

Adult College Student Choice:
Individual and Institutional Factors that Influence Students

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Executive Summary

The Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) asked us to explore why adult students, individuals age 25 and over, in Tennessee choose to enroll in private nonprofit institutions like their member campuses. It is their hope that better understanding adult college student choice will support TICUA's role in the Tennessee Drive-to-55 initiative. To understand the issue context, we explored existing data sets from TICUA and the Tennessee higher education commission (THEC). To frame our research and study questions we met with staff of TICUA, THEC, and several campus administrators. After developing our study questions, we reviewed literature on college choice and adult students. Finally, we administered a survey of current adult students enrolled at several TICUA institutions and conducted interviews with adult students and campus administrators who work with adult students. Our analysis of these data sets led us to posit a set of best practices specific to Tennessee private, nonprofit colleges and universities. TICUA institutions can draw on this set of best practices in ways that suit their geographic contexts, program offerings, and campus culture.

Tennessee is a laboratory for higher education innovation. A strong state lottery scholarship program has supported the growth of several initiatives that align with the latest thinking of the U.S. Department of Education and national think tank organizations like Lumina Foundation (USDE, 2012; Lumina, 2016). The Tennessee Reconnect program has mirrored Lumina's call for states to serve adult students through first credentials, articulated pathways, and advising. The 2017 expansion of the Tennessee Promise scholarships, through the Tennessee Reconnect Act, gives adults free community college and puts the state ahead of any other in supporting adult college students (Fain, 2014). Tennessee's higher education programs also largely address U.S. Department of Education recommendations for supporting adult learners with programs targeting access, quality, and completion (USDE, 2012).

While TICUA's membership of four-year institutions are largely excluded from press coverage surrounding the Tennessee Promise scholarships, these 34 campuses award the bachelor's degree that is more highly coveted by employers and more versatile in the job market (CEW 2010, 2013). TICUA institutions certainly serve a smaller number of adult learners than other segments of the Tennessee higher education community, but they are expected to serve increasing numbers of adult students and offer experiences and programs unavailable at public or for-profit institutions (THEC, 2015). Additionally, nearly a third of bachelor's degrees awarded by TICUA institutions go to adult students (THEC, 2016).

Our review of the existing data and literature suggest that students aged 25 and older pursue higher education in different ways than traditional aged students. These differences are best served by changes to marketing, recruiting, onboarding, classroom engagement, and path to degree. Adult students are more focused on specific employment outcomes, expect efficient administrative services, welcome classroom rigor, and require a clear and timely path to graduation and credentialing. While the four-year bachelor's degree is more sought-after by employers and more flexible in the national job market, adult students prefer to know that the knowledge and skills they personally learn will be worth the time and energy they expend to acquire them.

Introduction

Background and Context of Problem

The Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) represents Tennessee's 34 member private colleges and universities. TICUA institutions educate over 80,000 students and confer more than 19,000 degrees a year (TICUA, 2011). TICUA supports its members' campuses by "working collaboratively in areas of public policy, cost containment, and professional development" (TICUA, 2011). One public policy area of interest is increasing attainment among Tennessee adult students who are individuals age 25 and over. For such students, TICUA is interested to better understand why those individuals might return to college and might select a private, independent college or university.

TICUA's interest in adult education is supported by the 2014 adoption of Governor Haslam's signature higher education policies, Drive-to-55 and Tennessee Promise (TICUA, 2014). While not a state agency, TICUA worked closely with the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), the University of Tennessee system and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) in the development and implementation of Drive-to-55 and Tennessee Promise (TICUA, 2014). Tennessee's goal is to have an adult population where 55% have a higher education credential by 2025. The Tennessee Promise provides a last-dollar tuition award to resident students who meet minimum requirements; meaning that this aid program covers costs not met by public funding available through PELL grants, the HOPE Scholarship, and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA) (TSAC, 2016). However, in order to reach the 55% goal by 2025, Tennessee colleges and universities must engage adult and returning students. The goal cannot be reached with recent high school graduates alone (THEC, 2015). In recognition of the need to engage first time college attending and returning students over the age of 25, the Drive-to-55 initiative includes another program called Tennessee Reconnect. The aim of Tennessee Reconnect is to recruit adult or 'non-traditional students' to enroll in Tennessee higher education institutions (TSAC, 2016). TICUA has engaged our capstone team to learn more about adult college choice decisions in order to increase TICUA member campus enrollments of adult learners. Not only do adult students play an important role in the governor's higher education programs, but adult students and the degree they receive from TICUA institutions will shape Tennessee's economic productivity and workforce for years to come.

The economist Milton Friedman declared that investment in training yields higher rates of return than investment in physical capital (Friedman, 1955). It was Friedman who also noted a "sizable underinvestment in human beings" since at least the early 20th century and declared the situation a failure of the market warranting government intervention. Such arguments were the basis for numerous government programs supporting student attendance at U.S. colleges and universities. Education continues to provide substantial return on investment and many students who could benefit from its returns do not invest. The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce (CEW) makes a particularly persuasive case in their report titled *The Undereducated American* (Carnevale and Rose, 2011). The CEW report points to historic growth in economic productivity and reduced economic inequality as key reasons for expanding educational attainment. Of course, economic benefits are not the only positive outcomes associated with higher education. College graduates also experience greater health and happiness, and are less likely to commit crimes (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). However, much of the current public debate has focused on the economic returns to individuals and the broader economy. While the

most recent 2016 presidential election included multiple mainstream candidates calling for higher education reform, much of the policy action has occurred within state contexts. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) publishes an annual policy brief of pressing state higher education concerns. This annual brief selects ten concerns for each year and makes note of states at the forefront of each issue. Tennessee has received multiple mentions in each of the 2015, 2016, and 2017 reports, particularly for its innovative funding for higher education and scholarship programs (AASCU).

The Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program (TELS) was created by a 2002 referendum that provided for a state lottery with revenue dedicated to postsecondary scholarships (Bruce and Fox, 2010). The scholarships are available to traditional-aged Tennessee high school graduates who meet academic requirements and to Tennessee residents 25 years and older with annual family adjusted gross income less than \$36,000 (TSAC, 2017a, 2017b). Research has concluded that Tennessee's HOPE scholarship had no perceptible influence on the decision to attend college, but the scholarship did influence students to pursue more prestigious four-year institutions over two-year schools in some cases (Bruce and Carruthers, 2014). The report did not specifically address whether these trends hold for nontraditional adults students. While traditional-age college students enroll shortly after graduating high school, adults can choose to attend college under a wider variety of circumstances that often include full-time employment and family responsibilities beyond those of the average American 18 year old.

Tennessee's Governor Bill Haslam went beyond the state's HOPE scholarships to create the first state-wide free community college program in the United States called Tennessee Promise (Fain, 2014). At the same time, Governor Haslam called for Tennessee to grow the number of residents with a college credential to 55% of the state adult population by 2025. The "Drive-to-55," as it became called, relied on the HOPE scholarships, the TN Promise, and the TN Reconnect program, which allowed Tennessee adults to earn a tuition-free certificate at certain state institutions. Since then, TN Reconnect has been expanded to give adults the same benefits toward a two-year degree as the TN Promise initiative. The Reconnect program defines adults as 25 years of age and older. Tennessee's Higher Education Commission (THEC) believes the expansion addresses a much discussed hole in the Drive-to-55 programs by including adults (Smith, 2017). Tennessee is home to 900,000 adults with some college, but no degree (THEC, 2015a). THEC knows that adult students will make up the bulk of credentials needed for reaching the governor's 55% goal by 2025 (THEC, 2015a, 2015b). These continuing program expansions have received national attention and raise questions about replicability in other state contexts (Smith, 2017). For now, Tennessee appears to be unique and an experiment worthy of investigation. Unfortunately, the benefits of Tennessee's programs have not equally benefited all sectors of Tennessee higher education. Only 4% of Drive-to-55 program recipients have enrolled at four-year private institutions because the program benefits can only be used for certificates and associate degrees, and not the bachelor's degrees most common at such schools (Smith, 2017).

Despite the publicity around the Drive-to-55 and its suite of programs, four-year institutions are largely ignored. TICUA's president, Claude Pressnell said "it's billed as a community college program (Smith, 2017)." It is true that certificates and associate degrees are the faster way to achieve the state's 55% goal. However, bachelor's degrees are very important in the labor market. THEC's own analysis acknowledges the importance of such degrees in certain fields and notes that bachelor's degrees will continue to be the most awarded degree in the state (THEC, 2015). In 2014, TICUA institutions served approximately 20% of adult

undergraduates in the Tennessee higher education community (THEC, 2016). Also, nearly a third of bachelor's degrees awarded by TICUA institutions go to adult students (THEC, 2016). Combined, these facts mean that adult undergraduate recipients are an important part of TICUA's enrollments and an important element of Tennessee's future economic competitiveness.

Tennessee's higher education commission published a report in 2016 concerning the workforce demand for college degrees in the state (THEC, 2016). The report also detailed the degrees being produced by the state to match those workforce needs. The report notes that most demand comes from certain sectors of the economy, including construction, transportation and logistics, medical professions, banking and finance, computer programming and multimedia management. These sectors are experiencing statewide deficits of people with much-needed skills. While many of the needed skills pair directly with certification and degree programs in the state, other jobs requiring a bachelor's degree have a less direct connection to specific degree programs. For example, many job postings requiring a bachelor's degree cite strong communication skills that can be supplied in a number of degree programs. Banking, teaching, and business analytics sectors also require bachelor's degrees for a large number of their open positions, yet these jobs do not necessarily have a single corresponding degree program. TICUA institutions offer an extensive number of degrees that meet the requirements of these jobs.

Tennessee employers certainly have need of job candidates with bachelor's degrees. However, national research also shows the importance and flexibility of bachelor's degrees in the post-recession economy. According to a report from the Georgetown University Center on Education the Workforce (CEW), the least educated are the first to be laid-off in times of recession (Carnevale et al., 2013). Better educated employees are retained at higher rates and command higher salaries. The highest job-growth in the post-recession economy has been among those with bachelor's degree or higher. A rapidly decreasing share of jobs are available to those without any college and the jobs available to such workers are paid the least. The report's authors contend that some statistics on educational requirements are misleading because they aren't specific to new-entrants in the field. For example, managerial jobs may not be classified as requiring a degree because so many current managers lack a degree. Despite this lack of a categorical requirement, new hires are often expected to hold a degree. Our study occurs in this context where an educated workforce is needed by Tennessee to satisfy both policy objectives and economic realities.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to help inform practice of programs and policies of TICUA member campuses in how they attract, accept, and support adult college students. Findings from the quantitative and qualitative research of this study and from reviews of the literature identifies student perceptions and priorities in searching for and choosing a college. Findings from this study point to replicable best practices for private, independent colleges in TICUA's membership to most effectively attract, enroll, and support adult college students.

Study Questions

Our project will primarily seek to understand adult students' process in choosing a postsecondary institution, and more specifically, why they may choose a private nonprofit

institution over other options. To address these questions, we have divided our study into an examination of institutional behaviors and adult student choice.

Institutional Behavior that Impacts Adult Student College Choice.

Question 1) what are current best practices among TICUA institutions for recruiting and retaining adult students?

Question 2) what institutional characteristics or practices influence TICUA institutions to offer programming for adult students?

Question 3) what does literature and theory suggest are important factors in the recruitment and academic success of adult students?

Individual Behavior in Adult Student Choice.

Question 4) what factors are most influential in the adult student decision to enroll at any institution of higher education?

Question 5) what factors are most influential in the adult students' selection of any institution of higher education in which to enroll?

Question 6) what are the most pressing concerns of adult students enrolling at TICUA member institutions of higher education?

These research questions follow the extant research on college student choice, and consider additional factors germane to our study on adult students. These research questions address both the institutional and individual factors that influence the college choice process for adults. Studying adult student perspectives and priorities will provide better understanding of what aspects of the college choice process are specifically important to adult students over the age of 25. These research questions follow the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and the existing literature on this topic outlined in the following sections.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks Guiding Research

Our project involves a review of existing literature on adult college students, the college choice process, adult student choice behaviors, and adult learner persistence and college completion. We also reviewed existing literature and available data regarding enrollment and completion for adult students at TICUA institutions, including TICUA reports, available data files from THEC, TICUA member institution official documents, and pertinent Tennessee Reconnect documents as they were available.

This project seeks to fill in gaps in the literature around the adult college choice process. Current research does not extensively address which factors influence adult students in college choice. Extant research is largely limited to what is known about the traditional students' choice process. Our research design gathered primary data on adult students and overlaid these findings with existing and trusted models of the college choice process for traditional students in order to

get a working understanding of what factors are most critical in the adult college student choice process.

