture*. The subsequent section on specific benefits the students receive addresses the themes of *challenges performance* and *consistently cares*. Third, the impact on college journey section reviews the *connects to college* theme. The response to the individual research questions is followed by a response to the findings as a whole.

Findings: How Relationships Get Established

While this entire study focused on the idea of how meaningful student-faculty relationships happen, this particular question intended to better understand how these interactions begin. While some students could identify a specific event or encounter that sparked a connection with the faculty members, the majority of the participants referenced the idea that the relationship developed over time as both parties gave signals that they were willing to invest additional time and energy into the other. From the students' perspective, this investment was seen through the faculty members'

commitment of time to the student and their ability to create a culture that was conducive to learning.

Commits time. The students spoke highly of the fact that they knew the faculty members were willing to spend their time getting engaged with the students on an individual basis. Multiple students recognized that time is one of the most precious resources that faculty members have available to them and were appreciative of the opportunity to have regular access to their teachers. Students identified Lost Lake's small size as a factor in the faculty members' ability to commit time to their students, in addition to their promotion of accessibility, ability to make students feel welcome when they visited with them, dedication of time necessary to serve as a mentor, and extension of the relationship beyond the initial semester.

Perks of a smaller classroom. The size of Lost Lakes was identified by these students as one reason that faculty members were accessible. In comparison to a school with a larger student body and larger average class size, it is easy to assume that instructors with responsibility to fewer students would find it easier to be accessible. In some ways, the size of the school becomes secondary to the efforts of the faculty members to get engaged with students. While there are key benefits a smaller institution provides, like having more of a small community feel on campus, each of the identified results of this study is something that these students perceived is implementable by faculty members teaching in classes of any size.

Professor Wiseman's assertion to Quinn that she seek out equal levels of engagement with her faculty members at State A & M confirmed his own belief that the behaviors he chooses to use in interacting with students are not an anomaly but the

expectation in the profession. The fact that many of these students also established similar relationships at four-year schools after leaving Lost Lakes also speaks to this point. While the students' increased confidence in their ability to foster a relationship was important, the faculty members at these larger institutions had to be equally willing to engage.

Promotion of accessibility. Faculty members were lauded for directly and indirectly promoting their accessibility to students. Interestingly, students were less convinced by faculty members making an “expected” offer to visit office hours while reviewing the syllabus than they were by subsequent invitations. Students were far more likely to make a decision about whether or not teachers were accessible based on the presence of accessibility cues. Whether or not the faculty members smiled, made it evident that they enjoy what they do, avoided presenting in a monotone style, and referred to students by name spoke to their approachability. These behaviors present differently than the faculty member who is perceived to be in the classroom “simply to get a paycheck.” In some ways, the students had built filters for themselves to determine whether or not the faculty members’ offer to come meet with them was sincere and it was the faculty members’ responsibility to show that they meant what they said regarding the invitation to connect.

The students made it clear that it was not a requirement that faculty members be extroverted and outgoing. Quieter faculty members can have the same level of success in establishing meaningful relationships with students as long as they are willing to take the risk of extending more personal invitations with students to connect.

Made student feel welcome during office hours. If the students determine that the invitation is sincere and visit an instructor's office, a pressure exists to make that first visit a warm and effective one. There is a natural intimidation factor that exists between faculty members and students. Often, the visit to office hours is an effort by students to reduce some of that intimidation and to bridge the gap. From the students' perspective, when they spent one-on-one time with an instructor they felt that "they're not the same people" that they are in the front of the class. The students' goal is to connect with the faculty members as people beyond the walls of the classroom. When this interaction is a negative experience for students, it is difficult to nurture the relationship. When this interaction is positive and rewarding, it pays dividends in terms of the students' investment in the course and the relationship with the faculty members.

The idea of establishing boundaries becomes an important part of the conversation regarding committing time to the relationship. As students referenced spending hours in the office of their instructors discussing the discipline, sharing stories, and eating meals together, a critical question arises regarding how the boundaries of the relationship are being set and by whom. There are both professional and ethical concerns associated with students becoming a "fixture" in faculty members' offices. Among other concerns, if students are spending a significant amount of time in their instructors' offices, there is a chance that their presence prevents other students from having comfortable access to those teachers. In Sam's story, the presence of the older students in the faculty member's office made her less comfortable in approaching her teacher. In these cases, the teachers need to ensure that while the students are given the opportunity

to bridge the traditional gap between students and teachers that gap does not disappear all together.

Outside of posted office hours, students often consider the time right before and after class as “unofficial” office hours for instructors. In much the same way they do with office visitors, the faculty members have to make the effort in these interactions to provide complete information to the student and to do so in a warm and welcoming manner. An additional factor that comes into play in this scenario is that other students in the class are watching these interactions and making decisions for themselves about whether they would be interested in having a similar interaction with these instructors to the one they witnessed.

Dedicated the time necessary to serve as a mentor. Many times, students are looking to connect with faculty members in an effort to find a mentor to stand by their side throughout the experience. In Molly’s case, she was looking to find a mentor early in the experience to confirm that she belonged in college. Fortunately, Molly found that mentor and transference also came into play as her positive experience in that one class drove her success in other classes as well.

Sometimes, the students confused the concept of mentorship with the idea of friendship. Omar claimed that he came to Lost Lakes looking for a friendship with someone with more life experience than he had. In defining that friendship, he referred to a “sociological construct of shared interests and intellect built over social time spent together.” He continued by saying that the friendships he was looking for with college faculty members were more meaningful based on the wisdom the faculty members could impart. Similarly, when Quinn referenced her relationship feeling like a “mother-

daughter” connection, she reflected on the many life lessons that the faculty members shared with her over time.

This idea of faculty members imparting life lessons on students leads more to a mentorship label than a friendship label. Often, these relationships were one-sided. While both individuals considered the relationship meaningful, it is likely that the students yielded greater returns in terms of wisdom and life lessons than the faculty members did. Students mentioned that faculty members helped them learn to better manage their stress, focus energy on issues they could effect, and become stronger interpersonally. They mentioned the idea of faculty members who taught them how to fish instead of just giving them fish and showed them how to be critical thinkers. The faculty members received benefits from being involved in the relationship, but their benefits were likely more altruistic in nature than the students’.

Extension beyond the initial semester. While both parties benefited from the relationship during the first semester of contact, the connections really started to blossom when the students returned for a second semester and found the faculty members equally willing to engage with them. When the students saw that even though the faculty members had 150 new students to work with, they were still willing to offer time to their former students, it sent an important message about the students’ value. In these meetings beyond that first semester, the faculty members got the opportunity to extend their mentorship efforts towards making the students lifelong learners. The students were receptive to this outreach as was evidenced by the fact that nearly all of them are still in touch with these teachers today.

Creates culture. While the administration of a college can work to establish a specific culture at the institution, the ownership of culture as a factor in relationship development belongs to the students and the faculty members. The faculty members were tasked with creating a culture that promoted relationship development. While there were minor distinctions between students' experiences when the initial connection happened inside or outside of the classroom setting, the students uniformly credited the faculty members with having an aura about them that made the students wanted to spend more time with them. This aura was created when the faculty members proved capable of building an ideal atmosphere for learning, treating students as valued members of the learning community, having an effective in-class approach, maintaining control of the classroom, and demonstrating authenticity.

Build ideal atmosphere for learning. The students frequently referenced behaviors the faculty members utilized to create an atmosphere that was warm and welcoming. The faculty members made a habit of arriving to class early and staying afterwards until their students had left. They used examples students could relate to and infused pop culture into their teaching. Some played music before class began. Some put comic strips as cover pages on their exams. One teacher was even acknowledged for singing "happy birthday" and bringing baked goods to class. As a unit, these faculty members were credited with building a culture that was relaxed and fun and made students look forward to going to class and establishing personal relationships with the instructors.

Treat students as valued members of the learning community. One component of the ideal environment was that the students felt valued as a member of the learning

community. In the community college environment, the classroom often boasts a wide demographic of learners. For many students, and students who have spent some time working prior to enrolling in college in particular, it is imperative that they feel acknowledged for the education and opinions their life experience has offered them. As an example, when a single mother is invited to share the story of her child's birth during a psychology lecture on giving birth, that mother is likely to feel more valued as a member of the community since she was offered the opportunity to share what she knew first-hand on her arrival to the class. The most important factor in the faculty members' ability to draw students into the lecture in this manner is their awareness of the life experiences of the students in the room.

Awareness of the students in the room starts by knowing and using student names. The students were well aware of which faculty members knew their names and which did not. There was a clear correlation between the faculty members who knew students' names and the faculty members credited with valuing their students. Knowing the names is only the first part of the process, however. Faculty members must use these names when interacting with the students. Whether inviting a question or comment or acknowledging something that has been said, when a faculty member uses students' names it serves as a resource to validate the contribution to the class. Some of the students mentioned a strategy where they "test the waters" by asking a question or offering a brief comment early in class to see how the teachers respond. When students feel validated for their initial offer, they are more likely to continue to be active participants in the class in the future.

