THE CHOICE TO ENROLL: DECISION-MAKING AMONG TECHNICAL COLLEGE APPLICANTS

by

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(Under the Direction of John Mativo)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine why accepted applicants to technical college make the decision to not attend. Because the college application process is time-consuming, its completion indicates commitment to the institution. The large number of potential students who make the decision not to enroll after being accepted represent a group that could be better served by technical colleges. Additionally, their attendance could assist colleges in meeting enrollment goals. Finding out why these students do not enroll could allow colleges to enact measures addressing their concerns, thereby providing better service and growing enrollment. By interviewing nine accepted students who did not enroll at SCTC, this study uncovered perceived barriers for this group. Of these nine interview participants, there were three from each program being examined for this study: Welding and Joining Technician, Automotive Technology, and Commercial Truck Driving. Interview questions were designed to determine motivations of students, personal goals of students and college instrumentality in obtaining these goals, the level of assistance provided by friends and family to this group while navigating the application process, and institutional issues that impact enrollment, such as campus proximity, cost, and access to student support services. Interview participants expressed few problems with college

location, cost, and student support services. Additionally, few received encouragement from friends, but almost all were influenced by family members during the application process. Three of the nine participants reported issues with the college's communication process. For these three, there was a feeling of confusion and an inability to get the information they deemed necessary for enrollment. Most reasons given for not enrolling following acceptance were personal, such as changes in employment, though college messaging was mentioned as a barrier to enrollment as well.

INDEX WORDS: Decision-making, College Applicants, Accepted Students, Technical College

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INTRODUCTION

Study Overview

Each semester, some students are accepted into technical college but decide to not enroll, impacting institutional fiscal planning and mission execution. Identifying reasons for technical college applicants' decision to not attend is an important step in boosting enrollment numbers and in providing greater access to workforce education within technical colleges' service delivery areas. This study attempted to determine the factors that impact students' decision to not enroll through a qualitative method using interview data from this group of accepted, not enrolled applicants.

Since the 2013 Fall Semester, Southern Crescent Technical College's (SCTC) total enrollment has fluctuated between 4600 and 5100 students. Students may leave during and at the end of each term, either as dropouts or graduates. Because of these leavers, SCTC relies on new and returning admits to maintain the minimum number of credit hours needed to cover annual operating costs. During both the 2016 Fall Semester and 2017 Spring Semester, SCTC's enrollment fell below 4700. SCTC's declining enrollment reflects a broader nationwide trend of decreasing numbers at community colleges, with a 2% overall drop reported between 2012 and 2013, and 3.4% from 2011 to 2012 (Education Advisory Board, 2014; Perez-Pena, 2013; "Community College Enrollment Continues to Decline," 2014). Among the twenty-two member institutions of the Technical College System of Georgia, which includes SCTC, enrollment decreased by 23% from 2010 to 2013 ("Technical College System of Georgia," 2014). As

student numbers decrease at SCTC, a corresponding reduction in faculty and staff levels is expected.

Each semester approximately 600 potential students complete every step of the application process and are admitted to SCTC but never enroll. Having these prospects enroll each semester would be a boon for SCTC's budget and for the acquisition of job skills for the citizens the college serves. Also, because budgetary decisions are tied to full time equivalent enrollments and local tuition payments, maintaining current enrollment levels is necessary if current staffing levels are to be maintained. Reductions in force and adjustments to faculty and staff job requirements due to low enrollment typically result in a larger number of part-time instructors, more faculty teaching courses outside of their content areas, limiting the number of programs offered, and a smaller number of classes each term (Mingle & Norris, 1981). Essentially, lower enrollment means a smaller number of faculty and staff, which in turn leads to fewer resources for the students who are left.

This study focused on choices made by a group of applicants to SCTC, specifically their decision to complete the admissions process, but not enroll in classes. Past studies of college applicant decision-making have been founded on psychological, sociological, and economic factors that influence the choice to enroll (Paulsen, 1990). According to Paulsen (1990), the differences between these three foundational concepts is, respectively, the idea that students choose based on institutional fit, on status attainment, and on investment return. While other studies of prospective student decision-making may have varying areas of focus, they approach the topic through one of these three lenses, as described by Paulsen (1990).

Studies of college choice have evolved over the past thirty-five years, and models have been refined in an effort to better explain and examine college applicant decision-making. Initial

studies focused on the correlation between student characteristics, such as academic ability, race, gender, parent education level, and aspirations, and on student institution choice (Bergerson, 2009). In the mid- to late 1980s, scholars began to look at not just institution choice, but at all steps of the college application process (Bergerson, 2009). This involved the identification of the steps involved in decision-making for prospective college students, which includes the choice to apply, to complete the application process, and to enroll (Bergerson, 2009).

The focus of this study was on a very specific stage in this process; that where accepted students' decide whether or not to enroll in classes. Institutional and individual variables were measured with the intent of determining their correlation with enrollment decision-making. This was accomplished by finding commonalities among the non-enrolled population and also by comparing them to the same variables found in the enrolled population.

This qualitative study examined, described, and interpreted data collected using interviews from a group of accepted, not enrolled applicants, for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs. Along with compiling demographic data on these applicants, and on all applicants who were accepted and never enrolled in these programs during the past three years (this information is available on applicant reports generated at SCTC), interviews were used to determine commonalities in motivation and barriers to enrollment for this group. In addition to interviews and the compilation of demographic data gleaned from SCTC's applicant reports, an observation of SCTC admissions procedures and processes was conducted to add details and context to the descriptions provided by interviewees.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine common perceptions and factors evident between SCTC applicants who are accepted, but decide not to enroll in college

Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs. The research questions are:

1. What are the relationships between enrollment at SCTC and goal attainment for prospective students who are accepted but do not enroll in college Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?
2. What reasons are given by accepted students for not enrolling in SCTC Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician and Automotive Technology programs?
3. What obstacles to enrollment are perceived by applicants who are accepted for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?

Development of Technical Training in the United States

In the post-industrial United States, as the workplace became more technically demanding, the need for skilled workers increased (Gray & Herr, 1998). During the twentieth century, legislators, communities, educators, private industry, and others addressed this need with the creation of secondary and post-secondary workforce education programs (Gordon, 2008). Over the past one hundred years, usually spurred by legislation and influenced by decisions made locally during implementation, workforce education programs have been used to enhance citizens' employability and to grow the nation's economy (Gray & Herr, 1998). These programs have adjusted to market needs, been modified, and may vary from place to place, but the dual aim and basic characteristics of workforce education has remained the same. This dual aim is to enable employability and develop the economy through targeted training programs.

Philosophers of education have long advocated different methods and pedagogical techniques for workforce training, even in the early 1900s. John Dewey, for instance, believed

vocational education should be one component of a comprehensive academic curriculum that, instead of being terminal, would lead to student growth and further engagement (Hyslop-Margison, 1999; Noddings, 1998). Dewey's contemporary, Charles Prosser, conversely felt that technical training should be occupationally-specific, offered separately from academic courses, and be a direct route to the workforce (Hyslop-Margison, 1999). These tensions provided a backdrop for workforce education policy decisions made throughout the 1900s and early 2000s. Due in no small part to these tensions, the basic terminology of workforce education has undergone regular revision, with terminal, vocational, semi-professional, technical, occupational, and career having all been used as descriptors. Despite these adjustments in nomenclature, the definition of workforce education has remained constant; the preparation of students for work (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013; Gordon, 2008).

The distinction between academic and vocational courses is straightforward, notwithstanding division regarding level of emphasis that each receives. Even in the early 1900s, conceptions of technical education were similar to modern viewpoints. Chamberlain (1909) noted that vocational training should include instruction in agriculture science, industrial arts, and mechanical arts. At the end of the twentieth century, Chamberlain's description would have still been accurate, although in need of revision. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), vocational courses in the 1990s included agriculture, business and office, health, home economics, technical education (i.e., protective services, computer services, engineering, etc.), and trade industry (i.e., construction, automotive services, drafting, personal services, etc.) ("Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1990s," n.d.). While more well-defined and comprehensive than turn-of-the-century ideas surrounding the makeup of workforce education, the basic substance remains from one decade to the next. Academic

education includes math and science, literature, social sciences, and art, while workforce education is job-specific, and terminal in nature ("Vocational Education in the United States: The Early 1900s," n.d.).

Growth and goals of technical training programs are typically the result of federal and state level legislation enacted by elected officials and designed to fill gaps in the workforce. Indeed, a landmark in the emergence of modern workforce education was the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which created a framework for secondary training programs supported at the federal level (Sarkees-Wircenski & Wircenski, 1999). In the decades that followed, various legislative actions refined workforce education, sometimes through addition and sometimes through subtraction, with training becoming more closely aligned to academic coursework (Hogg, 1999). After World War II, President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education suggested a greater emphasis should be placed on terminal, job-specific training (1947). An increased mid-century focus on workforce education was centered around the training of servicemen and women just returned from war, and was augmented by the Vocational Education Act of 1946 (amended in both 1956 and 1958) that provided $36 million for these programs (Hogg, 1999).

Until the 1960s, much of the legislation that influenced workforce education programs was directed at secondary training. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 vastly increased budget allocations for workforce education at both the secondary and post-secondary levels (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). The generous funding provided by the Vocational Education Act and its amendments in 1968, 1972, and 1976, gave rise to the implementation of a larger number of post-secondary workforce education programs nationwide, and also in the state of Georgia (Hogg, 1999).

Technical Colleges and Community Colleges

Since their inception in the late 1800s, different terminology has been used to describe two-year colleges. Initially, two-year colleges were referred to as junior colleges, and included university satellite campuses, publicly funded institutions with a two-year mission, college level courses offered on high school campuses, and local colleges formed by community groups (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). In the 1940s, some junior colleges were designated as community colleges, and the two terms came to be used interchangeably (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Terminology notwithstanding, and despite periodic shifts in emphases, the mission of junior and community colleges to provide access to post-secondary coursework and training has remained mostly unchanged throughout the twentieth century (Clowes & Levin, 1989).

In 1947, President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education, due to an influx in demand from soldiers returning from World War II, recommended an increase in the number of community colleges to address this need (1947). The President's Commission on Higher Education further suggested that these institutions should be locally controlled, low cost, geographically convenient, and provide easy access to higher education for students (1947). Further, the President's Commission on Higher Education advised these colleges to emphasize terminal programs that would lead directly to a job, alongside a slate of academic classes for transfer (1947). Due to governmental support, community colleges grew robustly throughout the twentieth century, and into the first decades of the twenty-first. In 1915-1916, there were 74 junior colleges in the United States. By 2010-2011, they numbered 1065, an increase of approximately 1400% (Cohen, Brawer, Kisker, 2013). The growth of institutions included enrollment gains as well. From the mid-1900s to the present, community colleges grew in size,

comprising 15% of all college enrollments in 1963, compared with 34% in 2010, reflecting the needs of the workforce for higher, college-level training options (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2013).

Although the vision and mission of community colleges may vary, certain trends have driven legislation, public perceptions, and areas of emphasis for these institutions creating some commonalities. Traditional junior colleges in the early 1900s typically offered only academic classes designed to transfer (Schuyler, 2003). In the 1960s, the community college in the United States was designed to provide transfer credits, career training, remediation, and community education programs (Clowes & Levin, 1989). During this time, the rate of enrollment growth for job-specific training programs in community colleges began outpacing that of transfer credit enrollment, and continued for twenty years (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). By the 1980s, riding this wave of popularity in an effort to maintain enrollment, many community colleges became more focused on delivering career training, and had lessened their emphasis on transfer credit options (Clowes & Levin, 1989). It is worth noting that, as the purpose of community colleges became more refined, their multi-tiered mission was similar to that of institutions in Georgia's Department of Adult and Technical Education, despite those schools' designation as institutes rather than colleges.

Despite similarities, two-year colleges are distinguishable from one another. Typically, distinctions between institutions are made with curriculum (Schuyler, 2003). At the most basic level, there are two types of two-year colleges providing post-secondary coursework and training options: comprehensive community colleges, offering academic transfer and career-specific programs, and technical institutes, offering vocational training with few (if any) transfer credit options (Schuyler, 2003). Within these two types of institutions, there are four essential areas of

focus, that receive different levels of attention contingent on college mission: academic transfer courses, technical courses, remedial courses, and adult education (Smart & Hamm, 1993). While job training was always part of the community college mission, it was invariably included with transfer coursework, too, as national trends and local decisions influenced which would receive more weight (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Technical institutes, on the other hand, were only offering job training, in the model of Georgia's area vocational-technical schools and, later on, Georgia's technical institutes.

Georgia's technical institutes, prior to name changes in 2000, fit neatly into the category of technical institutes described above. Due to the decision made to not create a community college system in Georgia when area technical-vocational schools were initially conceived, transfer credits were not offered at these institutions. However, after undergoing name changes in 2000, with the advent of associate degree options, and with the creation of the Technical College System of Georgia, technical colleges in Georgia have begun to more closely resemble comprehensive community colleges, with both job-specific and academic transfer credit programs, as defined by Schuyler (2003). In 2012, the Technical College System of Georgia and the University System of Georgia created a list of twenty-seven articulated courses, guaranteed to transfer to and from schools in either system, further solidifying the mission shift of Georgia's technical colleges to include not just job-specific programs, but also four-year degree preparation as well. The multi-tiered mission of Georgia's technical colleges certainly matches Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, and Vigdor's definition of community college as "education and training for adults" to include diplomas, associate degrees, and transfer credits (2013, p. 805). Walter and Farmer (1999) explain that community colleges should offer transfer credit programs, job-specific programs, remedial courses, continuing education programs, and student services. All of

these components are available in Georgia's technical colleges. Although not officially designated community colleges, mostly due to 1960s political maneuvering, Georgia's technical colleges have been modified and have adjusted to state needs to where a distinction between their offerings and that of a traditional community college are virtually indistinguishable.

Effectiveness of Technical Colleges

A discussion of the effectiveness of two-year colleges must first address scholarly assessment of the overall mission of these institutions. According to Smart and Hamm (1993), two-year colleges have been given two types of appellations; class-reproduction school and functionalist school. Critics of two-year colleges maintain that they serve to reinforce divisions by class, and would describe these institutions as class-reproduction schools, meaning they discourage students from pursuing education beyond the two-year level (Smart & Hamm, 1993). Conversely, those who describe two-year colleges as functionalist schools maintain that these institutions have allowed for entry into higher education for students who otherwise would not have attended college (Smart & Hamm, 1993). This backdrop of criticism is important to understand when considering metrics of success and failure for two-year community and technical colleges. If the initial function of two-year colleges is called into question, then any level of success they may attain could be seen as suspect.

Given that around 50% of all students in post-secondary school attend two-year colleges, measuring their success is important in maintaining the effectiveness of these institutions on one level and of American higher education on another (Schuyler, 2003). And the importance of benchmarking and assessment is not just for transfer programs; 58% of all associate degrees received in 2011 were for occupationally-specific programs, so technical training must be measured for success as well (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). With these numbers in mind,

regardless of perceptions and criticism of two-year college missions and outcomes, it is imperative that their success is ensured. Regular program assessment has long been deemed necessary for Georgia's technical institutes and colleges, and was a component of the policies outlined by the state Board of Education when it authorized the creation of area vocational-technical schools in the late 1950s (Bunnell, 2009).

According to Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013), there are eight components that make up two-year college effectiveness. These items are not institutionally unique, but could be applied at any two-year college. They are: retention from semester to semester, transfer rates, success of students following transfer, degree/program completion, goal attainment, job attainment, individual student benefits (i.e., economic), and benefits to the community at large (i.e., economic development) (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Measurement of these eight areas will determine the success or failure of two-year colleges, according to Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013). Another metric that is included, and was mentioned as a part of the mission of two-year colleges by the President's Commission on Higher Education (1947), is access. Two-year colleges typically serve a more diverse population than their four-year counterparts, and are also important in meeting local college enrollment needs, meaning they are to fill gaps in higher education options for underserved student populations (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2013; Wang, Ye, & Pilarzyk, 2014).

The success/failure framework for Georgia's technical colleges is similar to that described by Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013), alongside a stated goal of accessibility. Given the two-year degree completion and transfer mission of these technical colleges, their alignment with nationwide effectiveness metrics is not surprising. Indeed, the Technical College System of Georgia contains four strategic goals, each with separate components that determine how the

success of its institutions is judged. These four strategic goals, along with their component parts are listed below:

1. Goal 1—Students
    a. Access, defined as the goal for all residents to have access to post-secondary education.
    b. Affordability, maintained through cost controls and a variety of funding options.
    c. Student life, to include college activities that improve the social experience of participants.
    d. Completion, with Technical College System of Georgia institutes working to ensure students finish their chosen programs.
    e. Articulation, defined as transferability of coursework for students whose career path requires education beyond the two-year level.
2. Goal 2—Learning
    a. Instruction that enhances student learning and is not restricted to traditional, lecture-based classes.
    b. Adult education that prepares students to take and pass the General Educational Development (GED) test.
    c. Technology that is innovative and facilitates student learning.
    d. Facilities that are up-to-date.
3. Goal 3—Financial
    a. Development of private donations.
    b. Tuition that is affordable, but also reflects current market conditions.
    c. State support options be reviewed and requested.