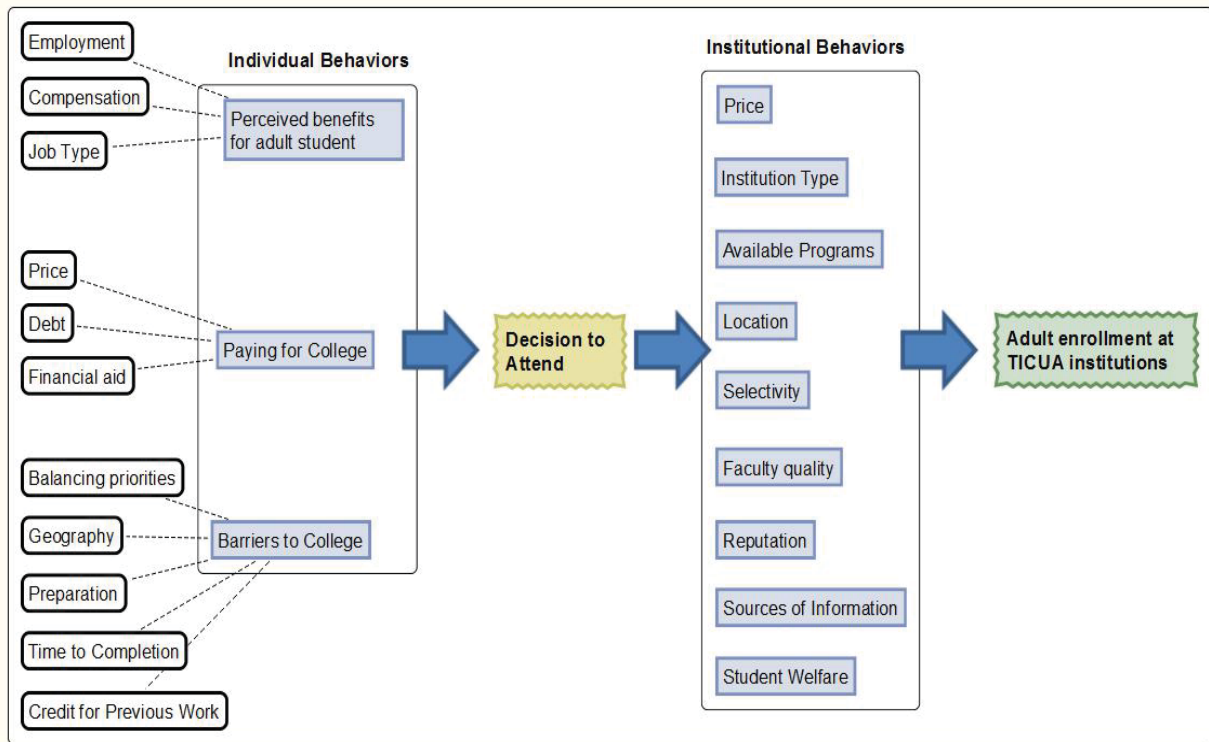
Evaluating institutional factors and behaviors appeared to be central to understanding influences on the adult student college choice process. Braxton et al.'s (2014) work on *Rethinking College Student Retention* was utilized as a resource to guide our research framework. In *Rethinking College Student Retention*, attitudes and perceptions of institutions where commuter school students were enrolled revealed critical information on what institutional factors and characteristics seem most important in the success of commuter students. Given that adult students are almost an exclusively commuter student population, this framework from Braxton et al. (2014) was used as an underlying model for understanding the institutional factors that are important to adult students.

Further, Perna's (2006) "Studying College Access and Choice: a Proposed Conceptual Model" is one of the most accepted frameworks for understanding the traditional student college choice process. By connecting this conceptual model to data gathered from the 2013 Public Agenda survey, *Is College Worth It for Me?*, where adults were surveyed on the benefits of college enrollment and degree completion, we developed a framework for exploring adult college student choice with an understanding of the individual factors that are important to adults in this college choice process. Our study conceptual framework and research questions were developed based on subsequent consideration of both the importance of institutional factors and individual factors in influencing the adult college choice process.

Our theoretical model and conceptual framework operationalized these access and choice theories already put forward in the literature, while specifically addressing the perceptions of, and barriers to, Tennessee adult students. Building on specific frameworks from the existing literature on college student choice and access of Braxton et al., Perna, and others, while including revisions and information from TICUA staff, we developed a specific conceptual framework integrating existing frameworks applied to this specific context for adult students in Tennessee. A review of the literature suggests that both individual and institutional behavior factors influence the adult college choice process. Building on this research, outlined in the capstone project literature review, we have developed a conceptual framework that shows a concept map of the relationship between these factors and the adult college choice process. The conceptual framework guided the selection and refining of our survey instrument and the development of our adult student and staff interview protocols.

Our framework takes into account both factors that appear to be of importance as adults decide if they will enroll in postsecondary education and where they will enroll, along with considering what aspects of institutions seem to be most appealing and important to adults as they decide if and where to enroll in college. The literature review explains the connections outlined in the conceptual framework, and analysis of our data illustrates how these institutional and individual factors inform the adult college choice process. The conceptual framework is outlined below (Figure 1). To see a matrix of how extant research informed the development of this conceptual framework, view the table in Appendix B.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for both Institutional Behavior and Individual Behavior in Adult Student College Choice



It is important to note that our capstone study will not focus on the factors that support adult college student persistence. While current frameworks addressing college student persistence examine institutional and individual factors that support student success, the request of TICUA, is to explore the adult college student choice process exclusively, in order to better understand what factors are the most central in decision processes as adults consider returning to school and choosing between post-secondary education options. A full report of findings from the literature review that supported this conceptual framework and provided greater understanding of what is known about the adult college student choice process is found in Appendix A.

Design of Study

Data Collection

The crux of our capstone project is to build an understanding of the adult college student choice process and the institutional and individual factors that play a leading role in that process. To create our study questions and establish the scope of our project, we reviewed existing TICUA and TICUA member institution documents, and TICUA and THEC student data. Next, we conducted a literature review of institutional and individual factors that influence adult student college choice and success. Thirdly, we collected primary source data on adult student choice by surveying current adult students attending TICUA member institutions and conducting in-person and phone interviews with current adult students attending TICUA member

institutions, TICUA member campus staff, and administrators. In the following paragraphs we outline how data sources were used to address the research questions in our study.

Existing Documents and Data. Before starting fieldwork and reaching out to TICUA member institution campuses, our capstone study team reviewed all related Tennessee policies for adult college students as well as TICUA institutions' mission statements, and related websites. This review influenced and added an element of customization to our in-person and phone interviews with staff and administration, as well as the interviews with current adult students. Our capstone study team more specifically reviewed available information on Tennessee Reconnect, like policies, Tennessee Reconnect Communities resources, and the initiative's website.

Prior to activating our survey, our capstone team reviewed several publications and adult student data sources from TICUA and THEC. The Private Colleges Serving Tennessee (2016) is an annual publication that describes the state of independent higher education in Tennessee. The report reflects the role of private colleges and universities in the state of Tennessee, the local communities in which the campuses are located, and college students. Also included in the report is detailed information on each TICUA member institution. The TICUA Characteristics: The Fact Book on Tennessee's Private Colleges and Universities (Fall 2015) is another annual publication that demonstrates the trends in student participation, affordability and degree completion for TICUA member institutions. The Tennessee Higher Education Fact Book (2016), THEC Master Plan (2015b), and THEC report of workforce needs (2015a) are each compilations of statistical information pertaining to higher education and workforce training in Tennessee. These reports contain tables and charts with data relevant to enrollment, persistence, graduation, tuition, financial aid, degrees produced, workforce needs, and lottery scholarships. We also requested a preview of any major changes to the data from the most current, and yet released upcoming reports from THEC staff. The purpose of such a review of existing documents and data was to ensure that our study was consistent with state and TICUA plans, enrollment, and priorities for serving adult students. It was important that our study include consideration of current state initiatives and other trends in serving adult students.

Survey. In order to gain insight into the adult college student choice process, our capstone study surveyed students across seven TICUA member institutions who agreed to participate in the study. This survey was developed to gather data related to research questions 1, 4, 5, and 6. Our study team identified and considered several possible survey instruments used in previous studies. We sought and secured permission to use the selected survey instrument from the instrument owners for this study. Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. The mission statement is to “[help]s build a democracy that works for everyone” (Public Agenda About Us, n.d.). Public Agenda pursues this mission through research and engagement in a variety of prioritized fields, including health care and education. In the November 2013 report, *Is College Worth It for Me? How Adults Without Degrees Think About Going (Back) to School*, Public Agenda researched elements associated with the prospective adult college student choice process, like preparation and expectations. Public Agenda designed a survey tailored to the report inquiry and partnered with a third party to administer the survey. The survey asked prospective adult college student participants questions about the benefits associated with degree attainment, their biggest concerns with going back to school, and the sources where they get information about colleges and degrees. The Public Agenda designed survey was administered to

803 prospective adult college students, 566 over the phone and 237 online, across the country (Hagelskamp, Schleifer, & DiStasi, 2013). Given the reputation of Public Agenda, the specific research report's support from the Kresge Foundation, and the nationally representative survey sample, a degree of instrument reliability and validity is assumed by this research team.

Based on the purpose of our capstone study, a review of the literature and consideration of the Public Agenda survey items, some survey questions were removed from the original instrument and streamlined to focus on the population and scope of our project. We compared and mapped the survey items to our conceptual framework to ensure that there were survey questions included to address each concept identified in our framework. We identified gaps between our conceptual framework and the survey questions and developed several survey questions to further and more fully investigate concepts with limited survey questions. Our study survey instrument included roughly 50 questions and was estimated to take 15 minutes to complete.

The student survey was administered electronically via email with a link to a web-based Qualtrics survey, to students at selected TICUA member institutions with cooperation from TICUA member campus staff. The survey was shared between two and three times per TICUA member campus, depending on when the responding staff initially volunteered to be a part of our capstone study. The survey instrument had a hard stop early in the questions to divert students that did not meet the parameters of an adult student which Tennessee policy has defined as a student 25 years of age or older (Meldrim, personal communication [Initial TICUA Capstone Meeting], June 2016).

Literature Review. Our capstone team reviewed literature pertinent to institutional practices that can influence adult college student choice and success. This literature review gave us insight into the extant research on this topic, and also provided data for research question 2 and 3. We also examined literature pertinent to adult college student behaviors that may affect enrollment and success. While research specifically for and on the adult college student experience is limited, research studies done at commuter institutions and community colleges are often inclusive of, and germane to, this non-traditional student population. Please see the literature review exhibited in Appendix A for findings from the existing research on adult college student choice and success. The literature review also provides support and grounding for the conceptual framework.

Interviews. Our conceptual framework and the initial findings revealed from the adult student surveys were used to inform interviews with ten adult students about their specific satisfaction levels, experiences, and progress toward graduation. The use of an interview protocol allowed us to gather data for research questions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. Students interviewed were asked about programs and institutional policies that help or hinder their success at their institution. Additional interviews were conducted with 12 TICUA member campus staff and administrators to uncover specific programs and institutional policies pertaining to adult college students, as well as their perceptions of the adult college student experience at their campus. We conducted in-person and phone interviews with staff and administration and current adult students at nine TICUA member institutions. Requests for interview participants were emailed out to select TICUA member institutions and further requested were made during a webinar for all TICUA member institutions on February 2, 2017. A follow-up reminder requesting interview participants was sent out via email to select TICUA member institutions two weeks later. Our

intention for this study was to maximize our time spent interviewing with current adult college students, staff, and administration to develop insights into what works, and what doesn't work, for adult students on campus.

We used a semi-structured interview strategy that included a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions. We developed two interview protocols - one for adult college students attending TICUA member institutions and one for TICUA member campus staff and administrators. Our initial interview protocols were designed with our capstone's conceptual framework in mind, and they were refined after analyzing the received survey responses to include some follow-up questions for additional insight into preliminary findings from the survey responses.

The adult college student interview protocol had ten questions, of which six questions included probes to tease out details. The TICUA member campus staff and administrator interview protocol had 13 questions, of which five questions included probes to tease out additional information. Interviews were conducted one on one in person, or via phone/Google Hangout with both adult college students and TICUA member campus staff and administrators. Interviews were estimated to last 30-45 minutes, no more than 1 hour in duration.