Having an effective in-class approach. The faculty members highlighted in this study were each recognized for making students feel like valued members of the learning community and utilizing a student-centered teaching approach. Engaging the students was only part of their approach to teaching a discipline, however.

While the specifics of their teaching styles were as varied as the faculty members themselves, there was a universal acknowledgment that these faculty members were content experts in their respective disciplines. From the representatives of the hard sciences to the representatives of the liberal arts and social sciences, the faculty were noted for teaching not to pass a given test but to establish a mastery of the course material. The faculty members also earned buy-in for their approach. LeAnn believed Professor Humble when he told her that repetition would increase her long-term retention of a math skill set, and Addison was confident that Professor Hunger would be able to break any topic down into very simple components to insure that it was easy as possible to understand. As a unit, the faculty members were aware that their job was not just about presenting, but teaching.

The students admitted their tendency to make snap judgments as to whether or not faculty members would be effective at teaching them. As a result, the first impression the teachers make is significant. In the earliest stages of the very first class meeting, the students will develop critical opinions about the competence and capability of the instructors. While first impressions always matter, they are even more important for first semester students who are at the highest risk of feeling lonely and uncertain of their ability to succeed in the college environment.

The faculty members were also aware that different students react to the same instructor behaviors in different ways. As a result, they work to vary their approach to teaching and utilized a variety of alternate teaching styles to communicate information. Additionally, they worked to better understand the learning triggers and academic goals of each individual student in an effort to tailor the message as much as possible to their audience. Understanding where the students are in terms of their personal starting point on a subject matter and how to make the learning personal to them makes a dramatic impact on the students' interest in and ability to retain the information.

Maintaining control of the classroom. Another factor that helps students fully retain course material is whether the classroom experience is conducted in a way that makes learning easy. While the students did reference behaviors like writing on the board in a font large enough to be read from across the room, the majority of the feedback was about addressing disruptive behaviors between classmates. Students identified side conversations, texting during class, and efforts to derail the teacher with off-subject questions and comments as some of the more distracting in-class behaviors. The students asserted the idea that those behaviors were as annoying to other students in the class as they are to the teacher. The students expressed their appreciation for the faculty members who confronted and corrected these distracting behaviors, even to the point of removing repeat offenders from class.

Authenticity. The sense of positive culture established by faculty members is contingent upon their perceived authenticity. While the students used terms like *genuine* and *authentic* frequently, they struggled to further define what they meant by the terms. The strongest definition that was offered was a sincerity of motives. An important

distinction was made between faculty members caring about their subject and the faculty members wanting to make sure that the students learn that subject.

Students often relied on gut feelings to decide whether or not faculty members' motives seemed sincere. They watched for cues as to whether the faculty members wanted to be in the classroom that day and wanted to be teaching them. Interestingly, the students also acknowledged that the faculty members were human and thus also had flaws. When Colby forgave Dr. Brentley for not giving his standard amount of attention to the poem she submitted, it spoke to her understanding that he had many priorities calling for his time, and he could not give everything he wanted to each of them. Because he had been so helpful in the past, Colby was willing to accept this disappointment and not hold it against Dr. Brentley and their evolving relationship.

Findings: Specific Benefits the Students Receive

The second research question focused on the specific benefits that the students received as a result of successfully establishing a meaningful student-faculty relationship at Lost Lakes. Students made reference to specific benefits they yielded from the relationship like passing course grades and letters of recommendations, but these perks were overshadowed by the stories of how the students benefited from having their performance challenged by being pushed to achieve at a higher level and by having someone outside of their immediate social circle consistently show that they cared about the students' success.

Challenges performance. The students praised the faculty members for challenging them and pushing them to perform at a higher level than they thought possible. The students were excited to have been recognized for having potential and

being told that the faculty members were going to work to help the students realize that potential. Effectively challenging performance involved holding students accountable for doing their part, clearly detailing academic expectations, making the learning experience personal, using passion to establish a tone, encouraging students to rise to a higher level, and using effective feedback as a motivator.

Held students accountable for doing their part. In the same sense that the soil must be prepared before the seed can be planted, the students must arrive ready to do their part to learn and effectively “play the role of student.” The students have a responsibility to pay attention to what is happening around them. They must read and react to the accessibility cues of the instructors, take advantage of the instructors’ office hours, and do all of the assigned homework. When students demonstrate a willingness to do their part to achieve success, the faculty members will be more likely to respond to the students’ outreach in a positive manner.

One interesting development that emerged in the results of this study was the participants’ reliance on using negative characteristics to label their classmates when describing themselves as a student. In considering why meaningful relationships do not develop between more students and faculty members, many of these students proposed that they were more serious, more focused, and more capable than their peers. In addition, several students asserted the fact that since they were paying for school themselves they were more invested than those students whose parents were paying for college. While there is reservation to accept these opinions as fact, the students presented their views with a strong confidence.

When the students do their part to help learn, the instructors have a natural opportunity to step in and hold them accountable. Whether the choice is to ask students in the hallway if they have completed the homework for an upcoming class or followed up with a tutor as recommended or not accepting work late if the syllabus indicated that late work is not accepted, the faculty members made a habit of holding the students accountable for doing their part to make the experience a positive one.

Clearly detailed academic expectations. The faculty members' goal of holding the students accountable is contingent upon them having provided clear, detailed academic expectations to the students. In some cases, what the students referred to as being "challenged" by the faculty members was more closely aligned with simply learning the course material than it was to being pushed beyond it. When the faculty members took the time to explain in detail what they expected from students for each assignment, it gave the students a better opportunity to meet, and even surpass, those expectations. When Professor Brentley said, "This is what it will take to pass. This is what it will take to impress me. And this is what it will take to knock my socks off," Colby knew she had a clear choice about what level she could choose to perform.

The instructors should also be aware that there is an inherent risk in giving highly detailed instructions. When Ariel asked her students to give their very best effort on a particular assignment, Darryl rose to the challenge and delivered his highest quality work. What is less known is whether Ariel's request had an impact on how students approached assignments later in the semester in which the same appeal was not made.

Made the learning experience personal. As referenced earlier, the faculty members understood what it took to make the learning experience personal for their

students. They spent time asking why students were in a particular class and what they hoped to take away. Then, they made an effort to present the material in a way that aligned with those goals. From the personal stories and real-life examples in lectures to the assignments given in class, the faculty members put an effort into showing why learning a specific discipline would add value to their experiences as a professional and as a member of the community as a whole.

The task of making the experience personal to 30 students in a given class and 150 students in a particular semester seems overwhelming. It is an easy answer to work with the students that are most interested in a subject and further develop that passion in them. The less easy, but perhaps more rewarding, approach is to find the way to make the learning experience personal for the disengaged student. Perhaps the students who are texting during class and not completing assigned projects need faculty members to reach out to them even more than those students who are actively participating in the class experience. These outlying students may be at risk of hitting rock bottom like Darryl did. And when Dr. Brentley reached out to Alex's disengaged friend, his decision to offer extra attention helped Alex's friend get back on track.

Used passion to establish a tone. Students made decisions about teachers' motives based on the passion they showed for the subject matter. Students sought out teachers they believed held a passion for their discipline. One way students evaluated the presence of passion was the faculty members' willingness to share stories from their own life which complement a given lecture. As it relates to the earlier conversation on faculty members being content experts, the idea of being passionate raises an interesting question as to whether passion for a topic helps someone become a content expert or if the passion

develops as one becomes a content expert. The reality is that it is likely a blend of the two. Regardless of how the passion evolves, it becomes a valuable teaching tool as it serves as a contagion encouraging students to capture that passion for the topic, also.

Encouraged students to rise to a higher level. The students credited the faculty members with making an intentional effort to “elevate” them academically, emotionally, and personally. The expected concept of academic elevation speaks to these faculty members’ effectiveness in finding ways to challenge students individually to explore a topic in more depth and push through the self-inflicted limits that have been placed on their thinking.

The concepts of emotional and personal elevation were less expected but equally important in the eyes of the students. There was a thematic identification of these faculty members as individuals who had a skill set in “knowing what students are capable of” accomplishing. More importantly, they combined the skill set of knowing students’ capabilities with the expertise necessary to help students reach that level. The students recognized that the faculty members were making an extra effort and challenging them to think and behave in new and different ways and they were responding positively to the pushing. As a result, many of these teachers developed a reputation of being difficult. Yet, when the students had an opportunity to reenroll with these faculty members or choose someone else for subsequent classes, they frequently chose to reenroll with the teachers because they knew those individual would be as hard on them as possible and they also realized that decision would insure the students had the best possible learning experience.

Used effective feedback as a motivator. Much of the faculty members' ability to challenge students thinking and elevate them to higher level came from their use of thorough, personal, solid feedback. Students placed a tremendous amount of value on individualized feedback. In the case of some students, they would even prefer to get a "B" on an assignment with meaningful feedback that helps them better understand a topic or think about an idea on a deeper level than to receive an "A" with the phrase "good work" scribbled across the top. The critical feedback presents the student with an opportunity to improve.

For some students, wanting comprehensive feedback stems from a desire to be acknowledged. In particular for an assignment the students feel they put a good deal of time and effort into, the students are looking to know that faculty put the same amount of energy into evaluating their work that they put into preparing it.