4. Goal 4—Community, Jobs, Workforce, and Economic Development
    a. Local, meaning that educational program offerings should reflect local business and industry needs.
    b. State, meaning that the Technical College System of Georgia's brand and mission will attract business and industry to the state because of the well-trained workforce.
    c. National, meaning Technical College System of Georgia institutions will adhere to federal strategies for workforce development and training.
    d. International, meaning Technical College System of Georgia institutions will explore partnerships abroad in the name of developing the state's economy ("Technical College System of Georgia, Strategic Plan Implementation Tracking," 2016).

Significance of Study

Determining why applicants do not enroll after being accepted at SCTC would be important in understanding college student decision-making. Some past research of the college admissions process has looked at competitively positioning student applicants, not on personal and institutional barriers to enrollment at access institutions (McDonough, 1994). The issues for the focus of this study occur before enrollment, and keep applicants from attending SCTC, not just from attending their first-choice college. Further, many studies of student choice focus on pull factors impacting applicants' decisions regarding which college to not attend. Paulsen (1990), for instance, studies applicant decision-making and works to determine why students choose to attend one college over another rather than the choice to not enroll. Also, while there have been many studies that focus on the selection process of college applicants, few have

examined choices made by applicants to a technical college in Georgia. A better understanding of the issues affecting technical college applicants' decision-making processes would enable SCTC and other colleges to focus their efforts on common barriers and motivating factors impacting enrollment, and allow them to enhance the experiences of prospective students.

A limitation of college choice resource is that it is predominantly quantitative. Studies have focused on quantitative measurement of factors such as student disconnection, academic preparation, parental characteristics, public policy, return on investment, socioeconomic status, and financial aid amount (O'Keefe, 2013; Dresch, 1983; Bibbings, 2006; Fosyth & Furlong, 2003; & Herzog, 2005). This study of SCTC applicant decision-making was qualitative, determining prospective students' perceptions of the college admissions experience. This provided insight into what students believe are causes of non-attendance, rather than what is statistically noticeable.

Another focus of college student enrollment decision-making research is on those who are already in classes, but opt to drop out. These studies have examined cohort groups who are in college, similar to Bean and Metzner's (1985) research of non-traditional student attrition and Eaton and Bean's (1995) study of college freshman and sophomore retention issues. Other research has focused on factors related to academic success, but not on factors that impact initial student registration (Houston, Knox, & Rimmer, 2007). College registration choices have been researched extensively from a perspective of persistence, and scholars of student attrition have determined institutional and individual variables that lead to non-attendance, most notably Bean (1980), Tinto (1982), and Metzner (1989). This study focused on the issues at SCTC that occur before enrollment, however. This study was not concerned with decisions made after students have already registered for and attended classes.

Identifying the reasons for accepted student decision-making at SCTC is an important step in boosting college enrollment numbers and in providing greater access to workforce education within SCTC's service delivery area. This study attempted to determine the perceived obstacles to enrollment for this student group, and the reasons they provided for not enrolling in courses. Student motivation was examined, along with factors tied to applicant decision-making; specifically whether motivational techniques applied by student support staff members during the pre-enrollment phase of college admissions matched those preferred by prospective students. By determining where barriers exist for accepted but not enrolled applicants and how they may or may not align with SCTC processes, steps may be taken to facilitate registration for this group. This prospective student group is not completing an important step in the matriculation process, so establishing methods that would more positively influence college registration decisions could lead to a higher level of student motivation and enrollment numbers. Knowledge and a deeper understanding of common issues for this group may lead to further study and implementation of techniques that would remove barriers and provide better post-secondary access for students in SCTC's service delivery area.

A study of SCTC's accepted but not enrolled prospect group may help further research in explaining the disparity in college attendance between students from different socioeconomic statuses, which has been identified as an area of need (Klasik, 2012). Data obtained from this study could lead to important conclusions about demographic similarities, common issues, common motivations, and common barriers to student enrollment. Further, this study of SCTC applicants addressed the need for information regarding prospective student decision-making. A better understanding of the issues affecting these potential students could directly benefit SCTC. Data culled will allow SCTC to pinpoint issues impacting student enrollment. SCTC

administrators can focus efforts towards those issues and better serve their student population. Along with SCTC, other technical colleges in Georgia could benefit from the results of this study. Many of these institutions are faced with the same dwindling enrollments and applicant issues, so information addressing these problems would be beneficial. This study of SCTC accepted student decision-making could assist all post-secondary schools, but Georgia's technical colleges most directly because of their similar institutional profiles.

Relationship to the Topic

In 2006, I completed my second degree in history, receiving my diploma during Georgia College's Spring Semester commencement ceremony that year. At the time, I was certain any employer would be thrilled to have me, believing myself completely qualified to enter the workforce. I could write papers and analyze primary source materials with the best of them, and my test cramming technique was without parallel. But, based on my unsuccessful job search during the summer of 2006, it seemed hiring supervisors were looking for a completely different skill set than the one I had obtained in college. While I frantically looked for work that summer, I eventually realized three things about myself: two degrees had left me academically accomplished, personally edified, and utterly ill-equipped for most entry level positions.

As I navigated a post-graduate world, I found it remarkable that six years of college could leave me foundering so radically in my search for full-time work. It seemed illogical for all that learning to culminate with unemployment; and without employment, what had it all been for? But I began to notice many of my recently graduated, college-credentialed friends were also having difficulty finding a job, particularly those whose degrees were not directly tied to modern-day, real world, vocational-specific skills, so my issues were not unique to me.

Fortunately, even with a history degree, I found my way in the workforce pretty quickly. Following a few initial missteps, my job search proved fruitful within a few months when I became employed in higher education, first as an instructor, later as Admissions and Provost Office staff. My work as a college staff member, especially in my most current position as Director of Recruitment at Southern Crescent Technical College, has been focused on community outreach and engagement, essentially working to collaborate with secondary educators to offer programs and publicize college options to high school students all across Georgia.

Both of my parents' families have valued education over the years, evident in many of my forebears' attainment of college degrees. My paternal great-great-great grandfather and great-grandfather were both medical doctors, both grandmothers completed bachelor degrees (one at North Georgia College and the other at Shorter College), and my paternal great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother had bachelor degrees too (both from Shorter College). It was not necessarily a foregone conclusion that I would go on to school after high school, but I do not recall ever really questioning that I would ultimately attend and complete college. However, I have always been sympathetic to those who did not have those same expectations and roads to success laid out for them at a young age, possibly because I was raised by a single parent. Not only was I raised by just one parent (the other was around, but far away, so not overly involved), but also a parent with limited financial means. Because of these challenges, I have some understanding, even though my family is fairly well-educated, of the types of issues and difficulties that can arise in someone's personal life. But also, because of the opportunities education has afforded me, I also have an understanding of how access to post-secondary programs can be transformative for an individual, their family, and for their community.

As a college staff member, I bring this baggage and these perspectives to my job on a daily basis. I realize that many students have simply not been equipped with the tools they need to overcome barriers and be successful. The college provides an ample number of resources to assist students with seemingly any and every problem that could possibly arise. We have recruiters who distribute information, career advisors who assist with aptitude assessment and job placement, and dual enrollment coordinators who offer opportunities for students who want to take college classes while still in high school. And yet it seems these resources often go unused, or perhaps unnoticed, by secondary students. Those who, because of age and circumstance, could arguably benefit most from the types of guidance these college services provide. A disconnect exists between what college representatives expect prospective students to know and the type of information that actually trickles down to them. That is why I am very interested in working to address applicant inequities and accessibility issues.

I think that my belief in universal college access provides a viewpoint suited to rooting out bottlenecks at every point in the admissions process. I worry that this could lead to my dismissal of portions of the process that may be inequitable but necessary. I might be too zealous in my goal of removing barriers. Also, because I have worked so long in college admissions, my perceptions may be too detailed to be of any value to someone who is not a college admissions staffer. Nevertheless, I think that my past employment and personal history are a good combination that will enable me to dig deep into the college admissions process to find out what is causing roadblocks for so many prospective students.

Conclusion

Workforce education has a long history in the United States, and is tied to the need for skilled workers following the Industrial Revolution. Federal and state level legislation has

attempted to address this during the past one hundred years. By funding workforce training programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels, legislators have guaranteed American students will receive job-specific skill sets. In Georgia, post-secondary modern technical education began during the mid-twentieth century with the creation of area vocational-technical schools. During the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, these schools, once focused on occupational training, revised their missions, eventually offering workforce education programs, adult education programs, and transferable coursework. In recent times these colleges closely resemble the comprehensive community college, though not officially being described as such. These colleges are assessed regularly and judged on a variety of metrics: student success, learning outcomes, financial health, workforce development, community development, and employability of graduates. Southern Crescent Technical College is a technical college in Georgia, is one of twenty-two colleges within the publicly-funded Technical College System of Georgia, and is assessed regularly for effectiveness.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Technical Education in Georgia and Southern Crescent Technical College Background

In the late 1950s, following nationwide trends in workforce education, the Georgia State Board of Education created policies and procedures that would allow for the establishment of area schools focused on vocational-technical education (Bunnell, 2009). Based on these standards, area technical-vocational schools in Georgia were required to meet the labor needs of local employers, to ensure all students completed foundational academic coursework, to provide adequate facilities and instructors, and to undergo periodic program assessments (Bunnell, 2009). Georgia's Board of Education allowed local control of area technical-vocational school makeup, specifically whether these institutions would become specialized or an extension of current high school programs (Bunnell, 2009). Despite this latitude, no district chose to extend high school programs, mostly due to concerns surrounding quality (Bunnell, 2009).

As state and federal resources coalesced in support of workforce education, local area schools became more prevalent in Georgia. In the early 1960s, classes began at two area schools in the southern crescent region of Georgia, with one located in Spalding County and one located in Upson County. Classes at the Griffin-Spalding County Area Vocational School started in September 1963, shortly after the passage of the Vocational Education Act, and with Georgia's Board of Education area school framework as its basis ("History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.). Also in September 1963, students began attending the Upson County Area Vocational School, thirty miles south of Griffin, in the city of Thomaston ("History of Flint River Technical

College," n.d.). These two institutions, after undergoing a variety of name changes and mission adjustments, eventually merged in July 2010, thereby forming Southern Crescent Technical College, one of twenty-two units of the Technical College System of Georgia ("History of Southern Crescent," n.d.). The history of workforce education in Georgia, particularly during the past fifty years, would effectively describe the actions and efforts of these two institutions (now one) during that same time period.

As the area school movement swept across Georgia, a provision was required by Georgia's secondary system superintendents that would color and impact their development for decades. By majority vote, this group refused to participate in area schools if they were made a part of community college program offerings. Reasons for this decision were never clearly articulated at the time, but it has since been suggested that maintaining local control of area schools was important to superintendents. By keeping workforce education out of a community college system, a central authority would not be able to dictate area school policy. More to the point, a central authority would not be able to dictate and demand desegregation of these schools (Bunnell, 2009). Whatever the rationale, area schools, which later became Georgia's technical colleges, were never, and have not officially become, community colleges, despite efforts to replicate community college concepts.

In the 1970s, Georgia's Area Vocational-Technical Schools began to assume some of the traits that are still evident in today's technical colleges. Area schools were tasked with providing a variety of educational resources during this time, influencing their overall mission and creating an underpinning for Georgia's modern-day technical colleges. This mission shift included the implementation of economic development programs, the creation and teaching of adult basic

education classes, confirmation of area schools' non-academic curricula, and a transition from being focused on secondary options to full-fledged post-secondary institutes (Bunnell, 2009).

Following a period of gradual change for Georgia's area schools in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, federal action required swift state reaction in 1984. That year, Congress passed the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, which authorized the distribution of federal dollars to state governments in order to assist with the expansion, improvement, and modernization of workforce education (Sarkees-Wircenski & Wircenski, 1999). The following year, 1985, Georgia established the State Board of Postsecondary Vocational Education to distribute these funds (Bunnell, 2009; "History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.). Area schools, which had been locally controlled for over twenty years, could opt to join this board and receive Perkins funding or maintain the status quo and forfeit their part of the allocated money. Three years later, in 1988, Governor Joe Frank Harris converted the Board of Postsecondary Vocational Education to a department, creating the Department of Technical and Adult Education ("History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.). By 1988, the Griffin-Spalding County Area Vocational Technical School and Upson County Area Vocational Technical School had both joined the new Department, and underwent name changes to Griffin Technical Institute and Upson Technical Institute, respectively ("History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.; "History of Flint River Technical College," n.d.).

During the 1990s, institutions within Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education maintained a three-pronged mission; to provide adult literacy classes, technical education, and programs designed to promote local economic development (Bunnell, 2009). The infrastructure of both Griffin Technical Institute and Upson Technical Institute grew during this time, as both schools expanded their reach in their respective service delivery areas ("History of

Griffin Technical College," n.d.; "History of Flint River Technical College," n.d.). Eventually, to more accurately describe its region, Upson Technical Institute changed its name to Flint River Technical Institute ("History of Flint River Technical College," n.d.). Also during this time, policy-makers became more interested in the creation of Tech Prep Associate Degree programs. Through the 1990s, Georgia's technical institutes focused on providing workforce training, but not to the associate degree level. Due to lobbying by the American Association of Junior and Community Colleges, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 was amended in 1990 to include funding for Tech Prep Associate Degrees (Craig, 1999). Tech Prep Associate Degrees are designed to provide students with basic literacy, critical thinking, soft skills, and occupationally-specific training (Craig, 1999).

In 2000, Georgia's General Assembly and governor approved legislation authorizing a change in nomenclature for the state's technical institutes by officially designating them as colleges, and enabling them to offer associate degrees ("History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.; "History of Flint River Technical College," n.d.). Griffin Technical Institute and Flint River Technical Institute became Griffin Technical College and Flint River Technical College, respectively, with both offering associate degrees during the 2000-2001 academic year ("History of Griffin Technical College," n.d.; "History of Flint River Technical College," n.d.). This framework lasted for eight years, until 2008, when Governor Sonny Perdue changed the name of Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education to the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), which is the current governance model for the state's technical colleges in 2017 (Bunnell, 2009). The creation of the TCSG acknowledged that the coursework and programs offered in Georgia's post-secondary technical schools as college level.

In July 2010, Griffin Technical College and Flint River Technical College merged, creating Southern Crescent Technical College ("History of Southern Crescent," n.d.). No campuses or centers of either Griffin Technical College or Flint River Technical College were closed as a result of the merger. Instead, service delivery areas were combined, duplicated resources were cut through attrition, and the mission of the new college closely resembled that of its two predecessors. Southern Crescent Technical College currently serves nine Georgia counties, including Butts, Fayette, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Pike, Spalding, Taylor, and Upson, with workforce education programs at the certificate, diploma, and associate degree levels ("History of Southern Crescent," n.d.). Southern Crescent Technical College maintains two campuses in Thomaston and in Griffin, along with three satellite centers in Butts, Jasper, and Henry ("History of Southern Crescent," n.d.).

As one of twenty-two institutions within the TCSG, Southern Crescent Technical College policy is created by a state board (Bunnell, 2009). The TCSG's stated vision to "be acknowledged as a world leader in technical education, [to] provide access to student-centered, high-quality affordable post-secondary education and training" ("About the Technical College System of Georgia," n.d.) influences decisions made at the local level, particularly those that impact student success. In addition, the TCSG's mission of providing technical, academic, and adult education programs closely resembles that of Southern Crescent Technical College, which is to "deliver relevant technical education" that "promote[s] lifelong learning and impact[s] economic development" throughout the college's service delivery area ("About the Technical College System of Georgia," n.d.; "Mission Statement," n.d.).

Admissions

The primary mission of two-year colleges is to provide educational opportunities, including job-training, transfer credit options, continuing education programs, adult literacy classes, and remedial courses, to those who live within their area of service (Walter & Farmer, 1999). By providing educational opportunities, these institutions promote social mobility and economic development, according to advocates of two-year college mission (Roman, 2007). Additionally, it is argued that two-year colleges are an important part of the American republic, given its reliance on a well-informed citizenry (Ingram & Morrissey, 2009). In their role as a community resource and gateway to democratic engagement, two-year colleges are often an entry point to post-secondary training for students who otherwise might not have access to higher education (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013). To ensure this access, two-year colleges typically maintain a policy of open-door, non-competitive admissions (Walter & Farmer, 1999). This policy has a far-reaching impact on two-year college management, instruction, governance, and emerging challenges, influencing cost, student numbers, student outcomes, the number and types of programs offered, financial aid, and funding models. Due to their commitment to educational access, and to the needs of students in need of educational access, a description of two-year colleges in the United States is circular in nature; their mission determines their makeup, and their makeup determines their mission.