Methods

Our capstone study employed a mixed methods approach. This approach provided the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative methods in our study. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) contend that “qualitative and quantitative research used together produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice” (as cited in Burch & Heinrich, 2015, p. 15). The authors further described the benefits of mixed methods by noting how narrative can add texture and nuance to numbers and how numbers can add an exacting quality to a narrative (Burch & Heinrich, 2015). This mixed methods approach allowed us to research broad trends around adult student choices and behavior through survey data, and interviews which provided us with specifics regarding how TICUA member campuses experience successes and challenges serving adult students.

Literature, Existing Documents, and Data. As discussed above, our capstone team relied on an initial literature review and a review of existing documents and data to form our theoretical and conceptual frameworks that ultimately guided our capstone project. This information allowed us to gather data for research questions 2 and 3. Existing documents and data were also used to build our understanding of the nuances within higher education in Tennessee, and specifically, the context in which TICUA, TICUA member institutions, and the adult college students attending TICUA member campuses operate. The review of these materials, along with the data collected in the survey and interviews allowed us to understand the context of this work with adult students in the state of Tennessee.

After our initial review, we continued to source and review available literature relevant to the adult college choice process, including adult college students, the college choice process, adult student choice behaviors, and adult learner persistence and college completion. We used extant research as a comparison tool with our survey and interview findings. We looked for congruence between the extant research and our findings, and we discuss how and if our findings are supported by literature in the discussion section. We also noted any areas of divergence between the literature and our findings.

Our capstone study team used available TICUA and THEC adult student data collected to examine our survey descriptive statistics for missing characteristics and over-representation of any characteristics included in our sample. We also compared the available TICUA and THEC adult student data with our survey data for any emerging trends positive or negative.

Survey. The deployment of this survey instrument allowed us to gather data relevant to research questions 1, 4, 5, and 6. In order to further understand our capstone study sample, we compiled descriptive statistics from our survey respondents. We also compared our sample with available TICUA and THEC adult student data to look for missing and over-represented characteristics from our survey respondents, like comparing total adult student population from each participating TICUA member institution versus total survey respondents from each participating TICUA member institution. From this comparison, we noticed an over-representation of some TICUA member institutions' adult student survey responses, along with an under-representation of other TICUA member institutions' adult student survey responses. We explored weighting survey cases and, although we chose to share what we found, weighting did not make an appreciable difference in our descriptive results.

The adult student survey data were reviewed, and variables were coded for further analysis. We chose to use two methods of statistical analysis for our survey data: chi-square test statistic and, where appropriate, Cramer's V. It is important to note a possible distinction in statistical analysis for the Public Agenda survey used in the *Is College Worth It for Me? How Adults Without Degrees Think About Going (Back) to School* report and our capstone study analysis. As mentioned in the data collection section, the Public Agenda survey used a nationally representative sample of people considering college, who were not continuing straight on from high school. The survey data collected was sorted into two age groups: 18-24-year-olds and 25-55-year-olds, which were used as variables for statistical analysis. When they granted permission to use the survey instrument, they provided us with the full survey results along with the survey instrument. They did not include statistical analysis information or values for reliability.

We chose to use the chi-square test statistic because we had many categorical variables of interest in our survey data and wanted to test for variations within the sample that could prove useful for TICUA, TICUA member institutions, and adult students attending TICUA member campuses. Also, because our survey used a purposive sample from TICUA member institutions and students willing to participate, we only looked for variations within our sample instead of making inferences about the entire population of TICUA adult students.

We identified ten student characteristics as units of analysis for testing for association with the chi-square test statistic - for example, age (25-34, 35-44, and 45+) and modality of instruction (all in class, mostly in class, blended, mostly online, all online). However, we abandoned our emphasis on these student characteristics because of the small cell sizes that resulted from the cross-tabulations produced. As a consequence, chi-square tests and Cramer's V are inappropriate statistical procedures to use. See Appendix C for the survey protocol.

Interviews. The interview protocol for the student interviews allowed us to gather data on research questions 1, 4, 5, and 6. The protocol for interviews with institution staff and administration allowed us to gather data to address research questions 1 and 2. Our capstone team followed an analytical framework approach in analyzing the collected data to further understand adult students' college experience at TICUA member campuses. Our unit of analysis was adult college students using multiple participants' case studies layered within the analysis.

Our data consists of interview notes and digital recordings, observations during the interviews, and any documents collected during an interview. We also memoed, as time allowed, directly after each interview. As Patton (2015) recommends, we began with the individual case studies and analyzed across the cases to discover patterns and themes regarding individual and institutional factors that may influence the adult college choice process (p. 536).

Our interview protocols followed our conceptual framework and drew from two broad buckets: individual behaviors and institutional characteristics and factors. The individual behaviors bucket is further divided into three concepts - perceived benefits of college, paying for college, and barriers to college. Along with our conceptual framework, our interview matrix (Appendix J) served as a tool for sorting concepts into sub-constructs. We interviewed adult students and TICUA member campus staff and administrators with separate interview protocols to add texture to our analysis by identifying themes within both groups and then across both groups. This additional strategy was used to produce a rich description and to seek out and include negative examples of themes.

The interviews were digitally recorded unless a subject requested otherwise. Due to time and budget constraints, the interviews could not be transcribed verbatim. Therefore, the capstone team employed a multi-listening phase strategy and relied on notes taken during interviews and memos, as available, to gain familiarity, discern patterns, and identify illustrative quotes. Emerging themes within the concepts were categorized and recorded in individual interview matrices. The multi-listening phase strategy, along with the individual interview matrices, formed the basis of the comprehensive/summative interview matrix our capstone team developed. See Appendix J for our interview matrix template. Appendix D & E show the interview protocol for interviewing adult program administrators and interviewing students, respectively.

Capstone Study Setting

Our project takes place in a multi-site setting across the state of Tennessee. TICUA institutions are located across three regions: east, middle, and west. Institutions are also located in both rural and urban settings. TICUA itself is headquartered in Nashville Tennessee, along with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), who represents Tennessee's state government.

Sampling Strategy

We employed a purposive sampling strategy for the student survey and interviews with adult students and TICUA institution staff members to gain focus and depth of understanding of the adult student college choice process in Tennessee and how private, not for profit institutions can best influence and support adult college student success. Our project relied on this strategy instead of a probability strategy because we seek to tease out specific information and expertise from our distinct sampling frames.

Our sampling strategy is also reflective of a convenience sampling strategy with volunteer subjects. We sought out participants from TICUA member institutions, to whom we had access from TICUA. TICUA also prepared their member institutions to be ready for our capstone team to contact them and request participation. Participation in our inquiry was also

entirely voluntary. Therefore, our sample was largely framed by those who chose to be participants in our project.

Institution Sampling Frame. All TICUA institutions interested in pursuing the goals of Tennessee Reconnect were included in the sampling frame. Not all TICUA member institutions are participating in the Drive-to-55 initiative or in adult-specific programming. Our project focused on institutions that are interested in working with adult college students and participating in the state policy initiatives surrounding increased degree completion.

Our team initially identified TICUA institutions of interest using THEC's Adult Student Fact Book (2016) and other third-party resources relevant to adult education. We then partnered with TICUA to select and contact institutions to request participation in our project. TICUA administrators provided helpful guidance on other factors outside of the data points we compiled that may have influenced an institution's ability to participate in our capstone project. We selected 18 TICUA member institutions to initially contact for participation in our inquiry in the adult student college choice process and adult college student success. Ten of the 18 TICUA member institutions contacted chose to participate in our inquiry. Four participated in our student survey, three participated in our interviews of adult students and TICUA institution staff members, and three participated in both the survey and interviews. An additional three TICUA member institutions participated in our interviews of adult students and TICUA institution staff members. These institutions were solicited from a TICUA webinar discussing our capstone project.

Adult Student Sampling Frame. The ideal sampling frame for our capstone study is all adults in the state of Tennessee that have considered enrolling in college. Realistically this was unlikely. Therefore, our sampling frame for adult students was limited to adult students who considered and enrolled in a private, not for profit, 4-year institution in the state of Tennessee.

We relied on the selected TICUA member institutions that we contacted for participation to request their institution's adult student population to participate in our inquiry. Again, TICUA administrators were helpful in reminding member institutions of our request for participation and encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunity to be a part of our capstone project. We also partnered with participating TICUA member campus staff to make students aware of our capstone project (survey and interview phases) through reminders which, we believe, led to increased response rates.

Survey Sample. Through our purposive sampling strategy and the target sampling frame we identified with advising from TICUA administration, we requested participation from 18 TICUA member institutions for our survey phase. Of the 18 institutions that were contacted, initially four responded and expressed interest in participating. Those four TICUA member campus representatives received information for disseminating our request for survey participation to their adult student population. Our contact at TICUA sent out a reminder to the remaining 14 institutions that did not initially respond to our request for participation. Through this reminder, an additional three institutions responded and expressed interest in participating. Those three TICUA member campus representatives then received information for disseminating our request for survey participation to their adult student population.

All seven TICUA member institutions that agreed to participate in our survey phase received at least one follow-up communication with a scripted reminder about our survey to be

disseminated to their respective adult student populations. The initial four TICUA member institutions received one additional scripted reminder about our survey for their respective adult student populations. All communications regarding survey participation requests took place in a six week window, during Fall 2016, while the survey was open.

In total, we estimate 2879 adult students across seven TICUA member institutions received a request for participation in our capstone survey. Distribution of the survey was managed at each institution by campus staff and may have included all adult students. 402 students participated in the survey, with 296 students who completed the survey and were included in our analysis. The response rate for student participants was 14%. The response rate for students who completed the survey and were included in our analysis was 10%.

The survey distribution used in this study does not provide a representative sample of the population. As a result, findings cannot be generalized to the population without consideration for missing or over-represented data. The primary benefit of the data collected is to identify consistencies or inconsistencies with extant research on adult college students. Such findings can indicate where TICUA institutions conform to, or diverge from, national trends. A secondary benefit of these results is to highlight variations within the sample that may support changes to policies or procedures regarding the recruitment and support of adult students to TICUA institutions. Demographic data of survey respondents is presented in Appendix G.

Case Weighting. Each survey case, or set of respondent answers, was weighted based on the number of adult undergraduates in the population at each surveyed institution. Population numbers were based on the 2014-2015 Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) Factbook table of adult students at TICUA institutions. Descriptive frequency tables are provided to show both weighted and unweighted values where appropriate. Statistical tests are conducted to identify variations within the sample and are therefore conducted using unweighted data.

Wave Analysis. Survey distribution to students occurred when the research team emailed staff at each of the sample institutions. The research team is unaware of when each institution distributed the survey to their adult student population. Therefore a wave analysis of when adult students completed the survey cannot be accurately conducted.

Adult (25+) and First-Degree Seeking Status. The target population of this study was adult students seeking their first degree at TICUA institutions. Distribution of the survey was managed at each institution by campus staff and may have included all adult students. The survey asked participants about their age and about the type of degree they were pursuing. However, the survey instrument does not specifically ask whether the degree is their first. To the extent possible, survey respondents under the age of 25 and respondents pursuing graduate degrees were eliminated from analysis.

Interviews Sample. The primary focus of our capstone project was to understand adult students' process in choosing a postsecondary institution, and more specifically, why they may choose a private nonprofit institution over other options. We employed a purposive sampling strategy and the target sampling frame for institutions were TICUA member institutions that were interested in pursuing the Tennessee higher education policy initiatives surrounding increased degree completion and working with adult college students.

TICUA member institution interview participants were solicited from institutions that had adult college student participants in our survey and from institution participants in a webinar hosted by TICUA discussing our capstone project, a broader sampling frame than we originally selected. From these sources, 10 TICUA member institution representatives expressed interest in interviews, and 9 TICUA member institutions are represented in our interview participants. The 9 TICUA member institutions represented include three institutions that participated in the student survey, three institutions that were from the initial 18 institutions selected for our inquiry, and an additional three institutions that participated in the TICUA hosted webinar covering our capstone project.

Representatives from the interested TICUA member institutions were asked to disseminate information about our project to their adult student population. A request for volunteer interview participants was included in the information disseminated. Potential participants were instructed to contact a member of our capstone project team to set a schedule and location for their interview. Our adult student interview participation in the study was 10 current, adult students from three TICUA member institutions.

Representatives from the interested TICUA member institutions were also asked to disseminate information about our project to campus staff and administration that may have input regarding the adult student experience at their institution. A request for volunteer interview participants was, again, included in the information disseminated. Potential campus staff and administrator participants were instructed to contact a member of our capstone project team to set a schedule and location for their interview. Our campus staff and administration interview participation in the study was 12 campus staff members and administrators from the nine TICUA member institutions referenced above. .