Some students mentioned being singled out in front of the class for being exceptional performers. Singling students out in this way carries both a positive and a negative impact. The positive result is the boost to the students' self-esteem; the negative risk is ostracizing the students from their classmates as overachievers. Knowing the students' preferences about being acknowledged publicly or privately is an important factor for the faculty members to take into consideration before issuing public recognition. Regardless of whether the feedback is provided through written comments on a student paper, an announcement to the class as a whole, or during a one-on-one student-teacher conference, when the feedback is constructive and thorough it sends a message to the students that they and the faculty members are in a true partnership in their efforts to better understand the discipline.

Consistently cares. Many students were touched to find members of the college community that they felt genuinely cared about them and their success. While these students spoke of strong support circles at home and with their friends, they were more touched by the fact that someone who was not expected to care about them was making an effort to do so. The students identified faculty members' caring through their demonstration of personal investment in their students, willingness to show vulnerability, behaving in a fair and equitable manner to all students, and impacting the student at such a level that it actually changed the student.

Show personal investment in students. The students continually emphasized the point that the teachers' success was not just being passionate about the subject matter. It was about loving to teach, and loving the students. In one overly sensitive example, a student offered, "If you don't care about me, why should I care about the information you are trying to teach me?" In a more general sense, the students wanted to know that the faculty members were willing to invest in their success in the same manner that they were asking the students to invest in themselves.

In some cases, showing a personal investment was about showing empathy rather than sympathy when talking to students about their experience. Having once been students themselves, the teachers have the opportunity to think back to their own educational journey and embrace a better understanding of what the student is going through. In other cases, there is little difference between showing that you care and offering civil common courtesy. As an example, when faculty members respond with negativity and anger to students presenting a disability accommodations letter, the hope is that they are reacting in fear as opposed to a sincere lack of interest in helping students

learn. In still other cases, the personal investment by the faculty members in the students is an effort to get the students to care about themselves. Whether the students are disengaged, distracted, or lost, knowing that the faculty members have taken a personal interest in them may be the influence those students needed to regain their motivation.

Often, the personal investment in students is established through the faculty members reaching out of their personal comfort zone and into the students.’ Whether it is referencing a Public Enemy patch as a reason to start a conversation or introducing students to members of their family when seeing them in public, the faculty members who treats the students in a manner that shows they want them to succeed is deepening the relationship in the students’ eyes. When this personal investment and interest in the students extends beyond the faculty members’ class into other classes, family life, work, and relationships, it is a good indicator that the relationship will reach the level of *sustained partnership*.

Showed vulnerability. Before embracing the idea of engaging in a deeper relationship with faculty members, the students wanted to see that the faculty members demonstrate some level of personal vulnerability. The students asserted their need to connect with the heart before the head and the instructors’ personal vulnerability opened the door for this to happen. In describing the vulnerability they sought, the students shared that it was less about the faculty members sharing anything deeply personal about themselves and more about offering stories from their own experiences and the life lessons that were learned along the way that resonated with the students.

In this study, it became clear that the students began looking to these specific faculty members as nurturers, in many different ways. To be effective in the role of

nurturer, the faculty members had to be willing to be both transparent and vulnerable. While there is a risk to the faculty members' self-esteem or effectiveness if they take a chance on being vulnerable and are rejected, there is also an opportunity for the faculty member to gain even more power in the relationship based on Bloom's taxonomy as the students move beyond the basic skills of remembering and understanding into the higher functions of analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Acted in a fair and equitable manner to all students. When the participants were asked to speculate what the reasons were that more students did not end up developing meaningful relationships with one or more faculty members, they almost always placed the blame on their peer students for not taking advantage of the opportunities that were available. In describing the faculty members with whom they established a connection, they referenced the idea that they made an equal effort to reach out to all of their students. In making this effort, the faculty members were fully aware that it would make an impact with some students while it would not with others.

The students were accepting of the faculty members' effort to reach out to all of their students but also wanted their relationship with the faculty members to feel unique. This combination of ideas presents an interesting scenario to the faculty members as they are called upon to design their outreach so it is fair and available to all students yet still feels unique to each of them as individuals. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it brings to question the idea of why students require the relationship to feel unique. If the faculty members can convince the students that engaging in a relationship with them will yield mutually beneficial results, then perhaps the students' response should not be

predicated on whether or not the faculty members have offered that same opportunity to other students as well.

One other area in which the students discussed fair and equitable treatment was in the cases where students looked to their faculty members for additional leeway on an assignment if they misunderstood the directions or missed a submission deadline. Almost without fail, the instructors chose not to provide any leniency to their students. These stories deserve additional consideration in terms of how justice and mercy balance with the law when it comes to managing the learning experience. If nothing else, the faculty members have to develop a skill set of integrating empathy into their communication. The perception of faculty members who could send a message of “I understand” and “I’m sorry this circumstance arose” before saying they were not able to adjust the rules to help students were perceived in a more positive way than faculty members who offered a reply that was cold and rigid.

Changed the students. The most powerful benefit identified by the students was crediting the faculty members with “changing” them. While in reality some of the change the students experienced was the expected developmental growth that takes place during college, these faculty members undoubtedly played a role in guiding that development. By establishing a level of trust with the students and serving in the role of mentors, the faculty members put themselves in a key position to both challenge and support the students as they evolved into adults.

Some teachers work to build walls in front of students and others fight to break them down. The good teachers, although all too often outnumbered, make an effort to compensate for those who do not care. This extra effort is not lost on the students. Most

of the students referenced the fact that the change these teachers made in them was so significant that they were currently or planned to eventually find a way to pay that gift forward to someone else. The work of the good teachers identified in this study will benefit future generations as these students meet their goals.

Findings: Impact on College Journey

The third research question examined how the students' college journey would have changed without the presence of the faculty members. Students recognized that the faculty members had played a key role in helping them get integrated into the college community through a strengthened understanding of the resources that were available to them. More importantly, the faculty members helped them feel welcome and accepted in the community. By working to help the students connect to the college, the faculty members offered the students a sense of belongingness.

Connects to college. The faculty members' ability to get the students effectively connected to the college community at large was contingent upon both the students' ability to integrate into the community and the faculty members' awareness of the resources that were available to support students. The model worked best when the students knew themselves and were prepared for the college experience, the instructors utilized a broad scope to engage with students, the instructors endorsed the students' self concept and served as a cheerleader for them, and the instructors drove the students towards college resources.

Students knew themselves and were prepared for the college experience. The students referenced the fact that they arrived at Lost Lakes with the intention of getting the most from the experience. Although there were differences in opinion about how they

would accomplish that goal and what it would take to maximize the experience, each student advocated for his or her interest in making the experience as rewarding as possible. The students arrived with the maturity necessary to succeed, the self-awareness to be receptive to the cues in the environment, and the humility to accept the outreach that the teachers offered.

Instructor utilized a broad scope to engage. One area where many instructors who were unable to engage with students hurt themselves was being too narrow in their efforts to connect with students. While instructors can use their own discretion regarding sharing personal opinions about highly divisive topics, they must do so with an awareness of the associated risks of alienating students who do not share the same opinions. For example, if a teacher regularly speaks about his or her frustration with the Republican Party, the students in the classroom who hold Republican views are highly unlikely to look to that teacher as a potential positive connection.

Developing a scope of interests broad enough to connect with a majority of students is not an easy task. It does not require the faculty members to become sports enthusiasts, but it does require them to keep track of how the local teams are performing. It does not require the faculty members to become political gurus, but it does require them to be aware of the current hot button topics in the political spectrum. It does not require the faculty members to be aficionados of every television station and new reality show phenomenon, but it does require them to be aware of some of the current programs or the gossip surrounding the actors and actresses that star in them. There is a definition of intelligence as “the ability to engage in a two-minute conversation with anyone about any topic.” While it may not be feasible to develop the ability to discuss everything, the

more well-rounded the teachers are the better opportunity they will have to connect with a greater percentage of the students in their classes.

Instructor endorsed students' self concept and served as a cheerleader. Once the faculty members have engaged with the students and seen that they arrived prepared for the college experience, they have the opportunity to work to endorse the students' self concept and move into the role of cheerleaders for their success. Even the most confident students seek reassurance that the image they have created of themselves is an accurate and reasonable one. Finding this reassurance is especially important for first semester students since they are at the highest risk for feeling lonely at school. These students arrive not knowing what to expect or to do, and they often end up letting others complete tasks for them. The reassurance they receive regarding their self concept builds their confidence and helps steer them towards greater levels of independence.

As the students achieve their independence as members of the college community, the faculty members have the opportunity to continue to serve as cheerleaders and push the students to higher levels of success. In order for this to happen, the faculty members must have the interest, willingness, and ability to play this role. Often the cheerleading component is about the faculty members offering a listening ear to the students and providing suggestions where appropriate. As the faculty members builds a track record of being consistent and accurate with their advice, the relationship grows. As the relationship grows, the students develop an increased willingness to engage in activities that extend their comfort zone.