In 2014, 7.3 million students were enrolled in two-year colleges in the United States, representing approximately 45% of all American undergraduates ("American Association of Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet," 2016). Although levelling off in recent years, robust decades-long growth in America's two-year colleges ensures that their share of students will remain sizable. In fact, between 2000 and 2010, two-year college enrollment grew by 23%,

outpacing enrollment gains at four-year schools for the same time period, and evidence that demand remains strong for pre-baccalaureate level training (Hutto, 2017). This group of students, due in part to the open access policy of most two-year colleges, consists of populations that are usually underrepresented in higher education enrollment counts. These include, but are not limited to, low-income students (58% received some form of financial aid in 2014), academically-unprepared students (historically, 30% to 40% require some form of remedial coursework), and minority students (51% were non-white in 2014) (Torraco & Hamilton, 2016; Boatman & Long, 2016; "American Association of Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet," 2016; Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013). Open access admission policies that generate this type of diversity typically involve a simple application process, with minimal criteria required for acceptance. Often, once residency is established, students are admitted into two-year colleges after providing proof of high school graduation or equivalency, though this requirement is not universal, as some institutions are able to admit non-graduates (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013).

Georgia's two-year college system, the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), is comprised of twenty-two institutions that meet the workforce and educational needs of residents within their respective service delivery areas. Around 70% of TCSG enrollees are non-traditional students that are over 21 years of age, and that are taking classes on a part-time basis ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015). With a mission that emphasizes workforce development and job-specific training, TCSG institutions adhere to open access admissions policies that are common among two-year colleges nationwide. Specifically, for TCSG institutions, these policies allow for the acceptance of any high school or high school equivalent graduate, any home school graduate, any immigrant with proper documentation, and any Georgia resident 62 years of age or older ("Admission Requirements,"

n.d.). Applicants are required to submit SAT, ACT, or entrance test scores, but not to determine admissions status. These scores are only used to determine accepted students' need for remediation ("Admission Requirements," n.d.). Admissions policies at TCSG institutions represent some of the most open in the state and result in a student population that is often underrepresented at four-year colleges.

Financial Aid

Tuition and fees at public two-year colleges in the United States were approximately one-third those of their public four-year counterparts during the 2013-2014 academic year, with national averages for that year of $3430 and $9410, respectively ("American Association of Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet," 2016). Since two-year colleges represent a gateway to higher education for many low income students, affordability is usually an important component of their mission. Open access policies extend beyond admissions to include cost at many two-year colleges that want to remove all barriers for potential students and tuition and fees are seen as a primary barrier for low-income and minority students (Boatman & Long, 2016). Due to their relative affordability, two-year colleges are a popular choice for low-income students, first generation students, and students of color (Roman, 2007). Because of this, a large proportion of two-year college students receive some form of financial aid. This aid is often tied to need and comes in many forms, such as Pell grants, payment through the federal work study program, and federal supplemental educational opportunity grants ("American Association of Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet, 2016). Because two-year colleges enroll a high number of low-income students, they use the largest share of federal Pell grant funds among post-secondary education providers (Torraco & Hamilton, 2016).

Despite two-year colleges' comparative affordability and the large amount of aid received by their students, their current tuition/fee model may be unsustainable. In recent years, tuition and fee costs at two-year colleges has risen in order to maintain services in the face of governmental budget cuts (Boatman & Long, 2016). Further, aid options, such as Pell grants, have not kept up with rising college costs and inflation in recent years (Boatman & Long, 2016). The combination of these factors threatens the affordability of two-year colleges, and their capacity to serve as a gateway to higher education for low-income students.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, a student at a TCSG institution would pay $1335 in tuition each semester, based on a 15-credit hour courseload ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015). This cost for students, which does not include fees, books, supplies, transportation, etc., was offset by the receipt of various forms of aid. Federal aid is most often disbursed to TCSG students in the form of Pell grants, with almost 59% of enrollees statewide receiving money through this allocation in 2014 ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015). State aid in Georgia is distributed through the HOPE programs, which are lottery funded with specific eligibility criteria. The HOPE grant provides partial tuition payment for college students in certificate and diploma credentialing programs, which typically take less than one and a half years to complete and do not include transferable, degree-level coursework. To be eligible for the HOPE grant, students do not have to meet minimum high school grade point average requirements, but must exceed a 2.0 college grade point average at certain checkpoints as they progress through their chosen program of study ("HOPE Grant Program Regulations," 2016). The HOPE scholarship provides partial tuition payment for students who are pursuing associate or bachelor degree programs, and who have met or exceeded certain high school grade point average requirements

("HOPE Scholarship Program at Public Institutions," 2016). Almost 56% of TCSG students received aid from the HOPE programs during the 2014 academic year ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015). These sources of federal and state money make up a large portion of the financial aid received by TCSG students each year.

Funding Mechanisms

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2016), during the 2013-2014 academic year there were five sources of revenue for two-year colleges. These were tuition (29.5% of revenue), federal resources (14.1% of revenue), state resources (29.8% of revenue), local resources (18.1% of revenue) and other (8.4% of revenue, which could include donations, gifts, etc.) ("American Association of Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet," 2016). In the past, receipt of federal and state resources was primarily a function of enrollment numbers. The more students an institution served, the larger their share would be (Davidson, 2015). More recently, however, governmental allocations are related to enrollment along with institutional performance and student success (Davidson, 2015). Basically, at both the federal and state levels, outcomes have become more important. Rather than pay for a subpar product (i.e., poorly-trained, unemployable graduates), governing bodies that provide money to two-year colleges want to pay for education that works.

A primary source of federal funds for postsecondary technical education programs are provided in the form of grants, made possible by the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Act in 2006 (Carl D. Perkins Act, 2006). The Perkins Act disburses grant money to strengthen academic and technical skills of students, to foster cooperation between secondary and postsecondary educational institutions, to promote the use of technology in workforce training

programs, to improve career education options for American students, and to provide resources for special populations of students, such as minorities (Carl D. Perkins Act, 2006).

TCSG institutions receive money from three primary sources; the state government, the federal government, and locally-generated tuition and fees ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015). During the recession in the late 2000s, austerity cuts adjusted the proportion of TCSG revenue provided by each of these sources. From 2004 to 2014, 23% of college revenues that had been part of annual state and federal budget allotments were cut, with those shortfalls mostly being filled through tuition hikes ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015).

TCSG institutions in 2015 saw a slight uptick in state, federal, and other (mostly tuition, fees, and donations) funds from 2014 ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2016 College Directory," 2016). State funding for the TCSG increased from $313,866,703 to $331,854,904, federal funds increased from $81,464,278 to $81,691,954, and other funds increased from $348,420,274 to $357,903,732 ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2016 College Directory," 2016). TCSG institutions, like most other two-year colleges in the United States, have a mission that goes beyond traditional postsecondary education coursework; in fact, administrative costs, adult education, economic development, and technical education are the primary TCSG functions paid for by these budget allocations, receiving 1.1%, 4.9%, 2.5%, and 82% of those monies, respectively ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2016 College Directory," 2016). Money is received in a variety of ways, but ultimately is put back into the system budget to work towards mission attainment.

Student Outcomes

Expected student outcomes at two-year colleges are tied to these institutions' four essential areas of focus: academic transfer courses, technical courses, remedial courses, and adult education (Smart & Hamm, 1993). Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013) describe these outcomes as retention from semester to semester, transfer rates, success of students following transfer, degree/program completion, goal attainment, job attainment, individual student benefits, and benefits to the community at large. Measurement of these outcomes varies from state to state, system to system, and sometimes even school to school. But there are some general conclusions that can be drawn about two-year college expectations and what constitutes student success at these institutions.

The eight outcomes described above are closely related, so an examination of one rightly involves an examination of the whole. Retention is tied to transferring, which is tied to completion, which is tied to job attainment, which is tied to student/community benefits. Every step in the process feeds into the next, so success in one breeds success in the other and failure in one breeds failure in the other. Following is a brief overview of outcomes in two-year colleges, described with this interwoven viewpoint in mind.

In two-year colleges, measuring retention is difficult, due to the fact that 35% of their students transfer to another institution (Simone & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). With this in mind, it is clear that retention is impossible for a large portion of their student bodies (Simone & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Nevertheless, in 2010, 53% of students at two-year colleges were retained from their freshman to sophomore years (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Recently, completion has become an important way for assessing the ability of two-year colleges to retain students. During a student's first semester or

two of college, completion of remedial course requirements is an important determinant of institutional effectiveness. Because students may not progress to credit level coursework without completing remedial requirements, this metric is important for both two- and four-year colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges (2016) reports that 49% of students at public two-year colleges successfully finished remedial classes, compared with 59% of students at public four-year colleges. Completion rates for community college students has typically been low, with around 40% possessing a college credential within six years of initial enrollment, compared with 60% of students who started at a four-year institution (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, Mann, National Center for Education Statistics, International RTI, 2015).

TCSG institutions are committed to four strategic goals, each comprised of various sub-goals, whose measurement is used to determine college effectiveness ("Technical College System of Georgia, Strategic Plan Implementation Tracking," 2016). These goals include student success, the creation of effective learning environments, financial strength, and development of the state's economy and workforce ("Technical College System of Georgia, Strategic Plan Implementation Tracking," 2016). To track progress, among other metrics, the TCSG also looks at number of graduates (31,608 in 2015), job placement rate (at or above 84% most years), economic impact ($1.2 billion in direct and indirect spending related to TCSG institutions), and general education diploma (GED) graduates (averaging around 16,000 per year) ("Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2015 College Directory," 2015; "Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and 2016 College Directory," 2016). By measuring these categories, the TCSG maintains institutional accountability and assessment of progress, helping to ensure appropriate allocation of funds in annual reports. Strategic goals for TCSG institutions are described below:

1. Goal 1—Students
    f. Access, defined as the goal for all residents to have access to post-secondary education.
    g. Affordability, maintained through cost controls and a variety of funding options.
    h. Student life, to include college activities that improve the social experience of participants.
    i. Completion, with Technical College System of Georgia institutes working to ensure students finish their chosen programs.
    j. Articulation, defined as transferability of coursework for students whose career path requires education beyond the two-year level.
2. Goal 2—Learning
    e. Instruction that enhances student learning and is not restricted to traditional, lecture-based classes.
    f. Adult education that prepares students to take and pass the General Educational Development (GED) test.
    g. Technology that is innovative and facilitates student learning.
    h. Facilities that are up-to-date.
3. Goal 3—Financial
    d. Development of private donations.
    e. Tuition that is affordable, but also reflects current market conditions.
    f. State support options be reviewed and requested.
4. Goal 4—Community, Jobs, Workforce, and Economic Development

e. Local, meaning that educational program offerings should reflect local business and industry needs.
f. State, meaning that the Technical College System of Georgia's brand and mission will attract business and industry to the state because of the well-trained workforce.
g. National, meaning Technical College System of Georgia institutions will adhere to federal strategies for workforce development and training.
h. International, meaning Technical College System of Georgia institutions will explore partnerships abroad in the name of developing the state's economy ("Technical College System of Georgia, Strategic Plan Implementation Tracking," 2016).

Program Options

Since the 1960s, the mission of two-year colleges in the United States has been four-pronged: to provide transfer credits, career training, remediation, and community/adult education programs (Clowes & Levin, 1989). While some systems and colleges choose to emphasize different aspects of this mission, an examination of programs at two-year institutions will typically show some level of focus on each of these four parts (Schuyler, 2003). A multi-tiered focus was even recommended by President Truman's Commission of Higher Education (1947) which suggested terminal, job-specific programs, but also transfer options as well. This varied emphasis is due to local decisions, adjustments made to government funding, and student demand (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

Academic transfer course options are easily definable, and the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) includes the following in its comprehensive description: math and

science; letters (English, literature, etc.), humanities (French, Spanish, other languages, philosophy, religion, etc.), and communications (journalism, etc.); social sciences (anthropology, history, sociology, political science, etc.); art and design (dance, fine arts, music, etc.); and education. Typically, students who take classes within these subject areas at two-year colleges are either completing the core course requirements needed for an associate degree, or are planning to transfer these credits to a four-year degree program.

In addition to academic transfer courses, technical, career-specific class options are also available at most two-year colleges. Students who complete a sequence of courses in these technical areas usually are awarded a credential, defined by the Association for Career and Technical Education (n.d.) as a certificate, certification, license, or degree. Certificates and degrees are awarded by the two-year institution and are based on the completion of a defined sequence of classes, certifications are awarded by industry and are based on an assessment of skills learned in the college classroom, and licenses are awarded by the government and are based on the meeting of certain requirements ("What is a Credential?," n.d.). Technical classes in two-year colleges that lead to these types of credentials may be in a wide variety of occupational areas, and are grouped by the Association for Career And Technical Education (n.d.) as clusters. These clusters are marketing sales and service; information technology; hospitality and tourism; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; law, public safety, and security; agriculture, food, and natural resources; human services; transportation, distribution, and logistics; finance; architecture and construction; education and training; arts, audio/video technology, and communications; health science; government and public administration; manufacturing; and business, management, and administration "What is Career

and Technical Education?," n.d.). Two-year colleges may not offer classes within each of these clusters, but this is a guideline for the types of courses they may provide.

Faculty and Staff

The faculty profile at two-year colleges includes a large proportion of part-time adjunct instructors, with almost 70% not meeting full-time status requirements in recent years (Hutto, 2017). The growing trend of using adjunct faculty at two-year colleges is due to a combination of enrollment growth and funding cuts; there is a need for more teachers, but less money provided to institutions to meet that need (Hutto, 2017). Frequently, the large number of part-time faculty creates challenges for student success and institutional effectiveness. Adjuncts sometimes are less effective instructors than their full-time counterparts, and also are not available to help students outside of the classroom (Hutto, 2017). Additionally, adjuncts are often on one semester contracts, which leads to a lack of instructional continuity and long-term student support, such as advisement and letters of recommendation (Hutto, 2017). For comparison, the percentage of part-time instructors at four-year colleges is approximately 40% ("Data Points American Association of Community Colleges, 2016).

Expectations of faculty at two-year colleges may differ from those of their four-year colleagues. Where four-year college faculty members are often research focused, two-year college faculty members tend to be teaching focused (Reed, 2016). Because two-year colleges usually provide survey-type courses, their faculty are typically generalists, rather than specialists, and are also oriented toward the two-year college mission, to prepare students for further education or for the workforce (Reed, 2016).

Diversity among two-year college faculty does not directly reflect the diversity of those institutions' student bodies, which is around 50% nationwide ("American Association of

Community Colleges 2016 Fact Sheet," 2016). In fact, only 24% of all faculty at two-year colleges are minorities, as compared with 27% at four-year colleges ("Data Points American Association of Community Colleges," 2016). This relative lack of diversity, and lack of alignment with these colleges' student profiles, could lead to a disconnect between student and faculty.

Support staff at two-year colleges is seen as a valuable way to positively impact student achievement and retention (Cooper, 2010). Identifying and serving at-risk student populations are important in cultivating a positive school culture and in retention. Applicants to SCTC are required to submit a number of documents in order to be accepted. These include an application for admissions, official transcripts, proof of residency documentation, and standardized test scores. Although SCTC is an access institution with no minimum grade point average (gpa) or test scores needed for admissions, completing the process requires a large amount of legwork for each applicant. Because of at-risk underserved student groups and an admissions process that can be difficult to navigate, most colleges maintain staffing levels in admission support, financial aid support, career advisement, and course advisement (Cooper, 2010). However, varying levels of emphasis on these support services lead to an uneven effect between institutions. It has been shown, though, that higher quality support can be much more impactful than its lower quality counterpart. For instance, the influence of academic advisement impacts runs on a sliding scale, where results more positively impact student achievement as quality rises (Metzner, 1989). Also, some studies have shown that a Success Coach and College Survival Skills course help with retention from one semester to the next (Allen & Lester, 2012). Student success and achievement has been shown to be directly related to interventions implemented by college administrators, but is often low quality or a victim of cuts due to budgetary limitations.

Faculty credentialing requirements at two-year colleges will vary from system to system, and from course to course. Because all units of the Technical College System of Georgia receive their accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and because that body's credentialing requirements will be similar to those of other regional accrediting agencies nationwide, what follows is a brief description of what is needed to teach at a SACSCOC institution:

1. To be eligible as an instructor for academic, general education courses, whether designed for transfer or to meet institutional associate/certificate level core requirements, faculty must hold a master's degree or higher and have successfully completed eighteen semester hours in the field of study they plan to teach.
2. To be eligible as an instructor in associate degree courses not designed for transfer, faculty must hold a bachelor's degree or associate's degree in the field of study they plan to teach, and also must meet competencies in the field of study (SACSCOC Standard, n.d.).

College Choice Theory Background

Scholars have attempted to determine decision-making causes for decades. One of the earliest studies, conducted by Panos and Astin (1968), used longitudinal data to examine college student decision-making. In their research, Panos and Astin (1968) examine variables that contribute to college students' decision to drop out, examining both personal and environmental factors. Panos and Astin (1968) narrowed the list of factors to four primary indicators that were accurate in determining student decision-making. Those factors are low grades in high school, no plans for graduate or professional studies, low socioeconomic background, and a declared major of engineering or secretarial work (Panos & Astin, 1968). This research is foundational

and laid the groundwork for other studies of student decision-making. The impact of high school academic preparation, college plans, and socioeconomic status are still widely studied factors, and are important issues in college student decision-making.