An interview participant table, in Appendix F, lists the institution affiliation, pseudonym, classifier as adult student or staff (including role - student facing or administrator), and for the adult students, their approximate age, sex, and degree program as available.

Findings

Institutional Behavior that Impacts Adult Student College Choice

Question 1) what are current best practices among TICUA institutions for recruiting and retaining adult students?

DATA SOURCE: SURVEY.

The survey results relevant to the first study question fall into two specific areas. The first is the ways in which survey respondents learned about colleges and programs. The second relates to the importance of course credit for previous work awarded to adult students. Table #1 summarizes responses to a series of questions about sources of information about colleges and programs. The table is sorted to highlight the most popular answers at the top. Adult students most frequently reported gathering information about colleges and programs from individual college websites ($n = 163$) and from family, friends, or colleagues ($n = 157$). More than 70% of survey respondents reported using each of these two sources. The findings described in Table #1 relate to Sources of Information under Institutional Behaviors from our conceptual framework.

Table #1

Before you picked your current school, did you learn about colleges and programs from the following sources?

Source of Information	Count	Yes (%)
Individual college websites	163	74.4
Friends, family or colleagues	157	71.4
Interactive websites to rank and compare priorities	95	44.6
College recruiters who promote and market their school	80	36.9
Books with information on colleges and programs	63	29.7
Television commercials, billboards or other ads	56	26.5
Guidance counselors at individual colleges	51	24.1
Financial aid advisers	50	23.3
An employer	43	20.4
High school guidance counselors	22	10.5

The second area of the survey relevant to study question 1 addressed whether credit for previous work was awarded and how important these credits were to students' decision to enroll in their selected institutions. Tables #3 and #4 show the unweighted and weighted frequency data concerning the awarding of credit for previous work. Large percentages of students received credit for either previous coursework, their work experience, or they were able to take a test to demonstrate previously learned skills. These percentages also do not change substantially from the unweighted to weighted tables. Only 13.5% ($n = 33$) and 14.8% ($n = 40$) respectively report not receiving any credit for previous work. The credit for previous work concept can be found under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework, connected to Barriers to College.

Table #2				Table #3			
<i>At your current institution, have you transferred course credit, received credit for previous work experience, or taken a test to receive course credit? (Unweighted)</i>				<i>At your current institution, have you transferred course credit, received credit for previous work experience, or taken a test to receive course credit? (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Transferred course credit	179	73.1	Valid	Transferred course credit	202	76.0
	Received credit for previous work experience	17	6.9		Received credit for previous work experience	15	5.7
	Took a test to receive course credit	4	1.6		Took a test to receive course credit	2	.7
	Other (please explain)	12	4.9		Other (please explain)	8	2.8
	No - I did not receive course credit beyond normal course completion	33	13.5		No - I did not receive course credit beyond normal course completion	40	14.8
	Total	245	100.0		Total	266	100.0
Missing	System	18		Missing	System	2	
Total		263		Total		269	

Table #4 provides the unweighted data concerning the importance of credit to the students' decision to enroll. It is clear from the respondent data, that the majority (68.4%, $n = 143$) of students believe that receiving credit played an important role in their decision to enroll. Although credit for previous work is directly mapped to Barriers to College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework, it also relates to Student Welfare under Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Table #4

Crosstabs of credit for previous work by importance of role in decision to enroll

	Yes - it was important %	No - it was not important %	I'm glad I received it, but it wasn't important
Transferred course credit	65.7 $n = 115$	9.7 $n = 17$	25.6 $n = 43$
Received credit for previous work experience	82.4 $n = 14$	17.6 $n = 3$	0 $n = 0$
Took a test to receive course credit	75.0 $n = 3$	25.0 $n = 1$	0 $n = 0$
Other	83.3 $n = 10$	16.7 $n = 2$	0 $n = 0$

DATA SOURCE: INTERVIEWS.

Meet Them Where They Are: Institutional Consideration of Adult Student Needs. A theme emerged from the interviews around the nature and quality of interactions between TICUA member institutions, various representatives of the institution, and adult students. Both groups interviewed agreed that adult students have different needs than the traditional-aged student. Christine, a TICUA member campus administrator, shared her belief that adult students may express their needs as “If I’m giving my best, will you help me?” Laura, another TICUA member campus administrator, described adult students as “driven but not sure how to do it.” TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students shared some of the ways in which the institutions are working to meet adult student needs. Additional observations of how TICUA member institutions can meet adult student needs are also shared in the following subsections.

Supportive Faculty. Both interview groups noted the importance of supportive faculty members in the classroom. Laura, a student-facing staff member, observed that some faculty are “all about the success of the student” and that they take the time to answer questions via email and phone with adult students that may be struggling. Barb, an adult student agreed, noting that many of the faculty have been “helpful and supportive.” Liz, a TICUA campus administrator, shared that sometimes faculty can be “hesitant to work nights and weekends” but that usually changes once they see “how it benefits the adult students.” Vivian, an adult student, also appreciated “how engaged the faculty [were] with the students.” Finally, Francina, an adult student, shared that one time she “almost dropped out but ... faculty followed up with her” and convinced her to continue. The sub-theme of supportive faculty relates to Faculty Quality under Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Enrollment & Registration. We heard evidence from our adult student interview participants that enrollment and registration were areas where efficiency and ease are important. The adult students described their enrollment experiences as “speedy” and “quick.” Several adult students shared that they completed their application process in one day, another adult student shared that they completed their application process in one week. Registration experiences were not described in the same way by adult students or TICUA member campus staff. Another element of Francina’s observation regarding supportive faculty is that she also mentioned that staff members helped to get her registered for the term when she considered leaving school. However, she also shared that she has experienced issues with registration in the previous year that may delay her graduation. TICUA member campus staff also observed occasional registration issues.

Orientation. Several TICUA member campus staff and administrators mentioned the role of orientation in helping adult students. Laura shared that her institution uses orientation as a time to review how to retrieve “email, [access]ing grades and student accounts.” Mary, a student-facing staff member, observed that her institution held five orientations throughout the year for adult students, as the institution has rolling admission and class start times. Isaac, an adult student, in agreement with staff and administrators, noted that he “found adult orientation class very helpful.” Liz observed that her campus was interested in developing an orientation specifically for adult students.

Student Services. TICUA member campus staff and administrators indicated several places where adult students could go for help. Kate, a TICUA campus administrator, described “deliberate interaction time built in” through scheduling and availability of faculty and staff

during the evening, when many adult college students attend class, for “time to talk ... or get services.” Several TICUA member campus staff and administrators noted using a one-stop shop model, incorporating multiple services into one office or department. Kyle, a TICUA campus administrator, noted that his institution had considered the one-stop shop model but found it difficult because of requirements (legal and regulatory) imposed on involved departments. He also noted that his campus offers high-touch student services and does “one-on-one attention ... really well.” The three preceding sub-themes of enrollment & registration, orientation, and student services all relate to the Student Welfare under the Institutional Behaviors heading in our conceptual framework.

Streamlined Degree Pathways. Most of the adult students interviewed noted the importance of efficiency through transfer credit awards. Karen, an adult student, pointed out that the “ability to get [transfer] credits ... made the choice easy.” Vivian, another adult student, also “appreciated the credit for prior work experience and skills.” Barb, another adult student, shared that her “past associate degree credits all transferred” to her bachelor’s degree. Harriet, another adult student, also noted receiving nearly half the credits required for her bachelor’s degree. She was also pursuing challenge exams for further streamlining and cost savings. Tom, another adult student, was able to transfer most lower division classes that “saved at least a year” of courses.

Not all adult students reported a worthwhile experience when trying to earn transfer credit. Theresa, an adult student, shared that while her institution does offer transfer credit for relevant work, she found the process “burdensome and only award[ed] a couple [of] credits.” Several TICUA member campus staff agreed that transfer was sometimes “challenging” due to “unique degree programs offered” at their institutions. As mentioned previously under the student survey findings for RQ1, credit for previous work maps under Barriers to College within Individual Behaviors but is related to Student Welfare within Institutional Behaviors.

Class Options. This sub-theme is related to Student Welfare under Institutional Behaviors within our conceptual framework. Adult student interview participants shared their reasons for different methods of taking their classes. Some preferred “face-to-face” for learning and shared that they “took everything on campus.” Harriet, an adult student, indicated that she “hadn’t tried it [online classes], and was not planning on it [continuing].” However, Isaac, another adult student, offered his perspective on online classes. He shared that

“Online classes for older adults are about scheduling more than anything. It is [not] a matter of preference, it is a matter of necessity.”

Question 2) what institutional characteristics or practices influence TICUA institutions to offer programming for adult students?

DATA SOURCE: LITERATURE REVIEW.

Adult Student Demand for Higher Education. Perceived student benefit for higher education, a key element in our conceptual framework, creates demand among adult learners for a college degree. According to U.S. Department of Education, adult students--those age 25 years and older--accounted for over 7.5 million students enrolled in college, or about 37% of total college enrollees in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In the state of Tennessee, 900,000 adults over 25 already have some college, but no degree and 1.4 million Tennessee adults over 25 have only a high school diploma or equivalent. There are a number of factors that

might lead an institution to recruit adult students. First, the demand from adult students to secure a postsecondary degree is evident in the number of adult students or prospective adult students mentioned in the previous paragraph. Several TICUA institutions have high numbers or percentages of adult students in their current enrollment. Fourteen of TICUA's 34 institutions have higher than 20% adult undergraduate student populations. The largest concentration of adult students (55%) are found in a few majors, including Business Management & Administrative Services, Health Professions, and Liberal Arts & Sciences. Among TICUA schools, there are additional concentrations in Criminal Justice, Teaching, Social Work, and Pastoral Counseling & Ministries. Overall, 33% of TICUA undergraduate degrees are awarded to adults (THEC, 2014-2015 Tennessee Higher Education Adult Student Fact Book).

At least sixteen TICUA member institutions offer programs designed to accommodate adult students age 25 and older. Programs lead to baccalaureate degrees and acknowledge that many enrolling adults will have transfer credits. Most of the degree programs are for business or health care. Programs often include flexible schedules and classes on nights and weekends for working students. Some institutions offer financial aid specifically for adult students and may lower costs compared to traditional degree programs. Specific programs include: Accelerated Baccalaureate Degree * Certificate Programs * Credit for Prior Learning Experience * Dual Credit Courses * Dual Enrollment Courses * Dual Admission * Offsite Courses * Online Courses * Transfer Articulation * Reverse Transfer * Dual Degree * Remedial Education * Veterans Resources * International and Global Education * Experiential Education * Workforce Development * and Other (TICUA, 2014 Alternative Academic Offerings of TICUA Member Institutions: Expanding Educational Opportunities). These alternative programs each target perceived benefits, cost, and barriers identified on the individual behaviors side of our conceptual framework.

Economic and Policy Drivers. The context in which colleges and universities operate, i.e. the market and state policy climate, influence institutional decisions to offer higher education to adult learners. This, in turn, is related to the provision of academic programs offered to adult students, another key item in our conceptual framework. Additionally, the economic and policy context in the state of Tennessee create a conducive environment for working adults without college degrees and institutions of higher education to connect so that students can earn beneficial credentials, and that institutions can connect with this additional student population where there is interest and demand for higher education. Further, colleges and universities in the TICUA membership, that have unique missions as private institutions and/or faith-based institutions may feel compelled to offer education to adults as a way to expand the reach of the institution's mission.

Reputation and Institutional Mission. College and universities that would choose to serve more adult students, or begin serving adult students for the first time, would benefit from understanding the unique qualities of the adult student population. Adult students take longer to complete their postsecondary degrees and credentials than their traditionally aged counterparts (Shapiro et al., 2016). Further, if adult students have children, only 40% of them earn their degrees after 6 years (Miller, Gault & Thorman, 2011), and adult students with children are more likely to drop out (Lumina Foundation, 2016). Also, nontraditional students have low degree completion rates when compared to traditional students (Hutchens, 2016). Nontraditional students leave before the completion of their college degree at a rate of 42% (Hutchens, 2016).

Almost 90% of “highly nontraditional” students (i.e. those students who have multiple nontraditional characteristics [USDE, 2015]) do not complete their bachelor’s degree within 5 years of starting their coursework (Hutchens, 2016). This finding fits under Reputation within the Institutional Behaviors section of our conceptual framework.

DATA SOURCE: INTERVIEWS.