Instructors drove students towards college resources. The students' willingness to extend his or her comfort zone is based not on the faculty members' encouragement

alone but on the broader trust that has been built while their relationship developed. Many times this encouragement includes getting the student involved in extracurricular activities on campus. Students often choose not to get involved simply because they are unaware of what opportunities exist. The faculty members, armed with a thorough awareness of these opportunities, direct the students towards the clubs and activities that would be of the highest interest and best compatibility for the students. The faculty members push the students to integrate into the campus environment and get involved because they see the benefits the students will receive in terms of a more rounded experience and exposure to more students that share similar interests. Both of these benefits result in developmental gains for the students.

In other circumstances, the resource the faculty members direct the students towards is not an extracurricular activity but a support service like the financial aid office or the tutoring center. In Keith's situation, his faculty mentor was also an employee in the financial aid office. When Alex told Keith he was aware of some loopholes in the federal process and would do whatever it took to ensure that his situation was taken care of, Keith accepted the fact that the ends justified the means to get him enrolled. He paid little attention to whether the loopholes Alex identified were ethical or legal. Keith's trust in Alex allowed him to blindly agree with the decisions that were being made on his behalf, without regard to whether the loophole went against his personal values.

Summary of Findings

As a collection, the findings of this study present a fairly clear, potentially daunting list of expectations that faculty members must meet in order to maximize their opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with their students. The students' stories

made it clear that all teachers are compared to other teachers and it is this comparison that distinguishes one faculty member from another.

In many ways it is easy to be a poor teacher. Making decisions like disregarding office hours, focusing on simple content presentation rather than engaging teaching methods, treating student learning as irrelevant, and trying to be perceived as “cool” and “fun” as primary focuses are lazy shortcuts employed by some faculty members to boost their popularity with students. Still, perhaps there is a need to have some teachers who are less interested in changing students’ lives and more interested in generating a paycheck. Jordan asserted his opinion that if every faculty member were equally engaging and had mastered these skills it could become overwhelming for the students as they tried to maintain relationships with multiple faculty members at once. In his opinion, the less engaged faculty members provided a necessary balance.

It takes effort to be special. The faculty members who strive to *commit time*, *connect to the college*, *create culture*, *challenge performance*, and *consistently care* have to dedicate a tremendous amount of energy to achieving these goals every day. The reward associated with their effort is students who create meaningful relationships with them that are rooted in learning, respect, and trust.

In many of the students’ stories, they referenced the idea that it took them time to recognize the impact the developing relationship was having on them. The first group of students started to sense something significant was happening during their first semester with the faculty members. With the second group of students, it took a little more time. Several examples of this arose when the faculty members taught a subject in which the students were uninterested or felt incompetent. In these cases, the students needed a

window of time to start to like the people independent of the courses they were teaching. There were also multiple examples where the evolving relationship changed the students' opinions about a particular subject matter as well. Finally, a third group of students were not able to fully comprehend what the relationship had done for them until they had moved beyond Lost Lakes and were provided the opportunity to think back on their time at the school. In this group, several students spoke to the fact that being invited to participate in this study was a trigger to start to reflect on what happened while enrolled and to really dissect the value of the relationships that formed during that time period.

Part Two: Relevance to Literature

In reflecting on this study overall, several points rise to the surface and merit additional conversation. First, research in the field projected that the participant pool would be heavily female, since male students tend to report developing fewer relationships with faculty members and are often less satisfied with the relationships that do develop (Hagedorn, et. al., 2000). Of the 14 participants in this study, six were male. Of the total population nominated for participation in the study, twenty of the forty-seven students were male. These two facts may indicate that males' involvement in student-faculty relationships is changing, at least in the case of Lost Lakes Community College.

Second, Bain's (2004) assertion that it is not about personality but the attitudes and perceptions that the faculty members hold while interacting with students was confirmed in this study. The evidence of diversity that emerged within the field of faculty members who were confirmed by the students and referenced with ancillary information and anecdotal stories was impressive. The faculty members who were discussed represented various racial backgrounds, sexes, ages, and disciplines. They also

represented diversity in terms of being introverted or extroverted, quiet or melodramatic, and formal or informal. This broad spectrum of identified faculty members adds validity to Bain's assertion that any interested faculty members can develop the skills necessary to foster meaningful relationships with students.

Third, chapter two ended with a call for action related to the research regarding student-faculty relationships. Specifically, Cotton and Wilson (2006) charged:

Quantitative study results have shown that students who have more contact with faculty outside of the classroom exhibit higher levels of achievement. However, this relationship alone does not explain *why* contact was initiated, not *how* the contact enabled higher achievement (p. 491).

This study has provided a good foundation for developing a strengthened understanding of these two ideas. The results detailed several specific avenues through which faculty members can help promote meaningful contact with students as well as some specific examples addressing how the existence of these relationships provided higher levels of both immediate and long-term achievement for the students. Exploring the research as it relates back to each of the study's research questions provides a better sense of how that strengthened understanding was formed.

How Relationships Get Established

Current research asserts that the developing relationship must be based on a series of quality interactions (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). The participants in this study echoed that point consistently. When they felt they were engaging in a quality interaction with faculty members, the students felt a desire to return to the faculty members to spend additional time. While many of the initial interactions between the students and the faculty members occurred before, during, or after a regularly scheduled class meeting. Still, there is no substitute for informal student-faculty interactions and contact outside of

the classroom (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001). Often, these “quality” interactions required time commitment on the part of both parties. The students’ stories did not support the idea that office hours interactions lasted an average of 2.4 minutes and all other informal exchanges lasted an average of 1.4 minutes (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Rather, the students referenced spending extended amount of times with the faculty members, sometimes for as long as “an hour or two” after class or during office hours.

The students also discussed at length the out-of-context communications (OCC) behaviors demonstrated by their faculty members as important factors in their decision to pursue or avoid a deeper relationship. The OCC behaviors chosen by the faculty members “contain implicit messages that modify students’ emotional reactions: in turn, those reactions influence students’ approach-avoidance behaviors in learning situations” (Titsworth, Quinlan, & Mazer, 2010, p. 445). Examples of OCC behaviors include frequency of office visits, frequency of informal contact, length of office visits, topics of discussion, and student satisfaction with contact (Medved & Heisler, 2002). The results showed that students were highly critical of their interactions with faculty members, particularly early on, and used them to determine whether or not to pursue a deeper relationship with a particular faculty member. Those faculty members who demonstrated immediacy in their communication style had an advantage since that immediacy projects a willingness by the faculty members to “associate with students and identify with them as individuals” (Wheless, et. al., 2011, p. 332).

Students also agreed that faculty members who showed a sense of humor and a willingness to share personal stories about themselves seemed more approachable than those teachers who did not (Cotton & Wilson, 2006, p. 505). Humor, when used

effectively, can add a wide range of psychological, social, and cognitive benefits to the learning experience for the student (Lei, Cohen, & Russler, 2010, p. 328). The stories that students shared about faculty members' efforts to use jokes and anecdotes to lighten the mood and invite student interaction validated this existing research.

These concepts of immediacy in communication and use of humor start to detail the culture that these faculty members established to promote student learning. While the research has identified that both of these ideas are important components in fostering a rewarding classroom climate (Goodboy & Myers, 2009; Lei, Cohen, & Russler, 2010), there is also evidence that these two constructs are just a sampling of a much larger design. Three additional key ideas in the literature related to this area are that the faculty members recognize the prior knowledge and experience of learners (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), allow students to ask questions and challenge perspectives (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), value student comments and enthusiastically engage them in the learning process (Cole, 2007), and use the momentum of in-class dialogue to promote a healthier approach to creating positive interactions elsewhere (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). Each of these components of cultural development was confirmed in this study.

Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) showed that students were able to identify a given "relational turning point" when their relationship with a faculty member progressed to a deeper level. The results from this study are incongruent with those results since these students shared an inability to pinpoint a specific moment or interaction when the relationship changed. Instead, they spoke more to a series of events and interactions that provided a foundation through which the relationship could develop.

These students' stories more closely resembled prior studies which found, "In sum, what students expected, and preferred, from a professor was to be treated with respect, and for the professor to have the capability of transmitting information clearly, relegating to the background personal characteristics" (Sanchez, et. al., 2011, p. 494). Regardless of the individual characteristics of their students, if the faculty members were committed to promoting a "positive transformation" and making the classroom a "fair and friendly place in accordance with human needs and wants" (Burns, 2004, as cited in Nawaz, et. al., 2010, p. 44), the students sensed that and thrived within that design. In other words, the opportunity for the students to establish a meaningful relationship with the faculty members had been presented.

Benefits of the Development of Meaningful Relationships

The students identified an exhaustive list of benefits that were associated with their participation in a meaningful relationship with faculty members. One of the key benefits was a validation of their belongingness in the college community. This sense of belongingness as a major benefit of the relationship is a confirmation of the work of Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado (2007). Students equated the presence of a meaningful relationship with faculty members with a desire to spend time on campus and to connect with other people and resources at the college. This integration led to an increased comfort level and sense of belongingness for the students.