There are several common categories of independent variables that are used by researchers of college student decision-making. Houston, Knox, and Rimmer (2007), described six important types of factors that were important for student decision-making for non-traditional college students at a university in Scotland. Those factors are academic preparation, grades, major choice, course load, gender, and age (Houston, Knox, & Rimmer, 2007). Similar to these scholars, Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) found six categories that proved reliable in predicting student attrition by surveying 2022 college students at four different institutions. These categories are previous academic success, commitment to the college, usefulness of college administrative services, financial issues, social support, and personal challenges (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009). These six categories are closely related to those of Houston, Knox, and Rimmer (2007), and also tie in with Bean's research from the early 1980s. College choice research must focus on the categories of variables described by Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009), and in doing so will include all of those deemed important by prior research.

According to Stephen Dresch (1983), there are four factors that influence an applicants' registration status. These factors are commonly found in the literature, and are important in any study of applicant attrition. They are academic competence, described as an applicants' high school aptitude and achievement; parental characteristics, or whether an applicant's parents attended college; public policy, which can vary from place to place, but can be extremely influential; and return on investment, or the long-term benefit a college education can provide for

a student (Dresch, 1983). Using these four categories, according to Dresch, one can determine the likelihood of college enrollment.

Herzog (2005) examines student decision-making, and determines several components are key in college choice. According to Herzog (2005), students' decision to attend college is based on four things: high school preparation, first-year academic performance, multi-institution enrollment, and financial aid support on college student persistence. Herzog (2005), examining groups of students at large universities, found that financial aid and academic preparation were the most important indicators of the decision to drop out. However, according to Herzog (2005), the importance of these factors differed from institution to institution. At some colleges, financial aid weighed heavier in decision-making than other factors, according to Herzog (2005). Academic preparation is a common issue when it comes to students' decision to leave college. Similar to Panos and Astin (1968) and Herzog (2005), McWhorter (2007) describes student preparation as a key component in enrollment decision-making processes. The work of both Herzog (2005) and McWhorter (2007) show that student decisions are tied to many issues that may vary, and that have different levels of impact on college choice.

Some scholars have examined reasons given by students for going to college (Schultz & Higbee, 2007). These motivating factors are directly related to applicant decisions, and to the reasons applicants may persist to enrollment. Nine motivating forces were found by Schultz and Higbee (2007), and were noted as prime indicators in why students go to college. These factors are a desire for education, the enhancement of career opportunities provided by a college education, goals for a better life, personal goals, family goals, to have a college experience, to enjoy collegiate social life, higher earning potential for college graduates, and to get a college degree (Schultz & Higbee, 2007). Dole (1970), reported similar findings in his earlier study of

student motivations. Dole's (1970) examination of motivating factors noted reasons students reported for choosing college enrollment, noting career goals as the most important metric impacting this decision. In determining these motivations, Schultz and Higbee outlined a long list of reasons an applicant may consider prior to enrollment.

Some scholars have focused on interventions put in place to impact student decision-making, especially as it pertains to choice. Metzner (1989) examined the role of academic advisement on student decisions. Metzner (1989) explains that advisement can be a positive factor regarding student decisions and college enrollment. According to Metzner (1989), the influence of academic advisement runs on a sliding scale, from no advisement to high quality advisement, with results becoming more positive as quality rises. Like Metzner, Allen and Lester (2012) study a hand's-on program of student advisement. Allen and Lester (2012) determine that a Success Coach and College Survival Skills course helped with college retention. Student decision-making was related directly to interventions implemented by college administrators. Metzner's results show that decision-making can be impacted by enhanced student support, and can lead to positive gains in a college's enrollment.

Other scholars have worked to determine the effects student expectations had on community college attrition rates (Millar & Tanner, 2011). These researchers wanted to find if students felt academically prepared for college, and then if their expectations of academic preparedness matched the realities of what they encountered during their first semester of coursework (Millar & Tanner, 2011). They found that student perceptions of preparedness decreased once class began, and that rather than modifying their expectations, many students chose to drop out (Millar & Tanner, 2011). Another study examined the decline in the college completion rate between 1972 and 1992, finding that preparedness was a reliable indication of

student attrition (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010). Barabasch (2006) similarly finds that student perceptions and expectations can lead to drop outs and issues when not well-thought out. According to Barabasch (2006), students who do not plan well and who are not prepared for the exigencies and demands of college are more likely to experience issues. As described by Millar and Tanner (2011), Bound, Lovenheim, and Turner (2010), and Barabasch (2006), these variables that describe preparation and perceptions can be important predictors of student decision-making and must be measured in studies of college student attrition.

Decades of research regarding college choice and student decision-making has identified various factors upon which these variables depend. Commonalities are certainly evident, though there is some nuanced differences within the research. These factors have been used to create theoretical models of college choice, which can be applied to studies of applicant decision-making.

College Choice Theoretical/Conceptual Models

DesJardins, Ahlburg, and McCall (2006) examine applicant decision-making at the University of Iowa to create an Integrated Model of Application, Admission, Enrollment, and Financial Aid. This study works to describe an integrated model of college student decision-making that determines if a student's probability of admission or financial aid influences their choice to enroll (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006). This quantitative study looks at the relationship between student expectations of being accepted and of receiving financial aid, and how those expectations influence their decision and choice making (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006). The researchers found that there was a relationship between these variables, and that the expectation of being accepted and of receiving aid led to positive enrollment benefits on the part of the college (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006). DesJardins, Ahlburg, and

McCall (2006) use a narrative hook similar in nature to that used by Paulsen in Article 1. They write that budget cuts due to lower enrollment are a concern to enrollment managers, and that by focusing on student decision-making, colleges can positively impact their bottom line (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006).

Millar and Tanner (2011), in their article "Students' Perceptions of Their Readiness for Community College Study," provide a framework for studying applicant readiness, based on student perceptions and expectations. Millar and Tanner (2011), noting that little research has been conducted on students at two-year colleges, use Cognitive Dissonance Theory to explain attrition. This theory posits a relationship between students' expectations, the discrepancy of those expectations with what actually takes place, and college persistence (Millar and Tanner, 2011). Essentially, when a students' expectations do not match what happens (ie, they think they are academically ready, but fail a test), they become more likely to leave college (Millar and Tanner, 2011). This theory is especially important during the application process; when an applicant expects a step to yield certain benefits or to be easy when it turns out to be difficult, they may leave, based on Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Millar and Tanner, 2011).

Researchers interested in student motivation, persistence, and achievement have sometimes used theoretical frameworks that attempt to describe workplace dynamics, especially those dealing with goal-setting and attainment (Drory, 1980). Given the prevalence of academic preparation and aspiration in the college choice factors listed in the previous section, using motivation theory models could be considered appropriate. While it would seem the most important factors impacting student transitions and student learning would be academic (high IQ, good grades, etc.), educational researchers have shown individual motivation is also a very important indicator of student success (Guo, Marsh, Morin, Parker, & Kaur, 2015). The

decisions students make are determined by some internal or external factor, so a study of the causes of college choice is a study of motivation. Students typically enter college with the expectation that coursework and credentials will lead to a career, and when a strong connection between studies and starting a job can be made, they are more likely to choose enrollment (Guo, Marsh, Morin, Parker, & Kaur, 2015). By determining motivating factors for students during the admissions process, applicant decision-making can be addressed. Because of this link between motivation and decision-making, frameworks describing these phenomena could be used in a study of college choice.

Expectancy Theory was developed in 1964 by Victor Vroom in an attempt to explain individual motivation (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Expectancy Theory deconstructs motivation into three component parts: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (Estes & Polnick, 2012). According to Vroom, the product of these factors is a reliable indicator of motivational force felt by an individual when completing a task: the higher level of each, the more motivated a person will be (Estes & Polnick, 2012). In order to understand Expectancy Theory, one must comprehend its three parts. Valence is best described as a measure of desirability (Drory, 1980). When faced with actions, individuals will internally assess possible outcomes, determining which is most valuable to them (Estes & Polnick, 2012). More attractive outcomes possess a higher level of valence, thereby impacting motivation more positively (Drory, 1980). Instrumentality, another aspect of Expectancy Theory, is a metric used to describe the importance of actions in shaping outcomes (Drory, 1980). For instance, an applicant to a technical college who wants to be a licensed practical nurse would place a high degree of instrumentality on enrolling and completing coursework because attainment of this goal necessarily includes post-secondary training. However, an applicant who wants to work in retail

may not value college enrollment because coursework and skills training is not a pre-requisite to becoming employed in that field. So instrumentality is a measure of relationship, or at least the perception of the relationship, between an action and a goal. Expectancy, the third motivational force in Expectancy Theory, is more immediate than instrumentality. Expectancy is the belief that a certain action will be followed by a certain outcome (Estes & Polnick, 2012). In whole, Expectancy Theory explains motivation as being compose of these three forces: valence, or the desirability of each action's outcome; instrumentality, defined as the feeling that each action leads to a relevant outcome; and expectancy, the belief that each action will be followed by a specific outcome (Drory, 1980; Estes & Polnick, 2012).

Another theory that works to describe student motivation is Future Time Perspective Theory. Future Time Perspective Theory attempts to explain goal-orientation, specifically the varying lengths of time people are willing to work towards a desired outcome (Nieswaudt & Shanahan, 2008). Future Time Perspective Theory is more concisely defined as an individual's current expectation of long-term goals and the link between persistence at a task and commitment to an outcome (Nieswaudt & Shanahan, 2008; Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Lacante, 2004). Students who are more inclined to value future career goals and potential earnings are also more likely to value the educational background that is often required to achieve these results (Nieswaudt & Shanahan, 2008). According to some researchers, it is the responsibility of schools to make students understand the long-term consequences of their actions (McInerney, 2004). When a student realizes that education is linked to future success, they become more motivated to accomplish actions in the present (Kauffman & Husman, 2004). Basically, a student's vision for the future influences their desire to learn, so students who are

more focused on goals persist at a higher rate than their more short-sighted counterparts (Kauffman & Husman, 2004).

Alongside models of student motivation are those more directly related to college choice. As mentioned above, models of college choice typically fall into three categories: economic, sociological, and a combination of economic and sociological (Lee & Chatfield, n.d.). The Economic Model of Human Capital Investment describes college choice as determined by the need for education and training to improve human capital, which is defined as one's ability to produce and earn (Perna, 2006). In other words, when students make decisions regarding college choice, they are weighing benefits with costs. Benefits to the student, in the Economic Model of Human Capital Investment, include improved earning potential, the statistical odds of living a longer life and being healthier, and lower unemployment, all of which are tied to having higher levels of education (Perna, 2006). Costs could be opportunity, in the way of foregone earnings while in school, or direct, as tuition or fee payments (Perna, 2006). The Sociological Model of Status Attainment looks at the effect of student socioeconomic status on college aspirations (Perna, 2006). The Sociological Model of Status Attainment predicts that those with higher socioeconomic status, which typically coincides with a higher level of academic preparation, will have higher college aspirations than their lower income counterparts (Perna, 2006). The third model of college choice combines economic and sociological factors, considering all in its assessment of student decision-making. This Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model describes four levels of college choice: an individual's demographic characteristics, cultural capital, and social capital; the availability of resources, and also barriers to college options; the messaging of post-secondary institutions, geographic proximity of post-secondary

institutions, and post-secondary institutions' characteristics; and the economic and public policies that impact student decisions (Perna, 2006).

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith's (1989) Three Stage Model of Student Choice describes three separate phases of the college selection, application, and enrollment process. First is introduction, a period where prospective students begin to form their college aspirations (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). This is a time where students may determine what post-secondary options are most aligned with their future plans and goals. After introduction, if college is needed, comes the search stage, when students begin to identify which institutions fit their needs and begin the application process (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). At this point in the process, students are narrowing their search and making decisions about what colleges are right for them. Once the applications are in and acceptance notices have been sent, prospective students, according to Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith's (1989) Three Stage Model, enter the third phase and make final enrollment decisions: choice. For the purposes of this study, which aims to determine correlates between student characteristics and their enrollment decisions, the choice stage is the area of interest.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) describe three stages of the college application process, but also provide a list of variables that may influence prospective student decision-making. According to Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989), there are eight student variables that could be tied to enrollment decisions: socioeconomic status, academic ability (based on high school and college gpas), ethnicity, parents' level of education, family residence characteristics, parental encouragement, peer encouragement, and high school quality. Alongside these individual variables, according to Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989), are seven institutional factors that may impact enrollment decisions: academic program

availability, tuition, financial aid availability, school reputation, school location, size, and social atmosphere. This study will work to measure these categories among prospective students who apply and are accepted to Southern Crescent Technical College.

The Model of Community College Choice describes college choice factors for prospective students of two-year colleges. This model consists of three categories, aspirations and encouragement, institutional characteristics, and finances, that contain ten total factors: price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, training and education goals, aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). Geography and price are the two most important factors in college choice, according to the researchers who created this model (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). This model was created to explain the phenomena of college choice at two-year post-secondary institutions, so it is very relevant and usable for any study of technical college applicant decision-making.

Three frameworks that would support a study of technical college applicant decision-making are Expectancy Theory, the Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model, and the Model of Community College Choice. These three models are similar in that they attempt to describe college student choices. Each considers the variables that can predict choices made by students during the college application process. Expectancy Theory considers college choice as a question of motivation: what value does a student place on college attendance, and how integral is college attendance to attainment of their goals? Similarly, the Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model considers the cost/benefit analysis that college applicants undertake. Essentially, this model asks is it worth their while, and necessary, for them to attend

college? This model also considers students' individual characteristics, namely socioeconomic status, and their ability to predict college choice decisions. The Model of Community College Choice outlines ten factors that make up its concept of applicant decision-making. According to this model, these factors, which include financial, institutional, and personal variables, are considerations and determinants in college applicant decision-making.

Differences between these three models are subtle, but present. Expectancy Theory is concerned with intrinsic student motivation and determining the value a prospective student attaches to college attendance. The Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model, on the other hand, is predictive in nature. This model works to determine what factors weigh heaviest on decisions made by students regarding college choice. Lastly, the Model of Community College Choice describes the factors as they relate to potential students of a two-year post-secondary institution. This model is related to the Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model, but with factors like geography and price being so prominent, it is clearly related to the issues and concerns of students at community and technical colleges.

For this study, the Model of Community College Choice was used because it describes student choice at institutions with a profile that resembles that of Southern Crescent Technical College. The ten factors outlined in the Model of Community College Choice were considered during the research phase of this study. Due to Southern Crescent Technical College's status as a two-year post-secondary institution, these factors predominate among prospective student groups. The Model of Community College Choice provided a lens for this study of Southern Crescent Technical College applicant decision-making.

In addition to the Model of Community College Choice, because motivation is such a commonly cited factor in student decision-making research, Expectancy Theory was also used in

this study. The Model of Community College Choice provided individual and institutional concepts and variables during the research phase. But Expectancy Theory allowed the study to contain another dynamic: to see what value students place on technical college attendance. In determining if students choose to not enroll in a technical college, the Model of Community College Choice provided variables that are important to students when making the decision to enroll. And Expectancy Theory provided a framework for researchers to also consider students' individual motivation.

The two frameworks gave this study a sharper focus, providing the research another layer related to the problem of technical college applicant decision-making. Determining the importance of certain variables and motivations of prospective students may lead to better practices for technical college student support staff members. When these factors are considered, knowledge and a deeper understanding of common applicant decision-making issues could lead to further study and implementation of techniques that would remove barriers and provide better post-secondary access for students in Southern Crescent Technical College's service delivery area.

Conclusion

American two-year colleges vary slightly from state to state, but they certain maintain certain universal aspects, too. Georgia's technical colleges system, which includes Southern Crescent Technical College, are very similar to comprehensive community colleges. Because of this, a description of community college practices also describes common practices at TCSG institutions as well. Two-year colleges in the United States, in an effort to provide access to higher education for all citizens, regardless of background, typically have open admissions policies. Students at these colleges also typically receive a large amount of federal aid, most

likely due to the open admissions policies. Two-year college budgets are composed of money received from local tuition, federal funding, and state funding. While enrollment has historically determined federal and state funding amounts, more recently retention, completion, and job placement have become metrics used to allocate money. In order to effectively distribute money, federal and state governments use regular assessment to ascertain how much is received by each institution. In Georgia, student success, learning outcomes, financial health, and impact on economic/workforce development are measured in making this determination. Faculty at two-year colleges is largely part-time, which presents challenges, often a lower level of commitment and a lack of continuity when compared to their four-year college counterparts.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Method

This qualitative study of Southern Crescent Technical College (SCTC) applicant decision-making examined accepted students' decision to not enroll and attend classes. Specifically, this study described the experiences of students who were accepted for but never enrolled in SCTC's three most popular technical and industrial programs: Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology. These three programs represent a cross-section of post-secondary credentialing options: short-term certificate, diploma, and associate of applied science degree, respectively. The research approach that was used was that of a basic qualitative study with interviews.

Basic Qualitative Study

Because this study sought a deeper understanding of accepted applicants' decision to enroll, a qualitative model was chosen. Statistical trends for this group of potential SCTC students is provided and based on application data. But the focus is on their experience, specifically during the college enrollment process. Maxwell (2013) writes that the intent of qualitative research is to better comprehend the perspectives of those being studied and how these perspectives relate to the experience being studied. Qualitative research is concerned with participants' real-world experiences, not those that occur in a contrived, experimental setting (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The research conducted for this study is suited to a qualitative design because of its purpose: to find out the experiences of this group of applicants and to

determine what led to their decision to never enroll. While quantitative data would show who is not attending, qualitative data will more effectively uncover the why, which is the focus of this study.