Value: Where Fit Meets Price. An initial theme to emerge from the interviews was the perceptions of higher education's value among TICUA member campus staff and administrators and adult students regarding their respective TICUA member campus. Their perceptions of value were shaped by the two factors: price and fit. The price factor was understood to mean tuition cost, and neither group interviewed mentioned books, commuting, or fees associated with college attendance. The fit factor was understood to mean matching between the adult student and various aspects of the institution, including degree program options available.

Price. This sub-theme relates to Price under Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework. We heard evidence of adult student perceptions of the tuition cost being high. Harriet, an adult student, referred to the cost as “pricey,” while several other students used “expensive” as a descriptor for their perceptions of cost. The adult student perceptions contrasted with TICUA member campus staff perceptions and observations. TICUA member campus staff described their perceptions and observations of the tuition cost as “lower price” and “competitive.” Noelle, a student-facing staff member, observed a campus practice of “unpublished discounting” available for adult students, as support for their perception of low tuition cost. Several other TICUA member campus staff and administrators also noted discounting for adult students. According to campus staff and administrators, this discounting is possible because adult students don’t use all of the facilities and services used by traditional undergraduate or residential populations.

Fit. This sub-theme of fit relates to available programs and student welfare under institutional behaviors in our conceptual framework. Several adult students referred to degree major of interest as a key component in their college choice. Harriet shared that “[She]I could’ve gone back to [previous institution] to start back where [she]I left off with elementary education but [she]I wanted something different, something new, a new start. [She]I decided to check out [current institution]; they ended up accepting some credits, but it did [not] play a big role. [She]I wanted to get into entrepreneurship ... and learn more about managing employees.”

Adult students also shared that supportive staff working in enrollment played a role in the matching process. Charlie, an adult student, described his enrollment experience as being “walk[ed] through the whole process.”

Kate, a TICUA campus administrator, shared that “congruence between expectation and reality” was a critical component for adult student and institution matching. Kyle, another administrator, explained that “adult student[s] pick [an institution] because they tried other places and it did [not] feel like a good fit.”

Value. This sub-theme of value is a combination of a number of elements from the conceptual framework – student welfare, academic program, faculty quality, and perceived benefit. The interaction between price and fit seemed to influence TICUA member campus staff and administrators and adult student perceptions of the value of the higher education experience at the applicable TICUA member campus. This price and fit interaction was particularly

expressed by adult students. The same adult students that perceived the tuition cost as high shared high levels of satisfaction with their institutions. Isaac, an adult student, described going to his college as a “life-enhancing experience.” Other adult students expressed similar sentiments of satisfaction with their choice despite their perceptions of price.

TICUA member campus staff and administrators also had insight into adult student perceptions of the value of their higher education experiences. They observed, like the adult students, that fit often trumps price. Kate shared that she believed that students chose her institution because “they know [the institution’s] history,” they “believe in the brand,” and that the institution “made them feel welcome.”

Question 3) what does literature and theory suggest are important factors in the recruitment and academic success of adult students?

DATA SOURCE: LITERATURE REVIEW.

Search Timeline. Findings from a Vanderbilt University doctoral dissertation (2016) show that the adult college search process is brief. The findings from this study show that 65% of adult students choose to enroll within 6 months of beginning a college search process (Hutchens, 2016). Hutchens (2016) also found that highly nontraditional students--those with multiple nontraditional student characteristics--were even more likely to have a short search process. 75% of highly nontraditional students enroll within 6 months of starting a college search process. Review of the literature on institutional factors that impact effective recruitment and academic success of adult students includes consideration of academic programs, advising, institutional fit, and institutional capacity to recognize students as individuals. While this search timeline information isn’t directly connected to our conceptual framework, it is relevant to understanding adult students in the college search process. Further, when combined with other data collected, may influence how recruiters and advisors work with prospective adult students.

Student Welfare. Institutional policy, procedure, and programming communicates to students the level of institutional commitment to student welfare and student academic growth and development (Braxton et al., 2014). How and when institutions offer academic programs, services, and support resources impact how accessible enrollment in college and degree completion are for adult students. Not providing classes and university services at convenient times for adult students is a critical barrier to adult students enrolling in a college or university.

Most colleges and universities are not designed with the adult student in mind. This becomes especially apparent when considering the admissions and financial aid experience adult students have at institutions that have traditionally served the 18-22 year old college-going population. More complex family or financial situations are often experienced by adult students, and these complexities are typically outside of the knowledge base of the traditional financial aid counselor (Hutchens, 2016). Further, because financial aid policy dictated by institutions, states, or the federal government, are designed for traditional students, and are typically immune to individual adjustments or case-by-case considerations, these financial aid policies do not offer much flexibility to adult students with more dynamic life circumstances (Hart, 2003).

Once students enroll, research on academic success and persistence for commuter students, and what we extrapolate for adult students, shows that specific institutional behaviors promote a student’s commitment to their college or university (Braxton et al., 2014). Institutional

behavior is a central way that colleges and universities demonstrate their concern and consideration for their students. Institutional behavior can include what academic and student support programs are offered to students and when, institutional policies, and campus procedures. These policies, procedures, and academic programs can either operate in such a way that they accommodate the needs of adult students and offer the flexibility needed by the adult student population, or institutional practices can operate in a more “one-size-fits-all” model that does not consider the unique characteristics of adult students. “The more a student perceives that their college or university is committed to the welfare of its students, the greater the degree of the student’s academic and intellectual development” (Braxton et al., 2014, p. 184). This finding from Braxton et al. (2014) on the significance of institutional commitment to student welfare holds true for traditional students at residential campuses and for traditional-age commuter students. This same significance of commitment to student welfare of adults will be considered in this research project, given that adult learners are likely to be commuter students, and are typically employed, as well. For working students, Perna’s 2010 research suggests that it is critical that faculty and administrators serving adult and working students understand this population and adapt to the needs of these students.

Other ways that institutions can communicate their commitment to adult student welfare include how academic advising and academic programming is offered to adult students. Braxton et al. (2014) shares specific recommendations on how institutions should offer advising and academic programming to commuter students. Academic advising is central to the academic enterprise of the university. Proper and effective advising encourages and supports student academic process. Braxton et al. (2014) highlights how academic advising helps students realize “their academic potential” (p. 189). As it pertains to adult students, academic advising should be convenient to adult student schedules and should keep in mind the class scheduling needs and time demands of an adult student who is likely balancing work and family demands in addition to school responsibilities. Academic advisors can also aid students in registration and the course schedule development process so that students can enroll in classes that allow them to balance both attending class and keeping a consistent work schedule. Further, when students see academic advising as a key component of the academic experience, the more students perceive institutional commitment to student welfare (Braxton et al., 2014, p. 193). Additionally, advisors can be critical in ensuring that students stay on track to graduate and make adequate progress each semester. Errors or issues with advising and subsequent course registration and enrollment can create significant barriers for students in the path of degree completion. More intrusive advising--for example, the use of mandatory advising sessions--can benefit adult students by “meeting students where they are” in their educational progress, rather than waiting for students to come to their advisors (Goldrick-Rab, 2007).

Institutions serving nontraditional students can communicate a commitment to student welfare by intentionally structuring services and schedules to accommodate non-traditional student schedules. The hours of operation of dining services, study centers, library services, university offices, and access to other campus facilities for evening and weekend hours is a critical way that institutions show their concern for student welfare which leads to student commitment to the institution (Braxton et al., 2014). Straightforward processes for student experiences in registration, using campus technology and services, and clear communication to students also impacts a positive impression of concern for student welfare and subsequently increases student commitment to the institution (Braxton et al., 2014). These institutional factors increase student commitment to their college or university and also positively impact student

academic experience and retention at their institution. Student Welfare is found under Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Faculty Quality. Institutions must also make sure their professors and administrators understand the prevalence of working students in the adult learner population, and how to adapt to the needs of these students. This includes adapting to non-traditional student schedules, providing time for one-on-one interaction with faculty, and addressing feelings of disconnect for these students that come from having other obligations (Perna, 2010). The multiple roles that adult students occupy (employee, parent, spouse, etc.) can add stress and interfere with student persistence and the completion of a college degree (Perna, 2010; Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011), so institutions must consider these external factors when working with students if colleges and universities are concerned with adult student persistence.

In interactions at their institutions, adult students find that classroom interactions are positively related to the adult student experience and retention (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Kerka, 1995). Similar to their traditional-aged peers, adult college students also benefit from small class sizes and engaged professors (Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Adult students, like their traditional-aged counterparts, find that faculty members' availability, level of respect for students, quality of classroom instruction, and contact with students lead to a perception of faculty engagement with students (Graham, 1998; Drew et al, 2015), and that engagement by faculty has a positive impact on student learning (Braxton et al., 2014; Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Because of the limited social connections with classmates, relationships with faculty connect adult students to the classroom. These adult student/faculty relationships should be considered important in understanding the adult college student experience.

To positively impact student achievement, institutions serving adult students should be mindful of how congruent or incongruent their policies, procedures, and environment is for adult student support and services. These factors of institutional practice that give an impression of concern for student welfare should be consistent with each other. Feldman et al. (1999) reference Holland's theory of congruence of person and environment being related to higher educational stability, satisfaction, and achievement. If the actual practice and implementation of institutional values and policies do not seem to fit with articulated concern for student welfare, this can lead to less educational stability, satisfaction, and lower achievement for students (Feldman et al., 1999). According to Feldman et al. (1999), students should clearly see institutional goals and purpose as prioritizing serving adult students well. This effective and accurate alignment of institutional practices and valuing adult students and their experience has positive impact on student achievement (Feldman et al., 1999). Faculty quality is found within Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Individual Behavior in Adult Student Choice

Question 4) what factors are most influential in the adult student decision to enroll at any institution of higher education?

DATA SOURCE: SURVEY.

The survey produced results relevant to the fourth study question in three ways. First, respondents addressed their main reason for pursuing a degree. These reasons included job and career related responses relevant to the “perceived benefits” included in the conceptual model. Second, a survey question asked respondent preferences between a clearly structured program and a program that allowed them to explore the curriculum. This question targets the model concept for “time to completion.” The third way the survey addressed study question four is around how adult students are paying for college costs. Tables #5 and #6 detail unweighted and weighted frequencies of respondent answers regarding their main purpose in pursuing a degree.

Table #5		Table #6	
<i>Which of these best describes the MAIN reason you are pursuing a (degree/certificate/diploma)? (Unweighted)</i>		<i>Which of these best describes the MAIN reason you are pursuing a (degree/certificate/diploma)? (Weighted)</i>	
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	To get ahead in your current job or career	106	43.6
	To get a different kind of job or career altogether (Please describe)	78	32.1
	To get a good education and learn about the world	26	10.7
	Other	26	10.7
	None of these	7	2.9
	Total	243	100.0
Missing	System	20	
Total		263	
Valid	To get ahead in your current job or career	138	51.9
	To get a different kind of job or career altogether (Please describe)	73	27.6
	To get a good education and learn about the world	21	7.8
	Other	28	10.5
	None of these	6	2.1
	Total	265	100.0
Missing	System	4	
Total		269	

Respondents who chose “other” were provided with a text field in which to describe their reason for pursuing a degree. Table #7 groups “other” answers according to the themes they mention. Some answers addressed more than one theme and have been counted independently in each category. Findings displayed in tables 5, 6, and 7 relate to Perceived Benefits for Adult Students under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Table #7

*What is the MAIN reason you are pursuing a (degree/certificate/diploma)?
"Other" answers*

Mentions	Frequency
Career goals	15
Degree a life goal	11
Religious calling to school	10

The survey also addressed respondent preferences regarding their time to completion. One question asked students about their preference for a well-structured program that supports timely graduation. Students were also allowed to indicate a preference for exploring the curriculum, both, or neither. The frequencies and percentages of answers to this question are shown in Table #8. The clear preference for a structured program and on-time graduation is evident in the 60.3% ($n = 141$) of valid responses for that choice. The findings shown in table 8 relate to time to completion which maps to Barriers to College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Table #8

Which of the following two things are MORE important for you?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	A clearly structured program that lays out the exact courses and exams you need to take to graduate on time	141	60.3
	Being able to explore different classes and areas of interest before deciding what to focus on	17	7.3
	Both	71	30.3
	Neither	5	2.1
	Total	234	100.0
Missing	System	29	
Total		263	

The conceptual model highlights the role of cost, financial aid, and debt associated with college choice. These areas were addressed by the survey in several ways. First, students were asked about their level of concern for debt. Second, they were asked about three common ways of financing college related expenses. Tables #9 and #10 detail the unweighted and weighted frequencies for concern over debt.