In addition to this enhanced sense of community at the institution, Cotton and Wilson (2006) claim that early connections with faculty members caused higher levels of satisfaction with the college experience and more motivation to increase the effort being applied to work in the classroom. Part of this increased motivation stems from the

development of “desirable difficulties” by faculty members intended to push students to be more thoughtful about their own learning styles and study habits (Glenn, 2009, p. 2-3). These benefits were confirmed in this study as the participants credited the care shown by the faculty members as a motivational factor in their success and overall positive feelings about their time at Lost Lakes. In addition to instilling an increased motivation to succeed in students, faculty members who show that they care are also perceived as more credible in their discipline than teachers who do not send the same message (Teven & Hanson, 2004, p. 50).

The students also reported benefits from the relationship that emerged inside of the classroom. Whether the student entered a particular course with a high or low interest level and a high or low level of anxiety, the presence of the particular faculty members as the teachers led to an increase in academic performance. Much of this was based on the expectations established by the instructors. Faculty members must fight the lure of “adjusting” their expectations to lower levels in order to get the highest number of students successfully through the course with the least amount of effort (Bundy, 2000, p. 46). Schilling and Schilling (1999) asserted the importance of setting high expectations:

Classic studies in the psychology literature have found that merely stating an expectation results in enhanced performance, that higher expectations result in higher performance, and that persons with high expectations perform at a higher level than those with low expectations, even though their measured abilities are equal (p. 5).

This idea of establishing expectations that are intended to push the students beyond their comfort zone was an effort that was applauded by the students. They recognized both the motivational factor of setting goals that were personal stretches for them and the sense of achievement associated with accomplishing those goals.

One way the faculty members helped the students reach their goals was by being good communicators. By utilizing strong OCC behaviors, the faculty members were able to “demonstrate a responsiveness to students’ needs; communicate caring; validate students’ worth, feelings, or actions; and help students manage and cope with stressful situations through the provision of information, assistance, or tangible resources” (Jones, 2008, p. 375). These outcomes represent major benefits to students and ultimately lead to an increase in students’ motivation.

While the students appreciated the stretch goals that the faculty members helped them achieve, goal-setting was not the most significant benefit the students identified. The most significant benefit the students attributed to their relationships with faculty members was the infusion of a mentor into their lives. Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner (2007) identified teachers as mentors and called upon them to share their dreams and tell their own story in addition to sharing stories from their personal histories that will spur the development of the students. In their stories, these students referenced the comfort level they had as the faculty members shared stories about why they loved teaching, their professional lives before they became teachers, and the dreams they held for the future. This concept of an effective mentorship serves as the base of the partnership component of the essence of this study.

The idea of a mentorship also helps the relationships have more of a two-way feel to them as the teachers try to “personalize the interaction with the students by either remembering the previous talks on various issues or the concerns of the individual students” in addition to “considering the person as an individual rather than a student working for some marks with no emotions or human bonds” (Nawaz, et. al., 2010, p. 45).

When the students were able to look to the faculty members as mentors, they were also more receptive to the feedback they were being offered. Receiving feedback is not an emotionally neutral process but one that can evoke strong, invested reactions for participants that may yield identity consequences (Trees, et. al., 2009; Varlander, 2008, as cited in Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011, p. 78). Still, done effectively, feedback can be a resource to reduce expected feelings of distance between student and teacher (Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011, p. 90). When the students feel that the faculty members have accepted the role of mentor in their lives, they are more willing to take feedback to heart and view what they are told as an opportunity to improve.

The mentorship design also opens the door for the faculty members to discuss what stressors and successes the students are experiencing outside of school. Since students' life outside of school is the leading influencer on student persistence and completion (Bettinger & Baker, 2011), faculty members who can gather information about what the students are experiencing in these areas have an advantage over those faculty members who cannot or will not make that effort. When the students receive this focused, individualized attention, it increases their personal willingness to become invested members of the partnership.

How Relationships Change the College Experience

Students quickly identify the institution's culture regarding the prevalence, depth, and boundaries of student-faculty relationships (Ei & Bowen, 2002, p. 188). When the environment is conducive to establishing meaningful relationships, the students will pursue faculty members following the lead students who have spent more time at the school. These established relationships make a significant impact on the students'

experience. Each of the students acknowledged that their relationships with the faculty members were responsible for changing their college experiences for the better.

In some cases, the relationship was responsible for keeping the student enrolled. While Strauss and Volkwein (2004) identified a higher likelihood of first-year persistence for students who have established a meaningful relationship with a faculty member, these results extend the persistence impact beyond just the first year. While there were several stories about how the faculty members were instrumental in keeping a first semester student invested in the process, there were also stories about the faculty members' service when personal and academic crises arose for the students in subsequent years at Lost Lakes, and sometimes even after they had enrolled at another institution.

One theory as to why students do not succeed in college is that they lack key information about how to be successful or fail to act on the information that they have (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). One example of this is that many community college students have little knowledge of course requirements and are unsure if their courses will meet program needs (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Part of this lack of information can be attributed to the excessive workloads of the professional advisors assigned to assist students. Fifty-five percent of schools have counselor to student ratios between 1 per 1500 and 1 per 3500 (Gallagher, 2010).

Addressing this issue and working to insure that personal advising is available could help resolve this issue. Personalized support and advising might bridge students' informational gaps and help students complete tasks they might not otherwise complete (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Bettinger, et. al., 2010). Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003) note that such structured advising is particularly advantageous to students with less social

know-how (first generation college students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds). They find that such students often do not know that they need help, don't take the initiative to seek it out, or don't know what questions to ask.

Researchers have explored many areas to better understand their impact on college student persistence. Among these studies have been examining the effect of enhanced counseling at community colleges in Ohio (Scrivener & Weiss, 2009), the ways to decrease students' feeling of separation from the college community (Bloom & Sommo, 2005), and even a randomized experiment where students were given money for attending college without seeing any impact on persistence (Goldrick-Rab, 2011).

Once the role of the faculty members comes into play, the connection to persistence becomes more clear. Perception of instructor enthusiasm has been demonstrated to have clear ties to students' intent to persist (Wheless, et. al., 2011). Witt and Kerssen-Griep (2011) identified that teachers who take giving feedback seriously are likely to earn the return of that effort from their students through an increased commitment to the course and the college experience as a whole.

Aside from helping keep them enrolled and engaged with the college community, these students also noted that these faculty members played critical roles in their development of an identity. The process of developing a solid, grounded identity is an incredibly personal one. Having experienced guidance to navigate the associated questioning, values-clarification, and envisioning the future tasks allows the students to feel supported on the journey. As Erikson asserts, personal crises can and must emerge during this process in order to crystallized the students' self-perception and sense of self-worth. Establishing an identity they accept is the first step towards the students'

identifying a broader purpose for themselves (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Without the influence of these faculty members, these students predicted that their identities may have unfolded very differently.

Sustained Partnership

Operating with the accepted premise that it is not institutions or policies but people who affect people (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and the understanding that choices made during adolescence will have implications that ripple throughout the remainder of the individual's life (Tatum, 1997), the idea that meaningful relationships must be experienced as a *sustained partnership* becomes a logical conclusion. The *sustained partnership* has a personal feel as the faculty members recognize the differences among the needs and desired of different individuals and build their efforts around those needs (Nawaz, et. al., 2010, p. 45).

The ability to recognize these differences requires the faculty members to embrace a student-centered focus in their teaching. Bundy (2000) explains why this focus is not always easy: "The sad truth is that a number of teachers care more about the security and the nature of their own jobs than they do about the welfare of the students they teach" (p. 47). Faculty members who are genuinely interested in establishing *sustained partnerships* with their students have to demonstrate the ability to put the - students' needs first.

This idea of putting the students' needs first and tailoring the relationship to the individual is something that is supported through the concept of *sustained partnership* in the medical field. According to the Institute of Medicine (1994), a *sustained partnership* "facilitates tailoring a specific intervention or specific advice to the needs and

circumstances of a particular person. A bond to someone you trust may be healing in and of itself. This relationship is essential when guiding students through the health system” (as cited in Leopold, Cooper, & Clancy, 1996, p. 1). This definition closely mirrors the emergent concepts in this study and provides a validation of the essence.

The more pressing concern connecting the essence of this study with the existing literature is the limited number of students who are taking advantage of the opportunity. In higher education, as high as 80% of students report not interacting with any faculty member outside of the classroom during a given school year (Hagedorn, et al, 2000). This may stem from a faulty assumption that students understand that relationships with faculty members are available to them. In the same vein that Bettinger and Baker (2011) offered, “oftentimes in higher education, we assume that students know how to behave. We assume that they know how to study, how to prioritize, and how to plan. However, given what we know about rates of college persistence, this is an assumption that should be called into question” (p. 18). Perhaps we must also question how they are getting information about how to interact with faculty members. Students are inundated with ideas about different types of relationships from an early age and learn how to navigate them. Many students are not exposed to student-faculty relationships until they arrive at college and rely exclusively on the behaviors of their peer students in determining how to approach those interactions.

Among the 20% of students who do make an effort to connect, there is a cohort of students who have an experience similar to Sam’s and do not show her commitment to trying to foster a connection. As a result of this thinning student base, there is an imperative need to find the appropriate avenues to allow these connections to evolve

naturally but on a far larger scale. Higher education leadership has to be strategic enough to build a culture that promotes getting students engaged with personnel and resources across campus (Cotton & Wilson, 2006, p. 515) and then smart enough to step out of the way and let those relationships emerge.