According to Creswell (2007), there are five different types of qualitative research: narrative research, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and phenomenology. Narrative studies seek to describe an event as it occurred, and in chronological order (Creswell, 2013). This approach works to tell a story, using the experiences of its participants to do so. Grounded theory studies examine actions and interactions between people and events to create a theory of how and why things occur (Frost, 2011). With case studies, a researcher selects a particular scenario they would like to learn more about. Rather than sampling a population, case study researchers choose a group and attempt to glean data about that group's specific context (Maxwell, 2013). In a case study, the scenario supersedes the topic in characterizing the research (Imel, Kerka, & Wanocott, 2002). Ethnographic research interprets data through a sociocultural lens, meaning the researcher's interest is in the shared beliefs and practices of the group being studied (Merriam, 2002). The focus of ethnographies is shared cultural and social traits, rather than descriptions and analyses of experiences. Phenomenology is a paradigmatic way of viewing a series of events that is used in many qualitative studies (Maxwell, 2013). Phenomenology is, essentially, a description of an individual or a group of individuals' experience of a phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Phenomenology has roots in early twentieth century philosophy and humanities research, and more recently has been used in fields as disparate as education, psychology, and health science (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Basically, a phenomenological study describes the perceptions of its participants. Phenomenological studies are not only descriptive, but also contain analysis as well (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Though Creswell (2007) describes five types of qualitative studies, other scholars include additional versions. Anfara and Mertz (2015) write of a variety of others, including experimental research, survey research, and action research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that in some applied fields, such as education and business, a basic interpretive study is most commonly used by qualitative researchers. For these basic qualitative studies, analysis of data must include determining commonalities and that these themes in turn become the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study focused on the experiences of SCTC applicants who completed the application process but never enrolled in classes. Instead of providing a narrative overview of the college's application process, creating theoretical concepts about applicant decision-making, studying a specific case, or collecting applicant sociocultural data, this research determined participants' perceptions of the application process and the reasons they deem important in their choice to not enroll. The purpose was to find commonalities between participants' experience of the college application process, specifically between those who complete it and do not enroll. Because of this purposed, a model of basic qualitative study with interviews was used, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

This research studied accepted students' decision to not enroll at Southern Crescent Technical College. Prospective students from SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technology, and Automotive Technology programs who have been accepted but did not enroll in classes were interviewed in an effort to learn the essence of their shared experience. Interviews attempted to determine what this group of applicants perceived as motivating factors while progressing through the admissions process along with the emphasis they place on certain variables known to impact college choice. An overview of accepted student cost/benefit analysis

and value placed on college attendance, along with the importance of price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, aspirations (training and education), aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family will be drawn from interview data (Estes & Polnick, 2012; Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). For the three academic program areas, there are typically dozens of accepted students who choose to not enroll each semester. Southern Crescent Technical College maintains contact information for this group and it is available to researchers. By using applicants from a three year period, the pool of potential interviewees was larger, thereby enabling the target of nine, including three from each program, to be reached.

The Reason for College Choice Theory

Researchers have used a variety of conceptual and theoretical models to enhance understanding of college student decision-making over the past forty years. In that time, it has been established that there are a variety of factors impacting college applicant decisions over the course of a multi-stage process, such as individual characteristics, institutional characteristics, and institutional communication (Kallio, 1995). Identifying and defining these factors has been an integral part of student decision-making research. Early college choice studies focused on the correlation between student characteristics, such as academic ability, race, gender, parent education level, and aspirations, and on student institution choice (Bergerson, 2009). In the mid- to late 1980s, scholars began to look at not just institution choice, but at all steps of the college application process (Bergerson, 2009). This involved the identification of steps involved in decision-making for prospective college students, which includes the choice to apply, to complete the application process, and to enroll, the latter being the focus of this study

(Bergerson, 2009). Despite commonalities among college student decision-making models, there are some slight differences, so choosing from them is an important part of any study.

An examination of the departure point for applicants to a technical college seems to be a study in attrition. Essentially these are college leavers, so theoretical models of college student attrition and retention offer what could be good options for scholars and researchers of this phenomena. For decades, experts in attrition, such as Vincent Tinto have worked to provide models that describe why college students leave (Braxton, 2000). Tinto's model, called the Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure, was one of the earliest attempts, which explained that certain student characteristics influence the departure process (Braxton, 2000). These characteristics include socioeconomic status, parent education level, student expectations, academic ability, race, gender, and high school academic achievement (Braxton, 2000).

Like Tinto, Bean (1980) sought to determine what variables caused college student attrition and to measure their level of importance in student drop outs. In the early 1980s, Bean (1980) worked extensively to separate the most impactful factors in college student attrition, and found ten reliable indicators: major and job commitment, personal goals, courses taken, family approval of college attendance, institutional loyalty, certainty of choice, practicality of choice, transfer opportunity, college grades, and student intent to leave. These ten factors are the basis for independent variables used in attrition research, from the 1980s to the present.

Also in the 1980s, Bean and Metzner (1985) created their Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition, which is important in technical and community college research because of the large number of nontraditional students served by two-year post-secondary institutions. For Bean and Metzner (1985), college persistence could be predicted by measuring four variables: academic performance, intent to leave, high school performance, and

environmental factors. Bean and Metzner (1985) are interested only in nontraditional persistence, but these issues will certainly be important for any study of applicant attrition, and will be variables that must be examined and measured.

Tinto, Bean, and Metzner provided valuable insight into college departure with their models of attrition. The factors they identified are important in determining why and how students leave college. But studies of attrition focus on retention of current students, not on decisions made by students during the pre-enrollment phase. So while these models describe factors that influence applicant decisions, they are not completely applicable to the issue studied here, that of prospective student departure.

Because attrition models do not consider factors for pre-enrolled students, just those that are already attending, other theories must be used in a study of applicant departure. Theories of college choice are most relevant and applicable, because they examine why prospective students make certain decisions during the application process. College choice research is guided by different concepts that have influenced enrollment management practices in higher education in recent decades (Paulsen, 1990). Specifically, according to some, research of college student decision-making has rested on three different foundations: psychology, sociology, and economics (Paulsen, 1990). According to Paulsen (1990), the differences between these three foundational concepts is, respectively, the idea that students choose based on institutional fit, on status attainment, and on investment return. More simply, theories of college choice have been described by some scholars as relying on two perspectives, which combines the psychological and sociological components into one: an economic model and a sociological model (Perna, 2006). This idea of dichotomous college choice modeling is preferred because it shows the nature of the work that has been done in this field. Research has focused on factors within these

two areas, and more recently has combined economic and sociological models to create frameworks that consider both perspectives.

Subjectivities

It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, I brought baggage and potential biases due to my role as the Director of Recruitment at SCTC. In addition, I have attended college at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and both of my parents are college graduates. I approached all data collection, including interviews, as bias-free as possible. But my knowledge of the enrollment process from both a student and college staff member perspective, and my familiarity with what is involved in becoming a student at SCTC may have influenced how I asked questions and interpreted data. My reading of the SCTC webpage and Admissions Office communications is influenced by my knowledge of the process. Because I am well-versed in what it takes to become a college student, I may view information differently than this study's interview participants, some of whom are first-generation college students with no college admissions experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative study examined, described, and interpreted data collected using a compilation of demographic data culled from admissions paperwork, observation of the SCTC admissions process, and interviews conducted with a group of students accepted for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs, but who decided to not enroll. Because this study used a basic qualitative method, the interviews provided foundational data for this study. The other means of collecting data were supplemental, as the interviews provided the primary source of information (Eddles-Hirsch, 2006).

Of the nine interview participants, three applied to the college for the Commercial Truck Driving program, three applied to the college for the Welding and Joining Technician program, and three applied to the college for the Automotive Technology program. Although application data was pulled for this group of applicants for each term from Fall 2015 to Fall 2018, all interview participants had applied for either the Summer 2018 or Fall 2018 Semester. An effort was made to contact students for interviews who had most recently been engaged in the SCTC application process. To reach nine participants, this required reaching out to applicants from these two most recent semesters, Summer 2018 and Fall 2018. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 and their age, racial, and gender was as follows:

1. An 18 year old white male Automotive Technology applicant for the 2018 Fall Semester.
2. A 19 year old black male Automotive Technology applicants for the 2018 Fall Semester.
3. A 19 year old black male Automotive Technology applicant for the 2018 Fall Semester.
4. A 31 year old black male Commercial Truck Driving applicant for the 2018 Fall Semester.
5. A 50 year old black male Commercial Truck Driving applicant for the 2018 Summer Semester.
6. A 33 year old black female Commercial Truck Driving applicant for the 2018 Summer Semester.
7. A 24 year old white male Welding applicant for the 2018 Fall Semester.
8. A 20 year old black male Welding applicant for the 2018 Summer Semester.

9. A 26 year old white male Welding applicant for the 2018 Summer Semester.

Interview participants represented a wide range of ages, an equal number from each program being studied, and were roughly equal proportionally by gender and race to the overall group of applied and not enrolled students from Fall 2015 to Fall 2018 for these three programs. The average age of participants was 26.6 and the median age of participants was 24, compared to an average age of 31.41 and a median age of 28 for all applied and not enrolled students for these three programs during the ten semester period for which data was pulled. This means that interview participants were generally younger than the group as a whole.

Interview data was collected systematically and was in adherence to prescribed formatting. Initially, emails were sent to potential participants with requests for in-person interviews. However, after receiving no response, the Institutional Review Board approved phone interviews for this study. Consent was verbally granted by each participant (Eddles-Hirsch, 2006). Interviews contained a similar series of questions for each participant, but were open-ended in an effort to learn true applicant perceptions of the college admissions process (Seidman, 2006). By keeping a similar series of questions but maintaining their open-ended nature, the interviewer was able to follow leads that may surface (Partington, 2001). In addition, questioning consisted of three parts, in keeping with qualitative study interviewing best practices: participants' life histories; participants' details of experience; and participants' reflections on their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Moustakas (1994) writes that interviews should be informal, and should be topically guided, but should not consist of a specific list of questions. Instead of creating a questionnaire, researchers are encouraged to conduct unstructured interviews, and are not even required to prepare questions prior to the data collection process (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011; Rawat, n.d.). Creswell (2007) explains

there should be two broad questions that are asked of each interviewee and that themes should be pursued during each interview. The two broad questions suggested by Creswell (2007) are: what has a subject experienced regarding the phenomenon? and what situations have influenced your experiences of the phenomenon? Although interviews for this study were informal and flexible, a list of questions was prepared beforehand and tested on SCTC advisors, admissions representatives, and instructors in an effort to sharpen the instrument. This instrument was designed to examine participants' experiences with SCTC's application and enrollment processes. Using Creswell's (2007) two guiding questions (to address Research Question 1 and 2) and the Model of Community College Choice's ten themes (to address Research Question 3) the interviews determined how individual applicant goals may impact the decision to enroll, what applicants choose instead of enrollment, and what obstacles applicants face during the enrollment process, thereby addressing each of the study's three research questions. The ten themes of the Model of Community College Choice are price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, training and education goals, aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006).

This study received approval from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, and maintained adherence to all of that body's required standards. Participant confidentiality and permission was maintained and no interviewees were identified by name. A request for the contact information of accepted but not enrolled applicants for the past three years was made to Southern Crescent Technical College's Office of Institutional Effectiveness upon receipt of Institutional Review Board approval. The group targeted for interviews were those potential

students who were accepted for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs, but who chose not to enroll. Initially, in-person interviews were requested. Emails went to all students from this targeted group, but no responses were received. Following a second email, again with no responses, a request was made to the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board for permission to conduct phone interviews. This request was granted so the nine participants were interviewed by phone.

Morse (2000) states there is not much guidance for the number of interviews that must be conducted in a qualitative study, due to the wide variety of factors that must be considered. With these limitations in mind, it is important to note that research has shown a saturation point typically occurs within the first twelve interviews, and could possibly take place within the first six in some cases (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). A recent examination of over fifty qualitative studies found that number of interview particpants ranged from seven to eighty-nine, so there is a wide disparity in what is deemed appropriate (Mason, 2010). However, there are some suggested guidelines: Creswell (2007) writes that five to twenty-five interviews may be needed. With these recommendations in mind, this study conducted nine interviews from the target group to include three from each program area. Gift certificates were provided for those who agreed to participate. This number is within range of what is found in research literature. There was a written transcript created for all interviews with relevant data provided in the report of research. Each interview lasted approximately ten minutes. Access is often an issue for qualitative studies, particularly in identifying and reaching interview participants (Johl & Renganathan, 2010). However, because SCTC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness was apprised of this project and because potential participants' contact information is on file, access

to nine interviewees was not problematic. Also, pulling prospective interviewees from the past three years of applicants provided a large pool of potential study participants.

In order to ensure study methods were positive for participants and to ensure positive rapport between the researcher and participants, issues and concerns of the interviewee were examined during the data collection process (Partington, 2001). The interviewees were given feedback that positively acknowledged their issues and concerns. Because suspicion is often an issue in qualitative interviewing, steps were taken to address participants' trust in the researcher (Ryan & Dundon, 2009). At the start of each interview, the researcher introduced himself as an employee of the college who was conducting research for a graduate program at the University of Georgia. This provided interviewees knowledge of the researcher's background and intent. The introduction generated openness and truthful responses and allowed the researcher to develop a positive relationship with interviewees. In addition, any data received from participants deemed untrustworthy was not used as a result for this study. By addressing concerns and creating positive relationships with those being interviewed, the researcher was able to avoid common rapport and data collection issues.

To determine themes and trends in the qualitative data collected for this study, interviews were transcribed and imported to Nvivo. The researcher worked to manually determine commonalities in the data as interviews and research are conducted. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed manually for themes. Analysis of interview data enabled a determination of some commonalities, but also allowed for each participant's story to be told. Some participants shared perceptions of the admissions process. For instance, three felt communication from SCTC to be lacking as they made decisions regarding enrollment. Also, almost all participants shared that family encouraged them during the application process. This

type of information was gleaned from a thorough reading of the interview transcripts. Transcripts were also put into Nvivo allowing for an automated search for themes. The frequency of phrases and words were quantified by Nvivo, revealing shared traits among interview participants. Using a manual coding process uncovered connections among participants that were confirmed by Nvivo.

Validation and Quality of Study

The nature of qualitative studies, particularly their inclusion of researcher and participant subjectivities, makes them susceptible to criticisms of validity. Validity refers to the integrity of the research methods and the accuracy of the data that is reported (Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity issues may arise within any of four areas in a qualitative study: the researcher, the subject(s), the situation, and/or the data collection methods (Brink, 1993). Researcher and participant issues include potential biases, which can be offset through preliminary disclosures and internal assessments (Brink, 1993). By identifying areas where they could be biased, researchers are able to combat issues that could result from their own subjectivities. The validity of qualitative studies is also considered compromised because of situational issues and data collection. When a study relies on interview research methods, there are concerns that any data culled from a small number of participants might only be relevant and applicable for that group, and not generalizable for the population at large (Seidman, 2006). To address validity issues, I utilized triangulation, the use of data from a variety of sources (Konecki, 2008). As mentioned previously, the primary source of reported data was pulled from participant interviews. But data was also pulled from SCTC application paperwork and from observations of the admissions process. Triangulation occurred through comparison and substantiation of information provided by these sources, thereby validating the research methods and models.

Conclusion

This study examined student perceptions of motivations and barriers when applying to technical college. The specific focus of this study was those students who were accepted for SCTC Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs, but who never enrolled in classes. Using a phenomenological method, this study described, examined, and interpreted information provided through a sample of interviewees from this group, through demographic information available from application paperwork, and through observations of the admissions process. Institutional Review Board approval was granted for this study, and validity and quality was maintained through their recommendations and also through best practices for qualitative techniques, as described above. Through this research, perceptions of student barriers and motivations were identified and may lead to the implementation of more effective services for this student group.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to establish the motivating factors and barriers that impact college applicants' decision to enroll in classes. To determine what keeps these students from enrolling, data was collected from applicants to Southern Crescent Technical College's (SCTC) Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs for each semester, beginning with Fall 2015. This qualitative study examined applicant decision-making using a compilation of demographic data culled from admissions paperwork and interviews conducted with nine students three from each program who were accepted, but never enrolled at SCTC. Because this was a qualitative study, interview data provided foundational information and is supplemented here by age, gender, and race statistics available for all students (Eddles-Hirsch, 2006).

For this study, data was collected for applicants who were accepted but never enrolled for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs for Fall Semester 2015, Spring Semester 2016, Summer Semester 2016, Fall Semester 2016, Spring Semester 2017, Summer Semester 2017, Fall Semester 2017, Spring Semester 2018, Summer Semester 2018, and Fall Semester 2018. Application information including age, gender, and race is available for this entire group and has been collected and analyzed. Also, the 2018 findings from SCTC's Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provided data about the college and student perceptions of college

resources. In addition, three applicants from each program were interviewed to determine specific perceptions of the admissions process and what variables led to their completion of this process and decision to not enroll. Interviews lasted approximately ten minutes in length with each participant. These nine interview participants provide the qualitative data for this study. The interview instrument was designed using study research questions and themes from existing literature as a guide.