Table #9 <i>Concern for Taking on too much debt (Unweighted)</i>				Table #10 <i>Concern for taking on too much debt (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	A lot	93	40.6	Valid	A lot	111	44.5
	Some	53	23.1		Some	49	19.4
	Only a little	38	16.6		Only a little	41	16.5
	Not at all	45	19.7		Not at all	49	19.6
	Total	229	100.0		Total	251	100.0
Missing	System	34		Missing	System	18	
Total		263		Total		269	

Tables #9 and #10 show that concern for debt is substantial. The weighted frequencies shift approximately 5% of respondents who answered “some” concern to “a lot” of concern.

Three separate survey questions asked respondents whether they pay for college with the use of loans, assistance from family, or the assistance of an employer. Table #11 summarizes these findings. Nearly two-thirds ($n = 161$) of respondents indicated the use of loans, while much smaller percentages receive assistance from employers (23.2%, $n = 51$) or family members (10.8%, $n = 24$). Tables 9, 10, and 11 relate to Paying for College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework, drawing from price, debt, and financial aid.

Table #11
Paying for College

	Yes %
Have you taken out loans to pay for college? $n = 161$	73.5
Does your employer help pay for college tuition and other college expenses? $n = 51$	23.2
Do your parents or relatives help you pay for college? $n = 24$	10.8

In a chi-square analysis of answers, the age of respondents produced a statistically significant ($p < .05$) result. Table #12 details the frequency and percentage of responses to the question of loans by age group. This analysis suggests that a statistically significant association between student age and taking out a loan to pay for college exists. The older the student, the less likely a loan to pay for college is secured. While it is unclear whether this trend holds true in the population of TICUA adult students, the result is significant within the surveyed group. The findings in table 12 relate to financial aid which maps to Paying for College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Table #12

Have you taken out loans to pay for college?

	Yes %	No %
Age*		
25-34	81.2 <i>n</i> = 56	18.8 <i>n</i> = 13
35-44	79.2 <i>n</i> = 57	20.8 <i>n</i> = 15
45+	61.5 <i>n</i> = 48	38.5 <i>n</i> = 30

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

DATA SOURCE: INTERVIEWS.

Driving Forces for Enrollment: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivators. Our interviews with TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students revealed a theme involving the motivating factors that influence adult college student enrollment. The motivating factors can be classified as extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Extrinsic motivators can be understood as external rewards, like a pay raise and intrinsic motivators can be understood as internal rewards, like personal development (Alderman, 2008).

Extrinsic Motivators. Both staff and student interview groups described extrinsic motivators for adult students to enroll in college. Several adult students reported returning to school for “career development” and the availability of “future positions ... with [a] degree.” Theresa, an adult student, shared that she was “looking for full-time work with benefits instead of multiple part-time jobs.” Adult students also reported that they returned to school for “access to a promotion” and “advancement considerations.” Another extrinsic motivator described by TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students is applicable skills for industry. Vivian, a student-facing staff member, shared that adult students were focused on “organizational skills that are practical for the workplace.” Several adult students agreed that gaining “industry relevant skills” was a motivator for them.

Intrinsic Motivators. Both interview groups also described intrinsic motivators for adult students to enroll in college. Liz, a TICUA campus administrator, shared that “[adult students] are internally motivated to change their situation.” Several adult students described their interest in being a “role model” for their children and in avoiding “be[ing] an embarrassment.” Isaac, an adult student, was interested in being “an inspiration” for his children and his employees. Noelle, a student-facing staff member, described adult students motivators as “motivating [their] kids” and “be[ing] the example.” Another intrinsic motivator described by TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students is finally attaining a degree. Maureen, a student-facing staff member, shared that “students [felt] disappointed in not completing [their] degree” previously. Francina, an adult student, shared that she wanted to “finish what [she] had started.”

Student Champions: Adult College Student Support Systems. Another observed theme from our adult student interviews was the role of adult student support systems in their

enrollment and in pursuing their academic goals. We heard about support from work - for example, a supervisor, and from home.

Work. Several adult students noted support from their job. Barb, an adult student, indicated that her “boss [wa]s very supportive of her being in school” and that [without that [she was] not sure [she] would have been successful.” Karen, another adult student, shared that her “employer encouraged her to go back [to school]” and gave her a raise and a promotion since starting back. Tom, another adult student, described his employer as “flexible” and “willing to work with [him].”

Family. Several adult students noted support from their families, including parents, spouses, and children. Harriet, an adult student, shared that

“[She was] very blessed and wanted something different. [She] told her husband that [she] wanted to go back to school and he told [her] he wanted [her] to just focus on school. So [she] focus[es] on school, well besides little catering jobs.”

Interview themes explored in RQ4 findings are related to Perceived Benefits for Adult Students under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Question 5) what factors are most influential in the adult students selection of any institution of higher education in which to enroll?

DATA SOURCE: SURVEY.

The survey included many questions that addressed study question 5. The answers to these questions explored several items in the conceptual framework including both individual and institutional behaviors relevant to the selection of TICUA institutions. The first important questions asked students the main reason why they chose their institution over other schools for their studies. The frequencies of these answers are presented in weighted and unweighted values in tables #13 and #14.

Table #13				Table #14			
<i>What is the main reason why you chose this school rather than some other school for your studies? (Unweighted)</i>				<i>What is the main reason why you chose this school rather than some other school for your studies? (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Convenience/Location	36	14.8	Valid	Convenience/Location	44	16.8
	Affordability	28	11.5		Affordability	23	8.9
	Exactly the program you wanted	49	20.1		Exactly the program you wanted	55	20.6
	Admission requirements easier to meet/that is where I got accepted	6	2.5		Admission requirements easier to meet/that is where I got accepted	15	5.6
	Best school for this field/degree	28	11.5		Best school for this field/degree	28	10.4
	This school gave me the most credit for previous work or experience	22	9.0		This school gave me the most credit for previous work or experience	11	4.3
	Someone recommended it	29	11.9		Someone recommended it	28	10.6
	Other	46	18.9		Other	61	22.9
	Total	244	100.0		Total	265	100.0
Missing	System	19		Missing	System	4	
Total		263		Total		269	

The above tables show that “exactly the program you wanted” is the most frequently selected answer, followed closely by “convenience/location” and “other.” Selectivity or “admissions requirements easier to meet” is the lowest frequency answer. The findings in Tables #13 and #14 related to several institutional characteristics from our framework including location, available programs, selectivity, and reputation. These findings also relate to the individual barriers of preparation and credit for previous work. Table #15 summarizes the “other” answers regarding selection of institution according to themes in the answers. The two most frequent themes among “other” answers addressed the religious affiliation of the institution and the affordability of the institution. Each of these themes garnered 13 mentions. Additional themes of mention were convenience and the reputation of the institution. Convenience received 10 mentions and reputation or recommendation received 11 mentions. Finally, the policy context of this study warrants the mention of one respondent who specifically mentioned the Tennessee Reconnect program as the reason they chose their institution. The findings in Table #15 relate to framework concepts of cost and perceived benefits. The religious affiliation of the institution does not fit within our current framework.

Table #15

What is the main reason why you chose this school rather than some other school for your studies? "Other" answers

Mentions	Frequency
Religious affiliation of institution	13
Affordability	13
Reputation or Recommendation	11
Convenience	10

Another group of questions relevant to study question 5 addressed the career field sought by survey respondents, which corresponds to available programs. Two questions addressed career field by first asking students to describe their field of study or career field sought by filling in a text box. The second question asked whether the field of study is a passion or selected for the job prospects it offers. The text boxes of the first question were reviewed and coded for similar answers. Table #16 summarizes these answers and shows seven groupings including healthcare, religion, business, teaching, legal, computing, and other. The findings in Table #16 relate to the perceived benefits concept in our conceptual framework.

Table #16

Career field sought

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Healthcare	28	11.9
	Religion	84	35.7
	Business	87	37.0
	Teaching	8	3.4
	Legal	8	3.4
	Computing	5	2.1
	Other	15	6.4
	Total	235	100.0
Missing	System	28	
Total		263	

A further analysis of career fields revealed a relationship of interest with the modality of learning indicated by student respondents. Table #17 shows a crosstabulation of career field sought by the modality of learning reported by respondents. This relationship cannot be said to be statistically significant because several table cells have low values that invalidate the chi-square test. However, it should be noted that respondents who indicated studying religion are nearly all studying completely online. Only one such student indicated entirely classroom study. Other career groups are more evenly divided across the modalities of learning. It should be noted that

this finding is not due to a congregation of students from a single institution. No statistical relationship was found between field of study and respondent institution within the sample. These findings further address both the perceived benefits of attending college as well as the location of the college under institutional behaviors.

Table #17

Crosstabulation of Career field sought by Modality of learning

Count		Career field sought							Total
		Healthcare	Religion	Business	Teaching	Legal	Computing	Other	
Modality of learning	All online	5	78	11	1	0	3	4	102
	Mostly online	4	3	18	1	0	1	0	27
	Half and half	8	1	19	1	1	0	2	32
	Mostly classroom	4	0	16	0	2	0	1	23
	All classroom	7	1	21	5	5	1	8	48
Total		28	83	85	8	8	5	15	232

The follow-up question that addressed passion or job prospects is reported unweighted and weighted in tables #18 and #19.

Table #18				Table #19						
<i>Would you say you chose this field because it is your passion, because it is likely to improve your job prospects, both or neither? (Unweighted)</i>				<i>Would you say you chose this field because it is your passion, because it is likely to improve your job prospects, both or neither? (Weighted)</i>						
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent			
Valid	Passion	95	39.7	Valid	Passion	89	34.1			
	Likely to improve job prospects	46	19.2		Valid	Likely to improve job prospects	56	21.4		
	Both	84	35.1			Valid	Both	92	35.2	
	Neither (specify) what is the reason you are pursuing this specific field?	14	5.9				Valid	Neither (specify) what is the reason you are pursuing this specific field?	24	9.3
	Total	239	100.0					Valid	Total	262
Missing	System	24		Missing					System	7
Total		263		Total					269	

Survey respondents reporting passion changed from 39.7% to 34.1% between the unweighted and weighted tables. A smaller shift of 19.2% to 21.4% is shown among those who responded that their field of study is “likely to improve job projects.” Answers of “both” are nearly unchanged. For those students who chose the “neither” answer, 6 indicated a personal or faith-based mission, 4 indicated the importance of time to completion, and 3 indicated a career related reason such as the time they had already invested in the field or the desire to pursue a specific career path. These findings related to the perceived benefits of college, but the current conceptual model does not account for student passion.

While a statistical relationship cannot be established, a crosstabulation of answers between career field and reason for selection provides data worth further investigation. Table #20 shows the frequency of answers across the different combinations of answers. Perhaps unsurprising a substantial number of respondents who indicated religion as their field of study also indicated a passion for their selection. However, the distribution of other answers might contradict assumptions. These findings further highlight the importance of program to both perceived benefits to career and to personal passion.

Table #20

Crosstabulation of Career field sought and Would you say you chose this field because it is your passion, because it is likely to improve your job prospects, both or neither?

Count		Would you say you chose this field because it is your passion, because it is likely to improve your job prospects, both or neither? - Selected Choice			
		Passion	Likely to improve job prospects	Both	Neither
Career field sought	Healthcare	26	1	15	6
	Religion	41	2	25	4
	Business	14	47	47	15
	Teaching	1	0	2	0
	Legal	3	1	1	0
	Computing	0	0	1	0
	Other	2	4	0	0
Total		87	55	91	25

A third set of questions attempted to identify areas in which adult students are less satisfied with their TICUA institutions. A series of survey questions asked students to rate whether their school is succeeding or falling short in several areas of programs, instruction quality, and student welfare. Table #21 summarizes unweighted and weighted results of respondent answers. The results have been sorted to highlight the areas of least satisfaction at the top of the list. These findings relate to the institutional behaviors of faculty quality, available programs, student welfare, as well as the individual factors of perceived benefits, price, and financial aid.