As the relationships continue to grow, the students and the faculty members become more invested in one another's success. When comparing this data to my personal experience, it becomes clear that there has to be a progression of the relationship over time as it continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of the student as they develop. The nervous incoming freshman's needs are not the same as the self-confident soon-to-be graduate. Relationships which are capable of adapting alongside these changing needs are more likely to end as a *sustained partnership* as both individuals' needs continue to be met.

In many ways, this study confirmed Hurtado's (2005) assertion that in much the same way educators claim they do not leave learning to chance, a concerted effort must be employed with the focus on developing interpersonal relationships. The five emergent themes have shown that sustained partnerships evolve when the faculty member *commits time, connects to the college, creates culture, challenges performance, and consistently cares*. With a focused effort, each of these ideas becomes implementable by any faculty member who elects to do so. And aside from their impact on the students, these educational leaders also often achieve an unexpected outcome as they develop their colleagues and followers to a higher level of success and achievement as well (Nawaz, et. al., 2010, p. 45).

Part Three: Recommendations and Opportunities for Future Research

As I analyzed the combination of the results from this study and the integration of those results into the existing literature on this topic several ideas emerged in terms of both recommendations for practitioner implementation and opportunities for future research in the area. In part three, both the recommendations for implementation and the opportunities for future research are outlined.

Recommendations for Implementation

This study explored the establishment and impact of student-faculty relationships on students over the course of their college journey. Five emergent themes represented the framework of the phenomenon. These themes were acknowledgement that the faculty member *commits time, connects to the college, creates culture, challenges performance,* and *consistently cares*. Collectively, these five themes led to the development of the essence of the study, relationships as *sustained partnerships*.

Students who are able to successfully establish meaningful relationships with faculty members are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with their overall college experience. As a result, my recommendations are designed to increase the prevalence of these relationships on campus. To achieve this objective, two recommendations were developed.

First, community colleges should require enrollment in student development courses during the student's first semester of enrollment. Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) found that enrollment in a student success course at Florida community colleges corresponded to an increase in persistence rates of eight percentage points. Many of the student participants in this study referenced their experience in a student

development class as a critical part of their college success. Some of the participants identified their relationship with their student development faculty members as the most significant faculty-based relationships that emerged while they were in college; other students, while not making the same claim, did credit their student development faculty members with being key faculty members in terms of showing them how to interact with other faculty members and the institution at large. As a result, formalizing the relationship between student success course teachers and academic advisors makes sense since these faculty members are credited with helping students make the adjustment to college and often serve in the capacity of advisors regardless (O’Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009).

Achieving enrollment in a student development course for every incoming student is not sufficient enough to make an impact alone, however. The course curriculum must be designed to complement this effort. Additionally, the course must be connected with a larger Freshmen Year Experience (FYE) program developed to help students successfully integrate into the college community. One step to help with this would be having the school consider developing a college-based evaluation tool to help students identify the instructors that would best align with their personal learning style (Prevatt, et. al., 2011). An intentional effort to pair students with faculty members that align with their learning styles will pay great dividends in terms of emerging meaningful relationships.

Second, community colleges should require faculty members to demonstrate proficient awareness of the campus resources available for students. In this case, “campus resources” includes a wide variety of services and opportunities ranging from academic advising and financial aid to student activities and security. While this does not mean

faculty members have to understand the process to apply for financial aid, it does mean the faculty members should know where the financial aid office is and be able to introduce a student to a financial aid staff member by name.

Additionally, every effort that can be made to get faculty members involved as advisors in student clubs and organizations will yield positive results. The student stories about building relationships during van rides to conferences, forensics tournaments, community service activities, and weekly meetings shed light on the extra value that students placed on these informal interactions. Putting measures in place that expose more faculty members to more students in these types of circumstances should lead to the development of more meaningful student-faculty relationships.

These two recommendations highlight just some of the opportunities that exist to increase the percentage of students who foster meaningful relationships with faculty members prior to leaving the community college. Ongoing assessment of institutional efforts must be used to better understand the impact of implemented changes and their effect based on the culture of a particular school. Faculty course evaluations can also be used as one assessment measure to determine if faculty members are effective in this area. Since research has shown that “student course ratings are better interpreted as measures of teaching quality rather than as rewards for good grades, low workload, and non-challenging content” (Remedios & Lieberman, 2008, p. 112), there is an opportunity to use student feedback to ensure these expectations are being met. More importantly, there is an opportunity to address the circumstances where the faculty member has not made the effort to engage with students in these ways. Additional research on the topic of

establishing and developing meaningful student-faculty relationships in general can also offer strengthened ideas about how to achieve this objective.

Opportunities for Future Research

The findings of this study showed a clear need for additional research on this topic. Opportunities seem to exist on both ends of the involvement spectrum. To start with, we need a more thorough understanding of both the disengaged students who develop no relationships while they are in college and the students who develop deep relationships with multiple faculty members.

In terms of the apparently disengaged students, the question of whether those students' disengagement appears in all of their classes or just particular ones merits exploration. Does that student have at least one teacher they really like? If not, why do they continue to attend? Does the possibility exist to get them engaged at a deeper level? Did something happen early in the students' experience that caused the disengagement? Were the student in the 12% of Lost Lakes students who take just one class per semester and did they have a bad experience with their first teacher? Did that negative experience send a message to the student that he or she has held on to ever since? Overall, are more students having a good experience or a bad experience when interacting with their instructors in college?

The other population which provides an opportunity to learn more information is the students that were nominated by more than one faculty member or referenced the existence of multiple meaningful relationships that had developed during their time at Lost Lakes. In studying this population, there would be value in getting a better understanding of whether there is something unique about these students as they compare

to the student who did not establish a meaningful relationship with anyone. Of particular interest would be this comparison if the group of students who did not establish these relationships also successfully completed their degrees. A second question would be whether these students' development of multiple relationships was the result of them beginning to expect similar behaviors from other instructors after establishing a meaningful relationship with one teacher. If so, is entering an interaction with those expectations in place a good thing or a bad thing? Also, since the time commitment is a factor in these relationships developing, does one student connecting with four instructors take the opportunity for a connection away from someone else?

Several other questions also emerged over the course of the data analysis that present an opportunity for future studies. The first is whether the abundance of home-schooled students that served as participants in this study is an anomaly to the study or the host site or has a broader influence on the findings. The second is whether there is a distinction between the students who referred to faculty members by their first names and those who utilized formal titles. A study which finds there is no distinction between the two groups would be a confirmation of Bain's (2004) work. Third, an exploration of gender issues could be done to determine the differences between male-male, male-female, female-male, and female-female student-faculty relationships. Finally, a study to see whether or not the faculty members created the changed experience for the students or were simply representatives of larger "networks" of support the students had built would provide valuable guidance in terms of how to best frame these relationships on college campuses in the future.

Part Four: Final Reflections

When I enrolled in the community college leadership program at CSU, I arrived fairly certain about my dissertation topic. Ever since a faculty mentor of mine encouraged me to abandon what I thought my goal was as an undergraduate student and pursue a master's degree in college student personnel instead, I have become fixated on improving my understanding of how these relationships come to life and earn so much power so quickly. I thought the entire phenomenon was about magic moments. I was so certain they existed I even pre-committed to using "creating magic moments" as a part of the study's title. As I conducted my research I came to understand that magic moments simply do not exist. There's no wand to be waved, no pixie dust to be sprinkled. Instead, I learned that building meaningful relationships is about faculty members implementing a skill set that has been refined over time and consistently returns to the idea of being student-centered. According to Bundy (2000), "everything in the professional life of a teacher at a community college is connected to teaching. *This is what community college teachers do*" (p. 46). I can endorse Bundy's assertion only in the broadest sense where teaching involved mentoring the student through all of the components of development that are alive during the college experience.

Early in the analysis process, I faced apprehension while wondering if I was going to find something new and different to add to the research base on this topic. As I continued, I came to realize that I was validating the impact of what people were already doing as well as adding a piece or two to the puzzle. The students repeatedly reminded me of the message, "Know your subject, love your subject; know your students, love your students." When the message gets summarized down to those four ideas, it feels

pretty simple. And while there is certainly a percentage of the faculty who would not be receptive to the idea of “loving your students like you love your family,” these findings offer them a framework of more defined ways to extend the offer to build a relationship.

One participant mentioned that “If I idolize someone I want to impress them” as the reason her performance in class improved as she grew a strengthened affinity for her teacher. As the teacher built a rapport with the student, she began reaching a higher level of potential. And her improved performance impressed the teacher. Their success with the class material then allows them to branch out into the student’s efforts to navigate Erikson’s model of crises and critical engagement as they work to solidify their identity. In a way, that idea is what makes the concept of a sustained partnership so effective. Both parties work together to impress one another, establish a vision for the future, and work together to bring the vision to life.

In summary, the faculty member’s role in a sustained partnership is about changing the student experience for the better. And that is something that I live to do.