Themes in Existing Literature

As described in Chapter II, extensive research has been conducted regarding college choice and college student decision-making. Although areas of emphasis have varied, many dominant themes emerge in this literature. For this study, these themes were used to determine the focus of the interview instrument and the trends to be aware of as interviews were conducted and data were analyzed.

College student decision-making literature as described above, particularly that research concerned with enrollment decisions, typically falls into three categories: economic, sociological, and a combination of economic and sociological (Lee & Chatfield, n.d.). These categories of college choice scholarship are described by the Economic Model of Human Capital Investment, the Sociological Model of Status Attainment, and the Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model (Perna, 2006). The Economic Model of Human Capital Investment explains that college choice is determined by the need for education and training to improve human capital, which is defined as one's ability to produce and earn (Perna, 2006). According to Perna (2006), potential college students will weigh benefits and costs, both opportunity and direct, when making their enrollment decisions. The Sociological Model of Status Attainment predicts that those students of higher socioeconomic status will have higher

college aspirations than their lower income counterparts (Perna, 2006). The Joint Economic and Sociological Conceptual Model describes four levels of college choice: an individual's demographic characteristics, cultural capital, and social capital; the availability of resources, and also barriers to college options; the messaging of post-secondary institutions, geographic proximity of post-secondary institutions, and post-secondary institutions' characteristics; and the economic and public policies that impact student decisions (Perna, 2006).

Because motivation is such a commonly cited factor in student decision-making research, it is important to consider Expectancy Theory in any examination of this group. Expectancy Theory was developed in 1964 by Victor Vroom in an attempt to explain individual motivation (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Expectancy Theory describes motivation as being composed of three parts: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (Estes & Polnick, 2012). According to Expectancy Theory, these three factors combine to produce a reliable indicator of motivation felt by an individual when completing a task: the more valence, instrumentality, and expectancy experienced, the more motivated a person will be (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Valence, or the desirability of each action's outcome; instrumentality, the feeling that each action leads to a relevant outcome; and expectancy, the belief that each action will be followed by a specific outcome are the three factors that explain the motivation behind certain decisions, including those of potential college students (Drory, 1980; Estes & Polnick, 2012).

The Model of Community College Choice describes college choice factors for prospective students of two-year colleges. This model consists of three categories, aspirations and encouragement, institutional characteristics, and finances, that contain ten total factors: price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, training and education goals, aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and

encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family (Somers, Haines, Keene, Baker, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). This model was created to explain the phenomena of college choice at two-year post-secondary institutions, so it is very relevant and usable for a study of technical college applicant decision-making.

For the purposes of this study, the Model of Community College Choice was used as a framework because it describes student choice at institutions with a profile that closely resembles that of Southern Crescent Technical College. The ten factors outlined in the Model of Community College Choice were considered during the creation of the survey instrument and the evaluation of data. In addition, because motivating factors are commonly cited as reasons for college student decision-making, Expectancy Theory was also used to support instrumentation for this study. By using Expectancy Theory in the creation of the survey instrument and the evaluation of data, this study is able to determine the value students place on technical college attendance. In determining if students choose to not enroll in a technical college, the Model of Community College Choice provided variables that are important to consider for the purposes of this study. Expectancy Theory provided a framework wherein individual motivation was considered.

Findings—Observation of the Admissions Process

An examination of students' perceptions of the Southern Crescent Technical College admissions process must also include observation of the process. To better understand these perceptions, an explanation of the college's interaction and communication with applicants is necessary. SCTC admissions and recruitment staff work to provide potential students with information that is needed for enrollment, both in person and in writing. Following is an

overview of the college process, and the communication between staff members and all applicants.

The Southern Crescent Technical College admissions process is straightforward, with applicants able to submit an application form either online or in person. Admissions representatives are available at each SCTC location, which are spread around the SCTC service delivery area. An SCTC campus or center is in six of the eight counties served by SCTC (Spalding, Butts, Jasper, Pike, Upson, Lamar, Henry, and Fayette are served by the college, and locations are in Spalding, Butts, Jasper, Upson, Henry, and Fayette). The two counties, Pike and Lamar, that do not contain an SCTC campus or center location, are still within twenty minutes of multiple SCTC sites. Because of this geographic proximity to prospective students, access to admissions representatives is convenient for the population officially served by SCTC. Additionally, phone numbers and email addresses for admissions and recruitment staff are posted online, so students who are unable to visit campus have ready access to a point of contact as they work through the admissions process.

When a student applies to SCTC, they receive two initial contacts from Admissions that outlines next steps. In both an email and a letter, applicants are provided general information about the process and specific information about the next steps needed for admissions and registration. The mailed letter includes steps for checking their application status online, and instructions regarding their application for financial aid. They are also given phone numbers for the Admissions Office, the Financial Aid Office, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of Veteran Affairs. The email includes information regarding their application for financial aid, and also an Admissions Checklist that details everything they will need to complete in order to

be accepted. The information communicated in the letter and email differ somewhat, though no specific reason is given by the Admissions Office for this disparity.

Upon completion of the application process and after being admitted to the college, accepted students receive a letter informing them of their updated status. They are given a new checklist that asks them to apply for financial aid, to schedule an appointment with an advisor, to schedule an appointment with SCTC's Special Populations Coordinator if a disability accommodation is needed, and information about college orientation. This letter serves as the final contact for accepted students, and gives them the final steps to become enrolled in SCTC classes.

Findings—Application and CCSSE Data

For this study, data compiled from applicant paperwork provided a comprehensive profile of this group (those who were accepted but did not enroll) for the past three years. An examination of college reports show a large number of students complete the application process and do not enroll. From the 2015 Fall Semester to the 2018 Fall Semester (a range that includes fall, spring, and summer terms, ten in total), 6678 students were accepted to SCTC and chose not to enroll. Of these, 417 students were accepted for the Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs, averaging almost 42 per semester. Of the total number of applicants who were accepted and did not enroll, 6.16% applied for these three technical programs.

Age, gender, and race are provided by applicants and are compiled in SCTC data reports. For those students studied, the average age was 31.41, with a median of 28, and a range from 18 to 67. For this group, 60 of 417 were female, representing 14.4%. This result is low, but to be expected given the non-traditional nature of females in the three programs being studied.

Currently, SCTC's total student population is 67% female, 30% male, and 3% not identified (CCSSE, 2018). The Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology cohort gender makeup is much different than that of the total student body. The racial breakdown of this group is 244 (58.55%) black, 134 (32.13%) white, 4 Asian (.009%), 1 American Indian (.002%), 4 multi-racial (.009%), and 30 (.072%) not identified. Compared to the complete student population at SCTC, there are differences with the racial makeup of the Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology group. The overall racial composition of SCTC is 49% white, 32% black, 1% Asian, 1% American Indian, 5% multi-racial, and 4% Hispanic or Latino (CCSSE, 2018). The disparity in race between the group studied and the total student body is most evident with white and black proportions. There is a higher percentage of black students in the Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology accepted not enrolled cohort than in the SCTC total student body.

Additional demographic data is in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below:

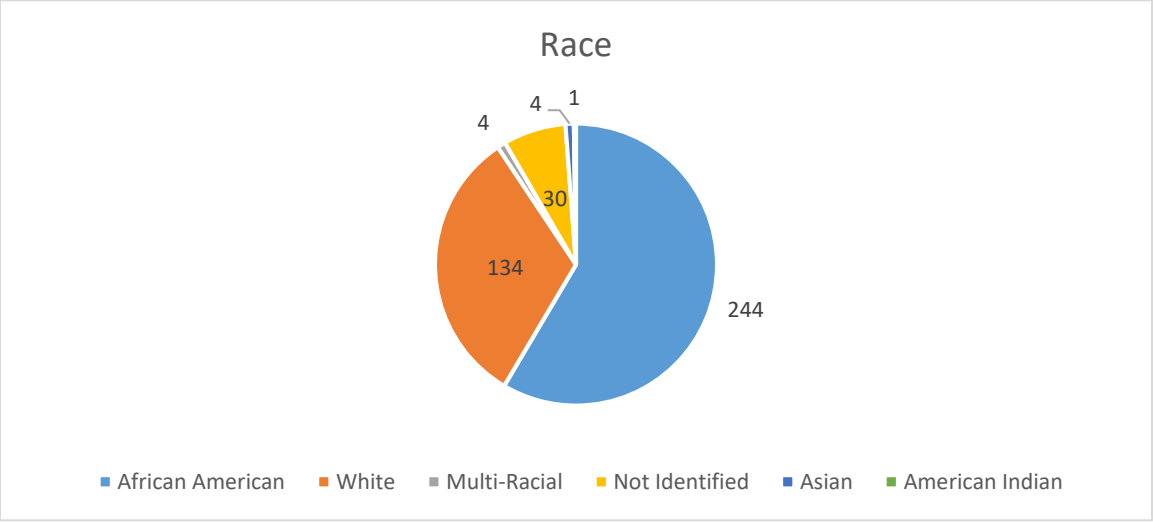

Figure 1. Breakdown by race

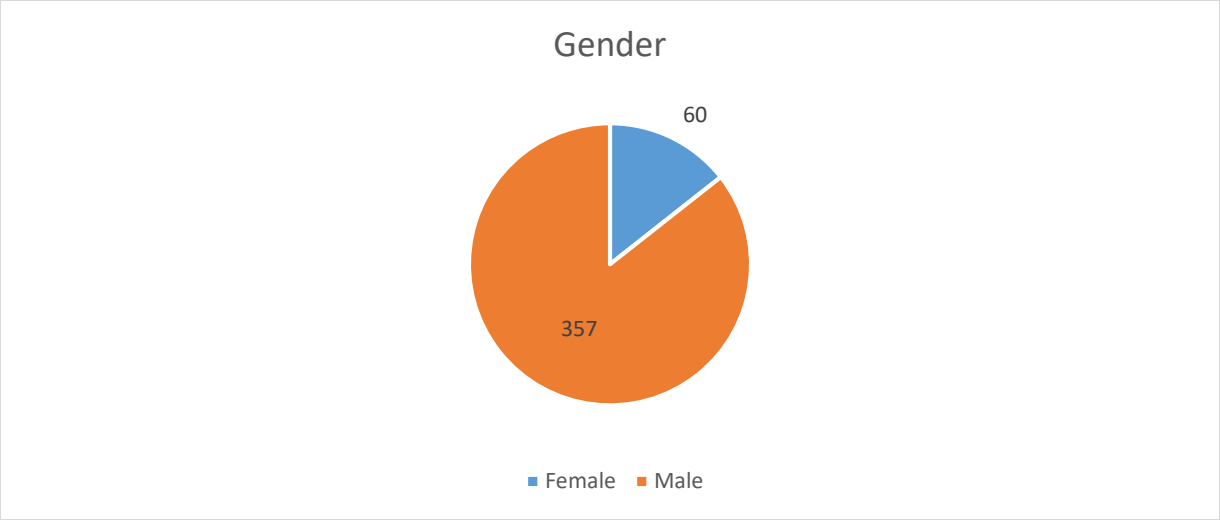

Figure 2. Breakdown by gender

Table 1 provides a snapshot of age, gender, and race for the accepted but not enrolled students for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs from Fall 2015 to Fall 2018.

Table 1

Southern Crescent Technical College Admitted not Enrolled Data 2015-2018

Term	Total	Average Age	Male	Female	Racial Makeup
Fall 2015	50	31.32	7	43	23 black/24 white/1 multi- racial/2 not identified
Spring 2016	48	32.29	41	7	26 black/15 white/2 Asian/1 multi-racial/4 not identified
Summer 2016	43	32.46	34	9	21 black/19 white/1 multi-racial/2 not identified/
Fall 2016	49	30.53	43	6	37 black/7 white/5 not identified
Spring 2017	44	32.20	37	7	25 black/14 white/1 multi-racial/4 not identified
Summer 2017	48	32.25	43	5	29 black/14 white/1 Asian/4 not identified

Fall 2017	39	32.51	33	6	20 black/12 white/7 not identified
Spring 2018	36	30.00	31	5	23 black/12/white/1 not identified
Summer 2018	27	33.92	20	7	20 black/5 white/1 American Indian/1 not identified
Fall 2018	33	26.21	32	1	20 black/12 white/1 Asian

Applicant data allowed the researcher to construct an overview of the group being studied. How old are they? What is their race and gender? This is important in gaining an understanding of who is applying for these programs and not enrolling, and how this group compares to SCTC's student population as a whole. However, to better understand the reasons students do not enroll after being accepted, more information is needed. To gain a deeper level of context, nine interviews were conducted to determine not just who these students are, but why they made certain decisions regarding college enrollment.

Findings—Interview Data

Because this was a basic qualitative study, data gathered from interviews was integral. Interviews allowed for deeper context than that provided by demographic data gleaned from applications. The interview process involved several steps: instrument development, subject identification, interview solicitations, one interview with each participant, and analysis. At each stage, I was careful to adhere to Institutional Review Board specifications. For example, after emailed requests for in-person interviews received no responses I requested, and was granted by the Institutional Review Board, permission to conduct interviews by phone. Although demographic information taken from application data is valuable in constructing a broad profile of this student group, interview data gives context to this overview and provides a better understanding of the real issues keeping these applicants from enrolling.

The initial phase of the interview process was the creation of an instrument. Some broad guidelines that were used during this part of the process and were based in the scholarly literature. Interviews all contained a similar series of questions for each participant, for example, but were open-ended to allow applicants to share their true feelings about the college admissions process (Seidman, 2006). Even with the open-ended nature of the interviews, each lasted only approximately ten minutes. This enabled the interviewer to follow leads, which certainly happened. Some interview participants volunteered information in one question that precluded asking another planned question later, for instance (Partington, 2001). Some research suggests informal, unstructured interviews for qualitative studies, without even preparing questions prior to data collection (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011; Rawat, n.d.). For this study, though, a list of questions was generated beforehand.

Along with general guidelines regarding interview structure, existing literature also influenced the creation of specific questions as well. Creswell's (2007) two guiding questions for qualitative research were considered when this study's interview instrument was written. These two questions are: what has a subject experienced regarding the phenomenon? and what situation have influenced a subject's experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007)? Also, the Model of Community College Choice's ten themes of price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, aspirations (training and education), aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family were used in the creation of questions, too (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). Lastly, Expectancy Theory was considered as measuring individual motivation and value placed on education are commonly factors in

college choice (Estes & Polnick, 2012). In the creation of the interview instrument, these issues faced by college applicants were all included based on this foundational literature.

The structure of the interview instrument and the questions asked were determined with both prior research and this study's research questions in mind:

1. What are the relationships between enrollment at SCTC and goal attainment for prospective students who are accepted but do not enroll in college Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?
2. What reasons are given by accepted students for not enrolling in SCTC Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?
3. What obstacles to enrollment are perceived by applicants who are accepted for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?

Creswell's (2007) two guiding interview principles inform Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, Expectancy Theory informs Research Question 1 (Estes & Polnick, 2012), and the Model of Community College Choice (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006) informs Research Question 3.

After interview questions were determined, a draft of the instrument was submitted to several SCTC faculty and staff members for review. These faculty and staff members were selected based on their relationship to this study's subject matter and program areas. A draft of the interview instrument was sent to one SCTC Commercial Truck Driving instructor, two SCTC Welding and Joining Technician instructors, three SCTC Automotive Technology instructors, the SCTC Student Navigator, and the SCTC Director of Enrollment Management. The questions were approved by all respondents, the SCTC Director of Enrollment Management, a Welding

and Joining Technician instructor, an Automotive Technology instructor, and a Commercial Truck Driving instructor. Only three slight adjustments were recommended: a suggestion to change the word "enrollment" to the word "admission", a suggestion to change the word "impact" to the word "influence", and a suggestion to change the words "to not enroll" to "to not enroll at SCTC." All three suggested modifications were made to the final version of the interview instrument.

A table is provided below that includes a sample of interviewee responses:

Table 2

Interview Data

Interview Theme	CTD Student Responses (3)	Welding Student Responses (3)	Automotive Student Responses (3)
Experience with Admissions	"It was an easy process." "It was what I expected." "It was easy." "It was a problem because Admissions didn't explain what needed to be done after I applied and tested. There was no communication."	"It was what I expected." "It was stressful because I had never done the Admissions process before." "It was pretty easy and I got helped a lot with my questions." "It was smooth, efficient. There were no problems. It was easy."	"It wasn't that bad." "It was unorganized, with information coming to me untimely."
Career Goals	"I want to be a truck Driver. I think [SCTC] can help." "At the time it was CDL. But my job status changed so I don't want to do CDL anymore."	"I'm not sure of my career goals. I definitely think Southern Crescent can help." "I'm looking at Welding so I can be certified." "I want to do Welding, Electrical, HVAC. I want to be a contractor."	"Yes, the college education is needed for the field I'm going into." "[SCTC] is a good college that can get me what I need to be

			successful."
		"I know the NCCER for Welding certifies you nationally, so I would get what I need."	"To have a good job with money."
			"Yes, I think [the program] can be helpful."
			"I was going to [SCTC] for Automotive because I think it can help me get a job in that field."
Cost/Financial Need	"I had gotten aid."	"I got aid."	"The cost was good."
	"I didn't know the cost because I never got the information."	"I didn't have a concern about funding."	"Yes, I got funding, but it was confusing as to if it was in place."
		"That was no issue."	
Campus Proximity	"I wish CDL classes were in Griffin."	"The location was convenient."	"No, that didn't influence me."
			"The location was fine as of now."
Student Support Services	"There was no impact."	"They would answer questions if I had them."	"I did go to the veteran's office and got what I needed from them."
	"I didn't get any help."		
Encouragement of Family	"Yes, my family who works as a truck driver said that it was a good career."	"My uncle did Welding and encouraged me to go."	"My family was very involved."
	"They didn't give me any help."	"My dad helped me with The paperwork and other things because he's on the campus every day and he could tell me what teachers to take."	"Yes, they encouraged me to think about my future."
	"Yes, my sister and my mom kept my kids."		