Table #21

*Frequencies of "Is your school succeeding or falling short on each of the following"
(unweighted / weighted)*

Institutional Behavior	Succeeding %	Falling short %	Neither %
Giving students hands-on help with financial aid applications	70.3 / 69.2 <i>n</i> = 130	23.2 / 25.3 <i>n</i> = 43	6.5 / 5.4 <i>n</i> = 12
Making top-notch tutors easily available when students need help	77.4 / 80.1 <i>n</i> = 103	18.8 / 15.3 <i>n</i> = 25	3.8 / 4.6 <i>n</i> = 5
Providing students with valuable internships and work experience	80.5 / 83.5 <i>n</i> = 103	12.5 / 9.8 <i>n</i> = 16	7.0 / 6.7 <i>n</i> = 9
Providing good opportunities to work in teams with other students	82.0 / 87.8 <i>n</i> = 150	10.4 / 7.0 <i>n</i> = 19	7.7 / 5.2 <i>n</i> = 14
Giving students effective guidance so they can stay on track	86.9 / 85.4 <i>n</i> = 193	9.9 / 10.3 <i>n</i> = 22	3.2 / 4.3 <i>n</i> = 7
Having instructors who care about their students and know how to teach	89.4 / 90.5 <i>n</i> = 203	7.0 / 6.7 <i>n</i> = 16	3.5 / 2.8 <i>n</i> = 8
Keeping class size small	95.5 / 96.9 <i>n</i> = 192	2.0 / 1.1 <i>n</i> = 4	2.5 / 2.1 <i>n</i> = 5

Respondents reported generally positive answers to all institutional behaviors questioned in Table #21. Especially large percentages of respondents feel their institutions are successfully providing guidance (86.9%), instructors who care about their students and know how to teach (89.4%), and small class sizes (95.5%). The area of least institutional success was “giving students hands-on help with financial aid applications” with 23.2% (*n* = 43) of answers in the “Falling short” category. An additional area of concern was “making top-notch tutors easily available when students need help.” Concern over lack of tutors was expressed by 18.8% (*n* = 25) of students who answered that question.

A final area of evaluation concerned the job and career related skills being taught to adult students. Two survey questions asked specifically how confident students felt about the skills and knowledge they are acquiring and about the benefit of those things in the job market. Tables #22, #23, #24, and #25 show the frequencies and percentages of unweighted and weighted results.

Table #22				Table #23			
<i>How confident are you that your current school is teaching you skills and knowledge that you will need to succeed? (Unweighted)</i>				<i>How confident are you that your current school is teaching you skills and knowledge that you will need to succeed? (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Very confident	175	74.5	Valid	Very confident	199	76.3
	Somewhat confident	54	23.0		Somewhat confident	56	21.5
	Not too confident	6	2.6		Not too confident	6	2.2
	Total	235	100.0		Total	261	100.0
Missing	System	28		Missing	System	8	
Total		263		Total		269	

Table #24				Table #25			
<i>Are you confident that completing your (certificate/degree) will greatly improve your job prospects, or are you worried that it won't? (Unweighted)</i>				<i>Are you confident that completing your (certificate/degree) will greatly improve your job prospects, or are you worried that it won't? (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Confident it will greatly improve job prospects	162	75.3	Valid	Confident it will greatly improve job prospects	187	79.9
	Worried that it won't	30	14.0		Worried that it won't	28	12.2
	Neither	23	10.7		Neither	18	7.9
	Total	215	100.0		Total	234	100.0
Missing	System	48		Missing	System	35	
Total		263		Total		269	

The above tables show that concern exists among adult students that the skills and knowledge they are learning will not lead to success or improved job prospects. The weighting of answers does not make an appreciable difference and tables #24 and #25 show approximately 30% of respondents are concerned about their job prospects. The results in all four tables relate to the perceived benefits of school in career advancement from the conceptual model.

DATA SOURCE: INTERVIEWS.

Meet Them Where They Are: Institutional Consideration of Adult Student Needs. A theme previously described in RQ1 findings, emerged from the interviews with both adult students and TICUA institution staff. This theme explores the nature and quality of interactions between TICUA member institutions, various representatives of the institution, and adult students. Adult students have different needs than the traditional-aged student. They are influenced by access to supportive faculty members and staff, convenient ancillary services, streamlined programming and processes, and multiple options for completing coursework. This theme is related to Faculty Quality and Student Welfare under Institutional Behavior in our conceptual framework.

Value: Where Fit Meets Price. Another theme previously described in RQ2 findings that emerged from the interviews with both adult students and TICUA institution staff was the perceptions of higher education's value. Interview participants understood value through the lens

of price and fit. The price factor relates to Price under Institutional Behaviors in our conceptual framework. The fit factor relates to reputation, academic program, student welfare, and faculty quality. The way in which these two factors interact influences perceptions of the value of higher education experiences at applicable TICUA member institutions. Fit was found to be the determining factor over price in shaping perceptions of value.

Question 6) what are the most pressing concerns of adult students enrolling at TICUA MEMBER institutions of higher education?

DATA SOURCE: SURVEY.

As discussed in the literature, adult students face several additional barriers to college when compared to traditional-aged students. The survey included a variety of questions that addressed the perceived barriers to college and the concerns that adult students typically report. These questions and answers adhere closely to the conceptual framework regarding barriers to college under individual behaviors. The questions specifically addressed concerns for balancing work and family, preparation, time to completion, and the convenience of access. Table #26 details the responses sorted according to areas of most frequent concern.

Table #26

Here are some things that students sometimes say they worry about. Please indicate how much you worry about each one. Do you worry about this a lot, some, a little, or not at all?

	A lot %	Some %	Only a little %	Not at all %
Balancing work and family responsibilities with the demands of school	51.7 <i>n</i> = 122	31.8 <i>n</i> = 75	9.3 <i>n</i> = 22	7.2 <i>n</i> = 17
Keeping up academically	47.7 <i>n</i> = 112	30.6 <i>n</i> = 72	13.6 <i>n</i> = 32	8.1 <i>n</i> = 19
Staying motivated and focusing on school work	29.5 <i>n</i> = 69	40.6 <i>n</i> = 95	18.8 <i>n</i> = 44	11.1 <i>n</i> = 26
Taking on too much debt	40.6 <i>n</i> = 93	23.1 <i>n</i> = 53	16.6 <i>n</i> = 38	19.7 <i>n</i> = 45
Getting the schedule and classes that will allow you to graduate on time	30.5 <i>n</i> = 71	24.5 <i>n</i> = 57	21.0 <i>n</i> = 49	24.0 <i>n</i> = 56
Not gaining the skills and knowledge you need for a job	12.6 <i>n</i> = 29	17.8 <i>n</i> = 41	24.8 <i>n</i> = 57	44.8 <i>n</i> = 103
Dropping out of the program	7.8 <i>n</i> = 18	8.7 <i>n</i> = 20	15.2 <i>n</i> = 35	68.3 <i>n</i> = 157
Fitting in with other students	3.1 <i>n</i> = 7	12.3 <i>n</i> = 28	21.5 <i>n</i> = 49	63.2 <i>n</i> = 144

Several areas show substantial levels of adult student concern. Combining the columns of “a lot” and “some” concern reveals that the top three areas of concern are shared by more than 70% of respondents. Balancing work and family with school is the top concern and is shared by over 83% ($n = 197$) of respondents. Keeping up academically is another top concern and was shared by over 78% ($n = 184$) of students surveyed. Staying motivated and focusing on school work is very similar to the other top areas of concern and itself drew concern from over 70% ($n = 164$) of respondents. In a further analysis of these answers, age of student was shown to have a statistically significant relationship with of the top concerns: balancing work and family responsibilities with the demands of school and staying motivated and focused on school work. Table #27 shows the percentages and frequencies of concern by age group. Concern about balancing work and family responsibilities with demands of school was most acute among the 35-44 year old age group. Separately, concerns about motivation and focus were reported most acutely among the youngest group of adults. Both tables 26 and 27 are related to Barriers to College, and its various mapped concepts, under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

Table #27

Crosstabs of Age by Concern

<i>Balancing work and family responsibilities with the demands of school**</i>				
	A lot %	Some %	Only a little %	Not at all %
<i>Age</i>				
25-34	47.3 <i>n</i> = 35	43.2 <i>n</i> = 32	6.8 <i>n</i> = 5	2.7 <i>n</i> = 2
35-44	64.1 <i>n</i> = 50	16.7 <i>n</i> = 13	11.5 <i>n</i> = 9	7.7 <i>n</i> = 6
45+	44.0 <i>n</i> = 37	35.7 <i>n</i> = 30	9.5 <i>n</i> = 8	10.7 <i>n</i> = 9
<i>Staying motivated and focusing on school work*</i>				
25-34	42.5 <i>n</i> = 31	39.7 <i>n</i> = 29	15.1 <i>n</i> = 11	2.7 <i>n</i> = 2
35-44	22.1 <i>n</i> = 17	45.5 <i>n</i> = 35	20.8 <i>n</i> = 16	11.7 <i>n</i> = 9
45+	25.0 <i>n</i> = 21	37.0 <i>n</i> = 31	20.2 <i>n</i> = 17	17.9 <i>n</i> = 15

p* < .05*p* < .01

Given the importance of career advancement previously identified in tables 5, 6, and 7, survey responses about concern for debt were also compared to answers regarding respondent confidence that their degree will greatly improve their job prospects. The results of this comparison are shown in Table #28. Chi-squared tests were unable to detect any significant relationships due to the small number of responses in crosstabulations.

Table #28

Are you confident that completing your (certificate/degree) will greatly improve your job prospects, or are you worried that it won't? * Taking on too much debt Crosstabulation

		Concerned About taking on too much debt				Total
		A lot	Some	Only a little	Not at all	
Confident school will greatly improve job prospects	Count	52	42	27	34	155
	Expected Count	59.9	36.7	26.2	32.2	155.0
Worried that it won't	Count	19	6	3	1	29
	Expected Count	11.2	6.9	4.9	6.0	29.0
Neither	Count	9	1	5	8	23
	Expected Count	8.9	5.4	3.9	4.8	23.0
Total	Count	80	49	35	43	207
	Expected Count	80.0	49.0	35.0	43.0	207.0

Respondents worried that their degree won't greatly improve their job prospects were more likely than expected to be concerned about taking on too much debt. Conversely, respondents most confident in their job prospects were more likely than expected to indicate concerns over debt to be "Only a little" or "Not at all." This variation cannot be shown to be statistically significant, but does suggest that further investigation is warranted. The rationale for this question and the related findings provides information about the perceived benefit factor in our conceptual framework.

The literature points to significant student suspicion regarding remedial course work. Remedial coursework is intended to address deficiencies in academic preparation but can increase time to degree, adds to the cost of a degree, and can be detrimental to feelings of student welfare – all of these items are included in the conceptual framework. Survey questions about adult student perceptions of remedial coursework attempted to verify these concerns among TICUA adult students. Tables #29 and #30 detail the breakdown in unweighted and weighted frequencies and percentages. While the frequencies of answer change between the unweighted and unweighted tables, the percentage distribution only changes for two-tenths of a percent in each category.

Table #29 <i>Took Remedial Classes (Unweighted)</i>				Table #30 <i>Took Remedial Classes (Weighted)</i>			
		Frequency	Valid Percent			Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	No Remedial Classes	163	72.8	Valid	No Remedial Classes	178	72.6
	Took Remedial	61	27.2		Took Remedial	67	27.4
	Total	224	100.0		Total	245	100.0
Missing	System	39		Missing	System	24	
Total		263		Total		269	

A separate breakdown of the remedial coursework question shows that remedial coursework was perceived to be generally helpful. Tables #31 and #32 detail the responses regarding the helpfulness of remedial coursework. The percentages across the different answers also do not change substantially from unweighted to weighted frequencies.

Table #31 <i>Have remedial classes helped you become a better student, have they not helped, or have you not taken them?(Unweighted)</i>		Table #32 <i>Have remedial classes helped you become a better student, have they not helped, or have you not taken them?(Weighted)</i>	
They have helped %	88.5 <i>n</i> = 54	They have helped %	92.5 <i>n</i> = 62
They have not helped %	11.5 <i>n</i> = 7	They have not helped %	7.5 <i>n</i> = 5

The findings detailed in Tables #31 and #32 show large percentages of respondents believed their remedial coursework to have been helpful in becoming a better student. Findings around remedial coursework relates to preparation that maps to Barriers to College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework.

DATA SOURCE: INTERVIEWS.

It’s a Juggling Act: Adult College Students Seeking Balance. A strong theme to emerge the interviews with TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students concerned balance. This theme and subsequent sub-themes addressed relate to balancing priorities, which maps to Barriers to College under Individual Behaviors in our conceptual framework. We understood balance to encompass financial and work obligations, as well as family commitments and life events. Both interview groups agreed that adult students sometimes struggled to actively maintain balance. Francina, an adult student, shared that her “biggest challenge was balancing work and family with school.” Kyle, a TICUA campus administrator, agreed that he observed “Balancing family, work, and financial obligations” as a challenge for adult students. TICUA member campus staff, administrators, and adult students repeatedly shared elements of balance that concern adult students.