EPILOGUE

In reflecting on this study as a whole, there was an intriguing issue that rose to the surface in terms of the students' success in achieving their self-identified goals. While some of the students directly linked their success in whole or in part to their teachers, others sent the same message in a more subtle way. Regardless of how the message was sent, the outcome was the same. The instructor found a way to "humanize" the environment. It no longer felt like "employed" faculty members standing in front of "rosters" of students but felt like a sales person making a one-on-one pitch to the student to embrace a particular discipline or his or her own vision for the future. Suddenly, the traditional divide between teacher and student was eliminated and the students felt like co-creators of a learning environment. Students felt valued in the college setting and sensed a respect from their teachers that made the experience personal.

That ability to humanize the environment led to a sense of achievement throughout these stories. When Addison credited Professor Hunger with being able to break down complex ideas into simple pieces and LeAnn referenced Evan Humble's message to her that if she came to his office hours they would find another way to help her understand, both women acknowledged that those efforts by the teacher were the reason they were able to learn the material, and subsequently pass the courses.

Successfully passing the course led to an increased confidence level that helped the students continue to reach their goals even after they left Lost Lakes. Quinn used the inspiration she got in Professor Wiseman's class to switch her degree from education to psychology. Currently, she is close to completing her master's degree and wants to get

into a profession where she can help other people the same way that the faculty at Lost Lakes helped her. Because of the fire that Dr. Brentley instilled in her, Kennedy has returned to Lost Lakes and works as an adjunct faculty member in the English department, serving alongside the faculty member who inspired her to pursue teaching in the first place. Colby is a librarian; Josh is almost finished with his master's degree in history; Addison is a dental hygienist; Robyn teaches high school and convinces every student that they belong in school and can learn.

These impressive levels of personal achievement are somewhat to be expected from these students. By using a nominated sample, the participant pool was destined to be filled with nominees that the faculty members consider strong achievers. As a result, the study fails to identify if a population exists that makes meaningful connections with a faculty member but does not complete the course or achieve the educational goals they set for themselves upon enrolling at the community college. My personal experience leads me to think this group of students does exist but would be far more difficult to access and learn what distinguishes them from their counterparts that were involved with this study.

In a sense, the pattern of goal achievement evidenced in these participants highlights the tremendous responsibility that faculty members undertake when they engage in meaningful relationships with students. Aside from the expectation to teach them a particular discipline, the faculty members played many more roles for the students. They served as coach, cheerleader, mentor, parent, disciplinarian, advisor, friend, and partner. And in many of the relationships, both the faculty members and the students had to play multiple roles over time to sustain the value of the relationship.

This concept of an evolving relationship is something I experienced first-hand. While the relationship I mention in Chapter 1 represented the deepest level of a meaningful student-faculty relationship I had experienced at the time I initially wrote that passage, that is no longer the case. The relationship that I've developed with my dissertation advisor has supplanted that relationship as the most meaningful student-faculty relationship I have been involved with from either end.

In the summer of 2009, I met Tim Davies as a facilitator of the capstone experience of our content course work for the graduate program. Tim had been acting as the director for the School of Education during our first two years in the program and had not been able to establish rapport with the students in our cohort that he had been able to build with the classes before us. Still his reputation preceded him. He was well-known nationally for his work with the graduates of the program and for having high standards and expectations for his students. In my mind those accolades, combined with his practitioner-based experiences as a former community college president, established him as an expert in the field. So, I approached him and asked him to serve as the advisor for my dissertation.

Tim asked me two questions. He wanted to know what topic I had in mind and whether I was doing a quantitative or a qualitative study. He said he only serves as advisors for qualitative studies because he prefers to be the methodologist for these studies as well. I told him my idea was about the dynamics of student-faculty relationships and that it was going to be a qualitative study. At the time, I had not yet decided if I was going to do a quantitative or a qualitative study, but I had decided I

wanted to work with Tim. So, there is a chance my study became qualitative during that conversation, but I will never tell for sure.

While the relationship between Tim and me started with Tim in the role of expert, the three years we spent on this journey advanced our connection into something so much more significant. Tim played the role of guide as he walked me through the process of understanding what a dissertation is and how to go through the process in a way that provided the greatest return on my investment. He served as a friend as he celebrated the birth of my sons and coached me through changes in my job. And today I look to him as an educator as he has provided me with an educational foundation that will serve me for the rest of my life, imparted life lessons on me that have shaped me a leader, and has inspired me to believe in my capabilities. Each time Tim said to me, “This is something you are going to need to know/do/be prepared for when you are a college president” it reminded me about the potential he saw in me and motivated me to keep going no matter how much self-doubt had crept in to my head.

Had Tim confined himself to the role of “teacher as expert” that served as the initial reason for our coming together, I am sure our experience would have been a positive one. But Tim’s awareness of what was unfolding within the framework of our relationship allowed it to progress into something that carried a much deeper value, at least to me.

I believe this same pattern is evident in many of our students’ stories in this study. The faculty members made a choice to engage with their students and continue to demonstrate those same ideas of *commits time*, *connects to college*, *creates culture*, *challenges performance*, and *consistently cares* as the students move beyond their

classrooms and their institutions and into the lives of their own. The total impact of these faculty members is something that may never be able to be fully captured. In a sense, one might argue that those drawn to the teaching profession would prefer it that way.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER REQUESTING ACCESS TO STUDY SITE

David J. Urso
123 Main Street
Anytown, USA 12345

April 6, 2011

Dr. Sample Name
Director of Institutional Effectiveness
Institutional Review Board
Lost Lakes Community College
124 First Street
Somewhere, USA 67890

Dear Dr. Name,

Since 2007, I have been pursuing my Ph.D. at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. My course work is complete and I am ready to begin my dissertation. My topic is student-faculty relationships, specifically the establishment of these relationships and their impact on the process of identity development for the student.

I am interested in using Lost Lakes Community College as my host site for the study. If I receive approval, LLCC will be acknowledged in the study using the following narrative:

Site and Participants

In order to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms have been utilized throughout this report. Lost Lakes Community College (LLCC) is a public two-year college that enrolls 13,500 students annually among three locations. LLCC is part of a larger, multi-college system that is centrally managed at the state level. The school is located in the southern part of the United States and serves a rural student population. The student population is comprised heavily of dual-enrollment, transfer-prep, and health professions students. LLCC was selected as the site for this study due to the school's desire to enhance student-faculty relationships and its geographic proximity to me.

LLCC mirrors many other national community colleges in terms of its demographic makeup. Enrollment is skewed towards females and Caucasians, as well as students who are in their twenties, attending classes part-time and on-campus, and balancing multiple out-of-school responsibilities. Nearly a third of the LLCC student population comes from dual-enrollment.

Participants will be identified and recruited using the following protocol for data collection:

Participant Selection

Selection of participants will be handled using convenience sampling, paired with criterion and nominated sampling methods. Convenience sampling will be utilized to keep the participants within the LLCC community. Criterion sampling will be used due to its purpose being adding quality assurance and identifying all cases that meet some criterion (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28).

Through a proctored distribution on the “LLCC Faculty” e-mail distribution list, LLCC faculty will be asked to identify students they have established a meaningful relationship with during their time at the college. Willing faculty members will be asked to submit a very brief overview of the relationship in addition to any contact information they have for that student by return e-mail to me. I will gather all of this information into one collection of study prospects. This collection will be developed and stored on my personal laptop separately from all other documents related to the study. If this method alone does not generate enough prospects to complete the study, I will follow-up with a letter in the mailboxes of all LLCC faculty members in an effort to increase the response rate.

Then, I will contact the prospects using the contact information provided by the faculty member (supplemented by any additional information that LLCC is able to provide) and inform them that they have been nominated by a college faculty member for participation in this study. I will use telephone, e-mail and USPS mail as my preferred order of contacting prospects. The responses from the contact will be tracked on the prospect collection spreadsheet introduced above.

Prospects who confirm their relationship will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview for the study as well as to participate in follow-up communication via phone, e-mail and in person as necessary. Those who agree to participate will be shifted from prospects to participants in the study. Creswell (1998) noted that phenomenological studies typically utilize between five and 25 participants. For my study, twelve to fifteen qualified students will be required as successful participants to help achieve data saturation. To achieve this, I am estimating that I will need approximately 35 nominations.

Data Collection

I will follow a very specific research protocol to complete the data collection component of the study. First, necessary permissions will be secured from the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University (CSU) and LLCC.

Following an established interview protocol, one-hour, tape-recorded interviews will be conducted individually with each participant. Interviews were selected as the primary data collection method based on my goal to engage in active interactions that explore both the whats and the hows of the student experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Creswell’s (1998) recommendations served as a guide to create the interview protocol.

Each interview will start with a review of the informed consent form, a request to audio tape the interview, and an assurance of confidentiality.