Encouragement of Friends	"They didn't help." "Yes, one friend gave me help through Admissions."	Yes, they helped me with choices and good advice."	"They were not Involved." "Yes, they encouraged me."
Barriers	"I just couldn't fit class into my schedule because I already have a job." "I only didn't enroll because I went to another shift so I couldn't attend class." "I couldn't get people on the phone. The office was open, but I couldn't get there and no one helped." "The communication process isn't good. The college should be able to let people know what they need to get started. That's why I didn't attend."	"I just wasn't ready to start. I had a job already that conflicted with Southern Crescent classes." "Everyone was helpful. It went well and the staff helped. Personal issues was the reason I didn't go." "I just didn't enroll because of the Welding waitlist."	"The website wasn't very clear. I couldn't find any information about costs and other things online." "[I] couldn't get people on the phone to help me with processing my FAFSA."

Interview Data—Research Question 1

Because Expectancy Theory and personal aspirations are considered important factors in college choice, interviews for this study included questions about goal attainment, specifically accepted students' perceptions of SCTC's ability to help them attain their career goals. Research Question 1 is concerned with the future focus of potential students, and the connection between

their future focus and the necessity of SCTC programs. Motivation is a commonly cited factor in student decision-making research, so Expectancy Theory was used when examining this group. Expectancy Theory was developed in 1964 by Victor Vroom in an attempt to explain individual motivation (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Expectancy Theory describes motivation as being composed of three parts: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (Estes & Polnick, 2012). According to Expectancy Theory, these three factors combine to produce a reliable indicator of motivation felt by an individual when completing a task: the more valence, instrumentality, and expectancy experienced, the more motivated a person will be (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Valence, or the desirability of each action's outcome; instrumentality, the feeling that each action leads to a relevant outcome; and expectancy, the belief that each action will be followed by a specific outcome are the three factors that explain the motivation behind certain decisions, including those of potential college students (Drory, 1980; Estes & Polnick, 2012). The interview instrument included lines of inquiry with student motivation, Expectancy Theory, and Research Question 1 in mind, asking participants to identify their career goals, if they believe completing a program at SCTC can help them reach those career goals, if their career goals influenced their decision to not enroll, and if they believe SCTC can lead to success in their chosen profession.

Interview participants were mostly certain about their personal career goals. Of the nine interviewees, six had goals that aligned with the program for which they had applied. The other three had varied responses, with one stated goal as "to have a good job with money," one as unsure, and one who was interested in Commercial Truck Driving when applying to the school, but whose interests had since changed. Among interview participants, there was a positive correlation between personal career goals and SCTC enrollment. One accepted student said he was "trying to go to Southern Crescent for Automotive because I think it can help me get a job in

that field." Additionally, three other students used the word "help" when describing SCTC's role in the attainment of their career goals. This language suggests that some applicants believe college enrollment is a part of becoming gainfully employed in a skilled trade, but not the only necessary component for employment. Three students described SCTC programs as quality, indicating their belief that the education received upon enrollment would offer value. In addition, three students described "needing" SCTC coursework as a prerequisite for certifications and/or licensure in their chosen fields. No students reported negative perceptions of SCTC programs, and no students equated SCTC enrollment with low-quality instruction. Based on interview data, it is clear that accepted students who do not enroll do see connection between SCTC classes and career goal attainment.

Interview Data—Research Question 2

This study, concerned with student motivation and college choice, is primarily focused on determining why accepted applicants do not enroll. Research Question 1 addresses motivation, while Research Question 2 addresses reasons given by accepted applicants for not enrolling. Using the Model of Community College Choice, questions were concentrated on ten variables that have been shown to affect college student decision-making. The Model of Community College Choice describes college choice factors for prospective students of two-year colleges. This model consists of three categories, aspirations and encouragement, institutional characteristics, and finances, that contain ten total factors: price, financial aid award, support services, academic programs, access, location, training and education goals, aspirations (student determination to "beat the odds"), information and encouragement from friends, and encouragement from family (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). Geography and price are the two most important factors in college choice,

according to the researchers who created this model (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). This model was created to explain college choice at two-year post-secondary institutions, so it is very relevant and usable for any study of technical college applicant decision-making. With the Model of Community College Choice and Research Question 2 in mind, lines of inquiry within the interview instrument included questions about personal background, cost, the receipt of financial aid, the assistance of student support services, geographic proximity, the encouragement of friends, and the encouragement of family members.

When asked about their personal background and a prior understanding of the college admissions process, eight of the nine interview participants reported no previous experience. One student described applying as "stressful" because they "had never done the admissions process before." Another stated that they completed the application "on [their] own." The student who was familiar with college admissions had dual enrolled at SCTC while in high school, taking college classes to meet secondary graduation requirements. In addition, this student's father works at SCTC. Of the nine participants, this student seemed the most confident about the application process and was the most knowledgeable about enrolling.

Interview participants were asked about the role of cost in their decision to not enroll in classes at SCTC. Cost was not a determining factor for any of the nine potential students interviewed for this study. One said it was "no issue," and seven said they had received some type of aid to offset or cover all costs, with Pell, HOPE (Georgia's lottery funded scholarship program), and the GI Bill were all mentioned as sources of this aid by various study participants. One interviewee stated his schedule being dropped for non-payment, but that cost did not play a role in his not attending. The receipt of financial aid and payment of requisite tuition and fees would seem to be a common barrier for accepted students who do not enroll in college classes,

but based on interview data collected for this study, it often may not be an important part of the decision-making process.

Student support services includes SCTC's accommodations coordinators, Title IX coordinator, veteran's coordinator, and career and academic planning. These staff members work with students from first point of contact until graduation on an as-needed basis. Interviewees were asked about the impact of student support services on their decision to not enroll at SCTC. Six of the nine participants stated that student support services played no role. Seemingly, this group had no contact with student support services during the process, saying they "didn't work with them" and that there was "no impact" of these services on their decision to not enroll. Three of the nine participants reported a positive correlation between services provided and their perception of the college. One of these three received assistance from the veteran's coordinator, another said he "got support when [he] needed it," and another said these staff members "would answer questions if I had them." Student support services played some part for these applicants, and there were no reports of negative interactions. But no students reported a correlation between these services and their decision to not enroll.

Regarding campus locations, only one of the nine interview participants for this study described proximity as an issue. Although SCTC maintains locations in five of the eight counties it serves, not all programs are at all locations. This student said that the location "stopped me because CDL is not in Griffin." Indeed, Commercial Truck Driving is only offered at Butts County and Upson County SCTC locations. Another student, though not deterred by location, also conveyed a need for Commercial Truck Driving at the SCTC Griffin Campus but said it was not a determining factor for the decision to not enroll. All other interview participants reported no influence of campus locations on their enrollment decision.

The encouragement of friends and family is an influence in college enrollment decisions, according to the Model of Community College Choice. Interview participants were asked about the support of friends and family during the application process in an effort to determine what impact it had on their decision-making. Seven of the nine interviewees reported no encouragement from friends, but seven of nine reported encouragement from family. One student who said he received the backing of friends said they "helped [him] with choices and good advice." Similarly, those who got help from family told of advice and input given by relatives rather than assistance with the application and enrollment process. Students described familial encouragement in these ways:

1. "My uncle did welding and encouraged me to go."
2. "My dad helped…because he's on campus every day."
3. "My family who works as a truck driver said that it was a good career."
4. "[My family encouraged me by] telling me to think about my future and long-term goals."

One interview subject said his family supported him "verbally." Between the interview participants, this passive, "verbal" type of support appeared to be the most common.

Interview Data—Research Question 3

Research Question 3 is concerned with those obstacles that are perceived by potential students. Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 required a line of inquiry regarding specific college services, cost, geographic proximity, goals, etc. Research Question 3 required a more open-ended, general line of questioning that enabled participants an opportunity to give their reason for not enrolling.

Each interviewee was asked about their experience with the SCTC admissions process. This question was designed to elicit opinions about the process, and to determine whether these opinions were positive or negative. Six of the nine interviewees had a positive judgment of the admissions process, calling it "easy" and "fine," with one describing it as "smooth, efficient" and another as "professional." One student stated that he "got helped a lot with my questions," indicating a willingness to assist by SCTC Student Affairs staff members. Three interview participants reported a negative estimation of SCTC admissions procedures. One interviewee said there "was a lot of clutter" and "a lot of running around" when he applied to SCTC. Another subject reinforced this view, describing admissions as "unorganized" and stating that he received information in an "untimely way." One interview subject was very unhappy with admissions. She stated that the process "was a problem because Admissions didn't explain what needed to be done after I applied and tested…there was no communication." This applicant went on to say she "never got the information" about cost and financial aid after applying and that although the office was open she could not "get people on the phone" and "no one helped." She stated that she believed SCTC could help her attain her career goals "if [she] can figure out admissions."

At the conclusion of each interview, a final question asked students if there was anything they wanted to say about SCTC's admissions process and if there were any obstacles that kept them from enrolling. Six students reported no institutional obstacles in response to this question, with one saying SCTC's process was "no trouble compared to other colleges I've applied to in the past." Three students, though, did encounter various issues. One said SCTC's website was not clear and that he "couldn't find information about costs and other things online." Another stated that it was "hard to get people by phone to get funding." The third said that "the

communication process isn't good" and that "the college should be able to let people know what they need to get started." The answers to this question are similar to those regarding this group's experience applying to SCTC. Some students seem to easily navigate the admissions process, while others report not getting the assistance they need to successfully apply and enroll.

The nine interview participants had various reasons for not enrolling at SCTC, despite being accepted. One subject said "not having a ride was 100% of the reason why I didn't enroll." Three others reported a conflict with their job schedule. Another student said that he would have enrolled, but his chosen program (welding) had a waitlist due to space limitations and that he had not yet made it to the top. Only one student reported admissions process as the reason for not attending. She said that had she been able to get through this and had she received what she deemed an appropriate level of assistance, she would have enrolled.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1 – What are the relationships between enrollment at SCTC and goal attainment for prospective students who are accepted but do not enroll in college Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?

For this study, questions were designed to determine interviewees' career goals, whether they felt SCTC programs could help them reach these career goals, and whether they felt SCTC programs could lead to success in their chosen professions. Expectancy Theory describes student goals and the instrumentality of education in reaching these goals as an important factor when making a decision to enroll (Estes & Polnick, 2012). Because motivation is an important part of college student decision-making, the connection between enrollment and career goal attainment was examined in this study. Additionally, the Model of Community College Choice

includes student aspirations as a factor in accepted student decisions regarding enrollment (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006). Because of this basis in the literature, this study included a line of inquiry regarding career goals that indicated interview participants were mostly certain about their personal aspirations. Of the nine interviewees, six had goals that aligned with the program for which they had applied. Students described both "need[ing]" SCTC programs to obtain their career goals and that SCTC programs could "help" them to obtain their career goals. Several students indicated a positive perception of SCTC programs, and described them as being of high quality. None of the students interviewed reported negative perceptions of SCTC programs. The value of SCTC and the necessity for college programs in goal and career attainment for the interview participants was clear. Interviewees maintained a positive opinion regarding this and expressed an understanding of the connection between program quality/necessity and goal attainment. No participants expressed this as impactful in their decision to not enroll.

Research Question 2 – What reasons are given by accepted students for not enrolling in SCTC Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?

Six areas were examined for this study as potential reasons for not enrolling at SCTC, based on scholarly research. These six factors were based on the Model of Community College Choice (Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks, 2006), which describes them as common barriers to enrollment. They are background with the college admissions process, cost, SCTC student support services, location of SCTC campuses, encouragement from friends of applicants, and encouragement from family of applicants.

Eight of the nine interview participants reported no previous experience with college application processes. One student described applying as "stressful" because they "had never done the admissions process before." Another stated that they completed the application "on [their] own." Three of the nine interview participants reported some level of confusion with the admissions process, and felt that communication by staff and through online resources could have been more effective. Although a large majority of the interviewees had no previous experience with college admissions, most expressed a positive attitude towards SCTC's process. However, one-third of the participants felt that it could have been better. Communication was the overriding concern from this group. Because of a perceived lack of communication, they were unsure of what they needed to do.

Interview participants were asked about the role of cost in their decision to not enroll in classes at SCTC. Cost was not a determining factor for any of the nine potential students interviewed for this study. One said it was "no issue," and seven said they had received some type of aid to offset or cover all costs, with Pell, HOPE (Georgia's lottery funded scholarship program), and the GI Bill were all mentioned as sources of this aid by various study participants. A personal hypothesis of the researcher for this study was that cost and procurement of financial aid would be a primary indicator of accepted students' decision to not attend. Based on interview data, though, this appears to play a small role in why this group did not enroll at SCTC.

Student support services includes SCTC's accommodations coordinators, Title IX coordinator, veteran's coordinator, and career and academic planning. Six of the nine particpants stated that student support services played no role. Seemingly, this group had no contact with student support services during the process, saying they "didn't work with them" and that there

was “no impact” of these services on their decision to not enroll. Three of the nine participants reported a positive correlation between services provided and their perception of the college. Student support services played some part for these applicants, and there were no reports of negative interactions. But no students reported a correlation between these services and their decision to not enroll. The fact that the group studied here was not enrolled means that they may have not reached a point in their academic career where they would need these types of services. But veteran’s benefits and career and academic planning are SCTC offices that can be utilized by future students, and that would be valuable resources for those just starting college classes. Because a small number of the interview participants utilized these resources, it appears communication regarding their availability and value may be lacking for accepted students.

Regarding campus locations, only one of the nine interview participants for this study described proximity as an issue, stating that the location “stopped me because CDL is not in Griffin.” Indeed, Commercial Truck Driving is only offered at Butts County and Upson County SCTC locations. Another student, though not deterred by location, also conveyed a need for Commercial Truck Driving at the SCTC Griffin Campus but said it was not a determining factor for the decision to not enroll. All other interview participants reported no influence of campus locations on their enrollment decision. Geographic proximity is an important factor, influencing at least one of nine interviewees’ decision to not attend. But because Technical College System of Georgia institutions operate under a well-defined service delivery area model, it seems to not be impactful for most accepted students in their decision to not enroll.

Interview participants were asked about the support of friends and family during the application process in an effort to determine what impact it had on their decision-making. Seven of the nine interviewees reported no encouragement from friends, but seven of nine reported

encouragement from family. Family influence was overwhelmingly reported as more important than the influence of friends among interview participants for this study. Family were given as motivational factors, encouraging one interviewee to "think about [their] future and long term goals." In addition, two participants reported family members' recommendations for specific careers that aligned with their chosen college programs. The students who received encouragement from friends described some advice and assistance, but none to the level of what was received from family members. Family appeared to be more involved in goal setting and in providing direction.

Research Question 3 – What obstacles to enrollment are perceived by applicants who are accepted for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technician, and Automotive Technology programs?

Each interviewee was asked about their experience with the SCTC admissions process. These questions were designed to uncover factors that might not have been considered by the Model of Community College Choice or Expectancy Theory. Six of the nine interviewees had a positive judgment of the admissions process, calling it "easy" and "fine," with one describing it as "smooth, efficient" and another as "professional." One student stated that he "got helped a lot with my questions," indicating a willingness to assist by SCTC Student Affairs staff members. Three interview participants reported a negative estimation of SCTC admissions procedures. One interviewee said there "was a lot of clutter" and "a lot of running around" when he applied to SCTC. Another subject reinforced this view, describing admissions as "unorganized" and stating that he received information in an "untimely way." One interview subject was very unhappy with admissions. She stated that the process "was a problem because Admissions didn't explain what needed to be done after I applied and tested…there was no communication."

This applicant went on to say she "never got the information" about cost and financial aid after applying and that although the office was open she could not "get people on the phone" and "no one helped." She stated that she believed SCTC could help her attain her career goals "if [she] can figure out admissions." Although some students seem to easily navigate the admissions process, others report not getting the assistance they need to successfully apply and enroll. The primary issue for these students who maintained negative perceptions of the SCTC admissions process was communication. Despite the college's communication flow via letter and email for these students, they were unable to get the information they felt was needed.