After obtaining the participant's acceptance of the terms of the study, a selection of opening questions intended to serve as grand-tour will be available to begin the conversation. The interview questions are designed to be intentionally broad in an effort to have the participant lead the interview and talk descriptively as much as possible. Additionally, the interview will be arranged to begin with questions pertaining to the present before reviewing the past and envisioning the future. Such a design makes it much easier for the participant to answer (Patton, 2001). After this initial interview, participants will receive a thank you note and, if necessary, one or more follow-up interviews will take place. Students will reserve the right to stop participation in the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Addressing the research questions in a qualitative study requires a different process than doing so for a quantitative study. Qualitative research requires higher levels of subjective thinking from the researcher. My proposed methodology presents the opportunity to demonstrate higher levels of subjective thinking. Although I utilize an objective approach to selecting participants through a nominated sample model, the data analysis and interpretation process is heavily subjective.

The goal of the interviews is to better understand the details of the students' relationships with the faculty members. Gathering information about how the relationship started, what specific behaviors strengthened the bond, the perceived impact the faculty member had on the students' identity development, and how the students speculate their journey would have been different without this individual's influence each present a message. Identifying patterns in the cases is the first step in the search for meaning (Stake, 1995).

Each participant interview will be transcribed and analyzed individually following Moustakas' modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (1994, p. 121). Significant ideas, phrases, and themes will be coded using initial designations. This process of phenomenological reduction, also called horizontalization, identifies the significance behind each participant statement (Moustakas, 1994). Then, axial codes will be developed by combining these initial codes. A codebook will be developed to track the initial and axial codes (appendix). Axial codes will subsequently be joined and clustered to identify interview themes. Finally, themes will be validated and transitioned from textural to structural descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

Once data from each of the participants are analyzed individually, overall interview themes will be explored and combined to identify emergent themes representing the collective structure and essence of the phenomenon. This process will be completed using the same strategy that directed the transition from axial codes to interview themes for

each individual participant. The three to five structural elements for each of the twelve to fifteen participants will be considered independent ideas and clusters will be developed.

I have elected to follow Boyatzis' (1998) theoretical clustering design instead of his empirical clustering approach. According to Boyatzis (1998), "conceptual or theoretical formation of the clusters might use (a) related characteristics, (b) identification of an underlying construct, or (c) a causal or developmental hierarchy" (p. 137). My preference is to build clusters around related characteristics. Utilizing a maximum variation approach to ensure that the results reflect how the phenomenon is experienced by the greatest number of people, these clusters will become the emergent themes of the phenomenon.

After these emergent themes are fully developed, the phenomenon will be built out and described. The final report will be made available to each of the study participants, the nominating faculty members, and the general public.

Protection of Student Participants

When the student recordings are transcribed, all information which can be connected back to the student, the faculty member and the college will be replaced with a pseudonym. Data indicating the age, sex, and race of the student or faculty member will remain unchanged to present the most authentic interpretation of the phenomenon as it relates to these characteristics. The original recordings will be saved on my personal computer until the dissertation is completed and then will be erased.

The interview design is built around the literature addressing student-faculty interactions. The grand-tour intentions of the interview, in addition to the fact that reflection on these meaningful relationships is expected to be a positive experience, lead me to believe there is no counseling risk for the students involved. To this point, I have not identified any ways in which the student participants could be negatively impacted by their involvement with the study.

If I can provide any additional information pertaining to the proposal, I would be happy to.

I look forward to hearing back from you and thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Urso', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David J. Urso

APPENDIX B

E-MAIL TO LLCC FACULTY MEMBERS REQUESTING NOMINATIONS

June 13, 2011

Dear Faculty Member,

I've built my career on the strong belief that there is little about the educational experience that is more important than the relationships students establish with others along the way. This belief is so strong that it stood out as the obvious topic to explore for my dissertation.

Specifically, I am studying the establishment of student-faculty relationships and their long-term impact. I chose to complete this study at LLCC with the hope that my results would provide a platform through which to increase the presence and impact of these relationships across the institution.

I have chosen to do a qualitative study using a nominated sample. I have made these decisions with the intention of making sure that the participants have been involved in relationships that are defined as meaningful by both the student and the faculty member. To do this, I need your help. **I am respectfully requesting that you nominate one or more students as participants in this study.** Participants must meet the following criteria:

- You and the student have developed a relationship that you define as meaningful
- Your relationship began when the student was between 18 and 24 years of age
- The relationship has lasted at least 2 years
- The student is not yet over 30 years of age

One of the validity measures for the study is having the student confirm the relationship without knowledge of the faculty member who nominated them. As a result, we ask that you do not discuss participation in this study with the student prior to nominating them.

Nominated students will be contacted by LLCC's institutional effectiveness and invited to participate in the study. Students who accept the invitation will be contacted with additional details related to the study and begin the participation process.

In advance, thank you so much for your time and effort to nominate participants for this important study.

With deepest respect,
David J. Urso

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO NOMINATED STUDENTS

DAVID J. URSO
123 MAIN STREET
ANYTOWN, USA 12345

June 27, 2011

Dear Student,

My name is David Urso and I am a graduate student at Colorado State University. I am writing because you were recently nominated to participate in an important study about student-faculty relationships in college. You were nominated to participate based on meeting the following criteria during your time as a student at Lost Lakes Community College:

- You and a faculty member developed a relationship that the faculty member defines as meaningful
- Your relationship began when you were between 18 and 24 years of age
- The relationship has lasted at least 2 years
- You are not yet over 30 years of age

At this point I would like to invite you to join the study. The first thing to consider before officially entering the study is whether you can identify a faculty member with whom you have established a relationship that you would define as meaningful. Second, decide if you believe you can talk in some detail about how that relationship was established and grew over time. If you can do each of these things, you will make a great participant in this study.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at URSO@EMAIL.EDU or 555.555.5555 and a meeting will be scheduled to officially start the study and to conduct an initial interview about your relationship with the faculty member. After that interview, I will be in touch with you over e-mail or during a follow-up interview to discuss the results that were generated from the first meeting.

In return for completion of the first interview you will be given a \$20 gift certificate to a local retailer.

In advance, thank you so much for your time and consideration as a participant in this study.

With deepest respect,
David J. Urso

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Student-Staff Interactions as Factors of Identity Development

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Timothy Gray Davies, Ph. D., School of Education,
davies@email.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: David Urso, School of Education, doctoral candidate,
daveurso@email.edu, 555.555.5555

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? As a student who has established and cultivated a meaningful relationship with a faculty member, you can provide valuable insight into how that process works. A faculty member nominated you to participate in this study because they believe you have played a meaningful role in each others' lives.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This research is being done by the principal and co-principal investigators identified above under the direction of a doctoral committee.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to strengthen our understanding of how students experience student-faculty relationships and identify the common themes that students assign to the establishment, development, and reciprocity within their context.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place at an on-campus or off-campus location selected by the participant. Participants will be expected to complete an initial sixty-minute interview and complete a follow-up meeting with the researcher to review the themes identified in that interview. A maximum time commitment of three hours per participant is anticipated.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? As a participant, you will be asked to talk openly about your relationship with a faculty member. Specifically, you will be asked to discuss the start of that relationship and how it got stronger over time. You will also be asked to be responsive to follow-up contact from the researchers.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no reasons you should not take part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

- There are no known risks associated with the procedures *of this study*.
- It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to students for serving as study participants. Your participation will help this institution better serve students that follow you.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? Participants who complete the first sixty-minute interview will receive a \$20 gift certificate to a local retailer.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, David Urso at 555-555-5555. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Sample Name, Human Research Administrator at 555-555-5555. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on June 13, 2011

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? Audio recordings will be made during your interviews. Upon transcription, your personally identifiable information will be replaced with substitute names and places. After your transcripts are analyzed, the researcher will follow-up with you to arrange a second meeting to review your results.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant Date

Signature of Research Staff

Obtain your parent's permission on page 3 ONLY if you are under 18 years of age.

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

As parent or guardian I authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by _____ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

APPENDIX E

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

Opening Questions

- a. Describe your experience in college.
- b. Tell me about the most important relationship in your life today.
- c. Did you develop a meaningful relationship with a member of the college faculty?
- d. How would you describe your relationship with Professor X?

***Share my experiences in establishing a meaningful relationship.*

Vulnerability begets vulnerability.

RQ 1: How do relationships between students and staff get established?

- e. Are there specific things that others can do to draw you closer to them or turn you off?
- f. Tell me about the worst teacher you ever had.
- g. Do you remember the first time you met Professor X?
- h. What happened that made you believe that your relationship with Professor X would be more than the traditional student-teacher relationship?
- i. Do you believe that most students have a similar meaningful relationship with a faculty member?
- j. Can the school make any specific interventions to make these types of connections happen more often?

RQ 2: What are the specific benefits that students perceive they receive from the relationship?

- k. What benefits do you believe you received as a result of having this relationship with Professor X?
- l. Did Professor X play a role in helping shape your identity as an adult?
- m. Do you believe you have given anything to Professor X in return?

RQ 3: How do students perceive their college journey would have changed if this relationship had not been developed and nurtured?

- n. How would your college journey have been different if you hadn't met Professor X?
- o. Could the relationship that developed between you and Professor X have developed in the same way between you and any other instructor?
- p. Do you believe your school should do anything different to encourage students to engage with faculty?

Summary Questions

- q. Do you think most college professors reach out to students in an effort to connect with them?
- r. What would you like to say about your relationship with Professor X that you haven't had the opportunity?