At the conclusion of each interview, a final question asked students if there was anything they wanted to say about SCTC's admissions process and if there were any obstacles that kept them from enrolling. Six students reported no institutional obstacles in response to this question, with one saying SCTC's process was "no trouble compared to other colleges I've applied to in the past." Three students, though, did encounter various issues. One said SCTC's website was not clear and that he "couldn't find information about costs and other things online." Another stated that it was "hard to get people by phone to get funding." The third said that "the communication process isn't good" and that "the college should be able to let people know what they need to get started." The answers to this question are similar to those regarding this group's experience applying to SCTC. Participants perceived barriers for not enrolling include: inability to reach staff members for questions, difficulty in receiving communication from the college addressing potential questions, and inability to easily access answers to questions using SCTC's website.

The nine interview participants had various reasons for not enrolling at SCTC, despite being accepted. One subject said "not having a ride was 100% of the reason why I didn't

enroll." Three others reported a conflict with their job schedule. Another student said that he would have enrolled, but his chosen program (welding) had a waitlist due to space limitations and that he had not yet made it to the top. Only one student reported admissions process as the reason for not attending: she said that had she been able to get through this and had she received what she deemed an appropriate level of assistance, she would have enrolled. Compatibility with work schedule was the most common reason for not enrolling among this group. Because the students who apply for SCTC's Commercial Truck Driving, Welding and Joining Technology, and Automotive Technology programs are mostly non-traditional, conflicting work schedules will often be a consideration. This age group typically has family obligations not shared by traditional college students.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretation and Discussion of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine barriers and issues for students who were accepted at Southern Crescent Technical College, but who did not enroll in class. By determining these issues, SCTC and other similar institutions may be able to address this problem, offering better services designed to offset potential barriers to enrollment. Analysis of applicant demographic data and applicant interview data showed some commonalities among this group, but also some factors that influenced individuals rather than the group as a whole. Following is a synthesis of the data, an analysis of the data, and interpretation of the data. The population studied here represents a large number of underserved applicants, so suggestions for further study are also offered here, along with suggestions for institutions that intend to confront these issues.

An examination of interview data indicates applicants to SCTC have very different experiences when navigating the admissions process. Determining predominant themes is difficult, because each potential student brings a different background and point of view to their college admissions experience. However, some commonalities are evident in the data, through both an evaluation of interviews by the researcher and by Nvivo, software used to assess qualitative research.

There was a common belief among this group that enrollment in an SCTC program was an integral part of their career goal attainment. Although some of the participants did not have

specific career goals, all viewed SCTC as important for them to move forward occupationally. One-third of these potential students went so far as to say SCTC programs were "needed" for them to attain their goals, due to licensures and certifications that required post-secondary education. In addition, all participants felt SCTC programs to be high quality. Based on interview responses, it is clear that attending SCTC is something that applicants feel is central to being successful in the workplace.

Interview participants reported little to no experience with the college admissions process with only one familiar with application procedures. Despite their inexperience, only one student, the one who was familiar with the admissions process, stated that he received direct assistance from friends or family when applying. Most interview participants said they were encouraged by family, but only in intangible ways: through advice, not through assistance with paperwork. And friends were even less helpful, as only two received support from non-family members. Accepted students who do not enroll are largely unfamiliar with how the application process works, receive little direct assistance from family, and little assistance at all from friends.

Geography and student support services were both unimportant factors in enrollment decision-making for interview participants. Eight of nine interviewees said campus locations played no role in their choice to not attend SCTC. Likewise, all nine said student support services played no role in their choice to not attend SCTC. Three received assistance from SCTC support staff members, but did not indicate that this assistance played into their decision to not enroll. While proximity to campus and support staff are variables considered by the Model for Community College Choice, for SCTC accepted students they are not concerns.

Cost was not a determining factor for any of this study's interview participants. One student stated that she had not gotten any information about financial aid, but did not claim this

as her reason for not enrolling. Her reason, rather, was that she did not receive any communication from SCTC after submitting an application. Technical college students have a wide variety of aid options, and this group of interviewees reported receipt of aid and an ability to pay their tuition and fees at SCTC. Overwhelmingly, cost does not seem to play a role in the decision made by some accepted students to not enroll.

While six of the nine interviewees maintained a positive perception of SCTC admissions procedures, three participants believed the process to be "unorganized" with "a lot of running around" and poor communication. The six potential students who reported a positive experience described the process as "easy" and believed they were able to get help from SCTC staff members when needed. This indicates that for most students, the SCTC admissions process is simple and straightforward. For some, though, there are negative feelings about the SCTC admissions process. The experience of this second group indicates that there is a lack of clarity in communication sent by the SCTC Admissions Office.

Synthesis of Data

Chapter IV includes data collected through observation of SCTC's admissions process, applicant demographic data, and applicant interview data. Below is an overview of this data, including conclusions drawn from data and suggestions for further research. The following summary of data includes an explanation of the SCTC admissions process, demographic data for the group being analyzed for this study, and data collected in interviews for this study.

The Southern Crescent Technical College admissions may be completed either online or in person. Admissions representatives are available at each SCTC location, and phone numbers and email addresses for admissions and recruitment staff are posted online, so students who are

unable to visit campus have ready access to a point of contact as they work through the admissions process.

When a student applies to SCTC, they receive two initial contacts with instructions on how to proceed. They are also given phone numbers for the Admissions Office, the Financial Aid Office, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of Veteran Affairs. Upon completion of the application process and after being admitted to the college, accepted students receive a letter informing them of their updated status. They are given a new checklist that asks them to apply for financial aid, to schedule an appointment with an advisor, to schedule an appointment with SCTC's Special Populations Coordinator if a disability accommodation is needed, and information about college orientation. This letter serves as the final contact for accepted students, and gives them the final steps to become enrolled in SCTC classes.

Application and CCSSE data provided a snapshot of SCTC's student body, and of the group analyzed for this study. Demographically, this group of accepted students for Automotive Technology, Commercial Truck Driving, and Welding, from the 2015 Fall Semester through the 2018 Fall Semester included 417 applicants in total with an average age of 31.41 and a median age of 28.

Application information indicates that 85.6% were male. Because the three programs being analyzed are non-traditional for females, this type of split was expected. In addition to the unequal gender numbers, the majority of this group was also non-white, with 60.6% identifying as black, multi-racial, Asian, or American Indian. Of the rest, 32.1% were white and 7.2% were not identified, meaning they did not indicate a race on their application. Lastly, the age of this student group indicates a mostly non-traditional pool of applicants. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, non-traditional students are over 24 years of age (Definitions and

Data, n.d.). This group, on average and in median, far exceeds the minimum age considered traditional for undergraduate enrollment.

Interview data collected for this study allowed for a deeper level of understanding regarding student barriers and issues. Instead of only seeing raw numbers regarding race and age, interviews enabled students to explicitly state their reasons for completing the application process, but never enrolling at SCTC. The interviews were based on decision-making theoretical concepts, and focused on three overarching themes: motivation, reasons for not enrolling, and obstacles to enrollment.

College applicants' motivation is often tied directly to goal attainment. Because college attendance is related to career aspirations, the motivations for enrolling and completing a program are related to whether students' believe attendance necessary for their chosen career goals. For this study, the majority of those interviewed (six of nine) felt SCTC programs would lead to success in their chosen careers. And of the three who did not express this sentiment, there was not a negative perception of SCTC's programs. Rather it was uncertainty or an adjustment to their personal career goals.

When addressing reasons for not enrolling, there were six topics discussed with interview participants: background with the college admissions process, cost, college student support services, campus locations, encouragement received from friends, and encouragement received from family. Eight of nine interviewees reported no prior experience with the college admissions process. The applicant who did report prior experience was dual enrolled as a high school student, and said that this provided him with an understanding of how admissions worked. Cost was not an issue for any interview participants. In fact, seven of nine had received aid that would offset some or all of their tuition. Similarly, most had no interaction with SCTC student

support services, as six of nine said it had no impact on their decision to not enroll. Three of nine used some college service and had a positive interaction with these staff members, but did not indicate a correlation between these services and their decision to not enroll. Regarding campus locations, only one of the nine interviewees reported this as an issue impacting enrollment. Her chosen program was not available at the campus closest to her residence. Two of nine applicants reported receiving encouragement from friends, and seven of nine reported receiving encouragement from family. No interviewees received negative feedback from friends or family about enrolling at SCTC.

Interview questions also addressed obstacles encountered by students during the admissions process. Specifically, interviewees were asked about their perceptions of admissions and also about any issues they met that were not already mentioned. Six of nine participants reported positive opinions about SCTC admissions, calling it "easy", "smooth", and "efficient, professional." However, three applicants maintained a negative view, describing disorganization and an inability to get their questions answered. One student reported never receiving anything regarding next steps after being accepted. Another student expressed frustration with SCTC's website, stating that he could not find needed information online.

Implications

A better understanding of why students accepted to technical colleges choose to not take classes could lead growth in college enrollment numbers and in more impactful services being provided for this group. In determining common perceptions and factors between SCTC applicants who were accepted but decided to not enroll, college resources could be deployed to address these commonalities. These resources could enhance the experiences of prospective students and could enable colleges to expand the population they serve. Several study

participants noted issues with college communication and confusion about next steps in the enrollment process. Colleges could refine materials to be more clear for students who are new to post-secondary education, including language that can be understood by most rather than just those who are familiar with admissions. Additionally, providing more information online for potential students could help as they navigate admissions and work to register for classes. For all students, even those who reported not enrolling due to personal- and employment-related reasons, providing a reliable point of contact at the college could be helpful. Students who are confused or who have questions may be deterred if a college employee with answers cannot be easily reached.

These suggestions are based on the results of this study, which is limited in scope. Further research must be conducted to determine exact steps that could be taken by colleges in addressing the needs of this accepted but not enrolled group. Communication between the college and applicants is clearly in need of improvement based on this study's results, but there may be other factors that influence students. The three programs selected for this study included many non-traditional students, so other program areas and types of colleges may find different types of barriers to enrollment.

Limitations of Study

This study was limited in the number of potential students that were examined. There were 6768 total accepted applicants who decided not to enroll at SCTC from the 2015 Fall Semester to the 2018 Fall Semester. This study, in focusing only on those who had applied for the Automotive Technology, Welding and Joining Technician, and Commercial Truck Driving programs, only determined issues pertaining to that group and made up only 6% of the overall number who were accepted and did not enroll at SCTC. These programs and the industries they

train for are male-dominated, meaning that factors influencing female decision-making may not have been evident. In addition, because they only comprise 6% of all accepted, not enrolled students, there may have been issues that impacted other program areas' applicants, but that did not come through in this research.

This study is also limited to only those applicants at SCTC. As a technical college, student profiles at SCTC may differ from those at four-year colleges and universities. Because of this, issues impacting bachelor degree-bound students may vary from those described in this study. Additionally, some decision-making factors could be regional. SCTC's service delivery area is suburban and just outside of Atlanta. Applicants to colleges in rural and urban areas may encounter a different set of obstacles or have different needs than those to SCTC.

Another limitation for this study is my role as the Director of Recruitment at SCTC. I approached all data collection, including interviews, as bias-free as possible. But my knowledge of the process and what is involved in becoming a student at SCTC may have influenced how I asked questions and interpreted data.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine why accepted applicants to technical college make the decision to not attend. Because the college application process is time-consuming, its completion indicates commitment to the institution. The large number of potential students who make the decision not to enroll after being accepted represent a group that could be better served by technical colleges. Additionally, their attendance could assist colleges in meeting enrollment goals. Finding out why these students do not enroll could allow colleges to enact measures addressing their concerns, thereby providing better service and growing enrollment. By interviewing nine accepted students who did not enroll at SCTC, this study uncovered perceived

barriers for this group. Colleges can now focus on removing these barriers for these prospective students.

For accepted students at SCTC, the data collected for this study indicates a clarity of career goals. The group interviewed expressed an interest in goals that required higher education. Three of nine interviewees said SCTC could "help" them become qualified workers, and three others said they "needed" SCTC in order to be qualified for jobs in their chosen fields. Information gleaned from interviews shows this group of potential students sees a positive relationship between college enrollment and career goal attainment.

Despite their need for post-secondary education, eight of nine interview participants described having no prior experience with college admissions. Most, seven of nine, received assistance from family members during the application process. Though there was little direct knowledge of this process among the potential students, they reported support systems that encouraged their college-going goals. Cost was not a factor for the nine students interviewed for this study, and campus proximity only played a role in the decision to not attend for one of the nine participants.

Most of the interviewees reported the application process at SCTC as being straightforward. This may have been because paperwork requirements are relatively minimal at for technical colleges when compared to other post-secondary institutions. However, one subject described the process as "unorganized" and another expressed a lack of clarity in necessary steps. Another said that there was "a lot of clutter" with admissions. In addition, one noted that "the communication process isn't good." Judged against other potential issues, like goal attainment, cost, and proximity, it would seem that communication between the SCTC Admissions Office and potential students was the clearest obstacle to enrollment for accepted

applicants. Though students felt the process was simple, they still believed they needed more information to make a decision regarding enrollment.

Recommendations

For SCTC and other colleges to better meet the needs of accepted students and to enable their enrollment in classes, better communication is necessary. Although SCTC provides application information and enrollment process assistance, potential students may have trouble determining exactly what they need to do to register for classes. Some students may be unaware of Admissions Office hours, as they are not easily found on the SCTC website. Also, college staff members' contact information, while available online, is difficult to access for a newcomer to the process. This lack of electronic forthrightness could potentially lead to confusion and frustration for applicants. The letters and email that go to applicants and accepted students are clear, and provide necessary information. But they do not go beyond what is necessary, and also do not provide a specific point of contact for potential students who may have questions about what comes next. The Admissions Office utilizes an *alphasort* system for applicants, meaning all potential students are divided by last name among two staff members. Including these staff members' email addresses and instructions to contact with further questions would be helpful. The Career and Academic Planning Center is also an integral part of the new student enrollment process, handling advisement for all new students. Because advisors are assigned to students based on program of study, it would also be helpful for students to receive specific contact information for their advisor so that they would know who to contact to make a schedule.

Addressing the needs of those students who are accepted to a technical college but decide to not enroll could lead to enrollment gains. For those institutions intent on serving this body and thereby growing enrollment, further study is needed. Determining the types of resources that

would lead this group's decision to enroll requires more research. This study makes clear that effective communication is a predominating need for this group, but which methods of improved communication would be most effective is unclear.

In addition, the data collected for this study pertains only to technical college applicants, most of whom are non-traditional. Four-year college applicants may encounter another set of obstacles and bring a different type of perspective to the application process than technical college applicants. Also, traditional students (i.e., those under 24 years of age) would be influenced by different factors than non-traditional students. Issues for these groups, that is those applicants to four-year colleges and those who are traditional in age, may be different than for the group studied here.

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Appendix A—Invitation to Participate in Study Email

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study of recent applicants to technical colleges. I am working to learn why accepted students make certain decisions regarding enrollment, and would like to interview you about your experiences with this process.

If you agree to participate as an interview subject (the time commitment should be brief for this-interviews should be approximately thirty minutes in length), you will be provided with a $5 gift card for your trouble.

Interviews will be recorded, and all data will be kept locked in a secure location. Upon completion of the study, all data will be destroyed. Participants will not be identified by name in this study.

If you have any questions about the study then please contact me at todddrew@yahoo.com or (770)301-2728. The Principal Investigator for this project is Professor John Mativo with the University of Georgia. If you have any questions for him, he may be reached at jmativo@uga.edu.

To sign up as a participant, just reply to this email with your contact information, and you will be notified of details soon.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Drew Todd

Appendix B—Interview Instrument

1. Describe your experience with Southern Crescent Technical College's (hereafter, SCTC) admissions process.

2. How did your personal background and circumstances affect your admissions process experience?

3. What are your career goals? Do you think SCTC can help you reach those career goals? Did your career goals influence your decision to not enroll?

4. What role did cost play in your decision to not enroll at SCTC?

5. Did your receipt of financial aid play a role in your decision to not enroll at SCTC? In what way?

6. How did student support services (ie, veteran's, special populations, tutoring, etc.) affect your decision to not enroll at SCTC? Did SCTC's student support services adequately meet your needs?

7. Does SCTC offer an academic program that matches your interests? Did the lack of an academic program that matches your interests influence your decision to not enroll at SCTC?

8. Did you encounter any issues with access (ie, office hours, help from college staff members, useful information, etc.) during the enrollment process at Southern Crescent Technical College?

9. Did Southern Crescent Technical College locations influence your decision to not enroll at SCTC? How?

10. Are you hopeful that you will be successful in your chosen profession? Do you think SCTC can help you be successful in your chosen profession? Did SCTC's capability in helping you be successful in your chosen profession influence your decision to not enroll?

11. What level of encouragement did you receive from your friends as you worked through the enrollment process at SCTC? How did the encouragement of your friends influence your decision to not enroll at SCTC?

12. What level of encouragement did you receive from your family as you worked through the enrollment process at Southern Crescent Technical College? How did the encouragement of your family influence your decision to not enroll at SCTC?

13. What else would you like to add about your experience with SCTC's enrollment process? What obstacles did you encounter that led to your decision to not enroll at SCTC?