Financial Obligations. Both interview groups noted the financial obligations that adult students must consider. Maureen, a student-facing staff member, pointed out that adult students are “more financially independent” and have more financial concerns. Barb, an adult student, shared that she used financial aid to pay for school and that without it cost would be a barrier. Theresa, another adult student, relied on PELL initially and was now taking out loans. Harriet, another adult student, also relied on a combination of PELL and loans now that she is eligible for them. Laura, a student-facing staff member, indicated that financial aid was discussed with adult students in “one-on-one meetings” and during orientation. Vivian, a student-facing staff member, described financial aid as a “barrier” because “[adult] students need to be full-time” to qualify. Karen, another student, shared that she did not think it was “fair to adults that you have to be full time to get financial aid.” Isaac, another adult student, shared that the “hardest part [of going to

school] is writing the check." He also shared that he was fortunate to have little debt because of a high salary and tuition reimbursement from his employer. Charlie, another adult student, shared that he used military education benefits to cover the cost of school.

Work. Adult students shared concerns for balancing their work schedules with taking classes. TICUA member campus staff and administrators also noted challenges with balancing work and school that they believe adult students face. Tom, an adult student, shared that it was difficult to keep his accelerated course schedule with his work schedule. He also noted that "it was not [his institution's] fault" and that it was his work schedule. He shared that he hoped to have a schedule change in the coming months.

Family Commitments & Life Events. Both interview groups described balance considerations that adult students face around family commitments, like childcare, and other life events. Barb, an adult student, described balancing school and family as "rough." She further noted that "[she] was just motivated to get it done, [she] can't even tell you how [she] do[es] it." Karen also noted that "you have to choose between your kids participating in activities or you going to school." Harriet, another adult student, described a life event when she needed to assume a caretaker role for another family member and noted that it would be challenging to manage that role and school. Liz, a TICUA campus administrator, believed that adult students often "sorted out childcare and commuting prior to enrolling."

Project Limitations

Generalizability. First, the purpose of this study was not to generalize, rather to gain deeper insight into what works for adult college student success and degree completion, at private, not for profit institutions in the state of Tennessee. As a case study, our capstone focused in narrowly on issues and programs that may be particular to best-serving adult college students in Tennessee. The study may not be useful in informing broader student populations' college choice process or higher education policy in other states that occur under different circumstances.

Time. In order to meet program and course requirements, this capstone study was contained within the course of roughly eight months. Therefore, all aspects needed to be completed within two academic semesters. The time available made it difficult to conduct preliminary interviews for building our understanding of the context of our capstone project and developing our conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Instead, we relied on an initial literature review and an initial review of existing documents and data available from TICUA and THEC. The time available, combined with other constraints, also led the capstone study team to rely on convenience sampling, along with the purposive sampling strategy and a limited number interviews.

Closely related to time is travel. We were unable to visit each TICUA member campus relevant to our capstone project. We were also unable to conduct multiple campus visits for interviews. Therefore we may have missed opportunities to further develop our understanding of the adult college student choice process across a more inclusive and broad sample.

Researcher Bias and Subjectivity. We are committed to an understanding of the unique set of circumstances that adult college students may face during their choice process and campus experience. However, Patton shares from Scriven (1993) that "people with knowledge about an

area are typically people with views about it; the way to avoid panels of ignoramuses ... is to go for a balance of views, not an absence of views” (p. 62). Therefore, it was critical for our team to consciously use objectivity with regular reviews and check-ins during the data collection process. Because a member of our capstone team works at a TICUA member institution, although in a different department, the other capstone team members conducted all interviews for that institution. In all interviews, we stressed that we were acting as graduate students. Our student status will also be important during the presentation of our findings to TICUA member campuses.

Participant Selection. Another limitation of this study that could affect the internal validity is the participant selection. As previously mentioned, we partnered with TICUA to select TICUA member institutions for participation in our capstone study. From the selected group, there were several TICUA member institutions that did not respond to our or TICUA administrator’s requests for participation. All participants, TICUA member institutions, adult college students, campus staff and administrators, were volunteers who responded to our request and were able to complete our data request within the time frame allotted.

Sample. Finally, while we did partner with responding TICUA member institutions to coordinate requesting adult student participation in our capstone study, our survey response rate and the total number of student interviews were low. There is also an over-representation of certain TICUA member institutions in our survey data, as well as our interview data. This sampling strategy may be of particular concern given that some TICUA institutions have unique programs and offerings. Such circumstances can present challenges when drawing inferences for the entire TICUA member institution affiliated adult student population.

Summary of findings

Given the limitations of this study, our recommendations for practice, future research, and conclusions are offered with a degree of caution. With a choice based sample and other study constraints, consumers of this research should keep in mind that our findings may not generalize to other populations or studies.

Before we discuss recommendations and conclusions, we will provide a summary of key findings from our capstone project. We have organized our discussion following our study questions framework, first by institutional and individual behaviors and then by the pertaining study questions.

Institutional Behaviors that Impacts Adult Student College Choice

Question 1) what are current best practices among TICUA institutions for recruiting and retaining adult students?

We identified three broad areas of best practices that are currently implemented at TICUA institutions:

- Websites that are easy to navigate and specifically address adult student programs and services

- Tailoring course delivery and administrative services to adult student schedules and needs
- Awarding credit for previous work

Our student survey findings show that a principal source of information in the college choice process for adult students is the institution website. Word of mouth closely followed the institution website as a primary source of information. As discussed in our literature review, the college search process timeline is brief for adult students, especially for those with multiple nontraditional student characteristics, usually enrolling within six months of deciding to go to college (Hutchens, 2016). The brevity of the adult student college search process coupled with the primary source of information for prospective adult college students demonstrate the need for a user-friendly, informative institution website with tailored information for adult students. While institutions are limited in their ability to effect word-of-mouth recommendations, TICUA institutions should be aware of how good and bad experiences for adult students can influence enrollment of future students. This is especially relevant given the limited geographic area from which adult students are likely to be drawn as well as the likelihood of potential recruits being employed alongside institutional alumni.

Adult student interview participants also shared the importance of efficient enrollment and registration processes. Once the adult college student decides to enroll in an institution, they value being able to complete the process quickly. Several adult college students shared how speedy their enrollment process was, getting enrolled in as little as one day. Web-based self-service options, with clearly defined steps, for enrollment and registration may help to expedite these processes for adult students but several students reported a pleasant in-person experience with enrollment staff.

A pattern from our student survey and interviews with adult students and TICUA member campus staff reveals that one of the most prevalent best practices among TICUA institutions for recruiting and retaining adult students is credit for previous work. Data collected from our student survey indicate that adult student respondents often received course credit from college transfer, previous work experience, and challenge exams. Receiving course credit was also found to play a role in the adult student college choice process.

Data collected from our interviews with adult students and TICUA institution staff also reveal the role that credit for previous work played in the selection process and the perception of institutional commitment to student welfare. Adult student interview participants noted that transfer credit awards aided in their college choice process and that they appreciated the time and cost savings that credit for previous work offered. A significant divergence noted that both adult students, and TICUA institution staff interview participants found that the transfer credit process was sometimes challenging and could result in limited credit for previous work, despite the potentially lengthy process. Therefore, it may be worthwhile for TICUA member institution administrators and staff to examine transfer policies on a rolling schedule to maximize the application of appropriate credit for previous work and to streamline the course credit transfer process for adult students.

Question 2) what institutional characteristics or practices influence TICUA institutions to offer programming for adult students?

Two major influences emerged from our data sources related to the offering of adult programs.

- Institutions whose program offerings address areas of high demand among adult students
- Institutions whose mission and religious affiliation are attractive to adult student learners

Based on interviews with TICUA member campus administrators and staff, and from review of the literature, there are a few key considerations for institutions to offer degree programs to adult students. First, according to TICUA member employees, the demand from adult students for degree offerings and degree completion opportunities are compelling for institutions of higher education. In addition to the demand for programs from adult learners, there are public relations campaigns and press on state initiatives that alert students and institutions to the opportunity for higher education for adult learners. Between market demand, and economic and policy drivers, institutions are responding to external forces to provide programs to adult college students. Institutions can participate in and may take advantage of state programs like RECONNECT to promote their programs and to receive funding for adult students.

Unique to TICUA member campuses, of which many are faith-based institutions, is the religious mission of these schools. TICUA campuses have a unique value proposition on providing higher education in the offering of a religions and faith-based mission, campus culture, and community. Religiously affiliated institutions are mission focused, and are driven to share this mission with students through the student academic and social experience. This is a unique value added aspect of higher education at TICUA campuses. A drive to offer mission based education and impact student development through mission delivery is a compelling force for campuses to offer programing and serves to populations outside of the traditional college student. Many TICUA institutions also have reputations within their communities for strong faith-based values of service and care. Institutional values were reflected specifically in their care for individual students and the emphasis on community fit and engagement. Many of the adult students in our sample were attracted to such values and cited them as their primary reason for enrollment.

Question 3) what does literature and theory suggest are important factors in the recruitment and academic success of adult students?

The literature suggests the importance of three specific ideas on which to focus for the recruitment and academic success of adult students.

- Information about adult programs at should be easy to access on the institutions website
- Institutions should place emphasis on the quality of faculty and services for adult students in a way that maximizes welfare

As institutions work with attracting adult students to their programs, it is important to keep in mind that the search process for the adult learner who is a prospective student is short—in many instances, adult learners are in the college search process for 6 months or less before making a decision. Recognizing this sense of urgency and speed of the search process can be helpful to college and university employees who work with students in the recruitment process.

Once students are enrolled, student welfare and faculty quality are of top priority in supporting adult student success. Most colleges and universities are not designed with the adult student in mind. Institutional behavior is a central way that colleges and universities demonstrate their concern and consideration for their students. Institutional behavior can include what academic and student support programs are offered to students and when, institutional policies, and campus procedures. These policies, procedures, and academic programs can either operate in such a way that they accommodate the needs of adult students, and offer the flexibility needed by the adult student population, or institutional practices can operate in a more “one-size-fits-all” model that does not consider the unique characteristics of adult students. How and when institutions offer academic programs, services, and support resources impact how accessible enrollment in college and degree completion are for adult students. Not providing classes and university services at convenient times for adult students is a critical barrier to adult students enrolling in a college or university. To positively impact student achievement, institutions serving adult students should be mindful of how congruent or incongruent their policies, procedures, and environment is for adult student support and services. These factors of institutional practice that give an impression of concern for student welfare should be consistent with each other.

In addition to a demonstrated concern for student welfare, institutional faculty quality is also a key area for supporting adult college student success. Because of the limited social connections with classmates, relationships with faculty connect adult students to the classroom. These adult student/faculty relationships should be considered important in understanding the adult college student experience. Institutions must also make sure their professors and administrators understand the prevalence of working students in the adult learner population, and how to adapt to the needs of these students. Providing flexible advising schedules, anticipating student scheduling and coursework needs, and providing reasonable accommodations with schedules of assignments and work are all critical to student academic experience with faculty. These are specific ways that faculty can be responsive to the needs of adult students.

Individual Behavior in Adult Student Choice

Question 4) what factors are most influential in the adult student decision to enroll at an institution of higher education?

Our data sources show that three large factors influence adult decisions to enroll in higher education

- A career or personal goal will be supported by completing their degree
- The time and cost of degree completion is clear and manageable
- They are supported by family, friends, or colleagues in their decision to enroll

Our student survey and interviews with adult students and TICUA institution staff findings uncover the most influential adult student motivators for their decision to enroll in college. The student survey data show career advancement and promotion opportunities are the main reason why adult students are pursuing a degree. This is followed closely by a desire to change career fields. Adult students prefer a structured degree program to achieve their goal of degree attainment more quickly. This is opposed to exploring various subjects across the curriculum with more flexibility.

In interviews with both adult students and TICUA institution staff participants described adult students choosing to enroll in college for external rewards, like career development and advancement considerations. Participants also discussed the acquisition of practical and relevant career skills. TICUA member institutions may be well served to promote career focused aspects of their available programming, as well as to draw connections between skills gained in the classroom and their use in the world of work.

Another noteworthy item for discussion from the student survey, and adult student and TICUA campus staff interviews is the role of support in the lives of adult students. The role of support is a prerequisite in the adult student decision to enroll in college. Findings from the student survey show that the people closest to adult students were supportive and encouraging of their academic pursuits.

Adult student interview participants also described the supportive role that family played. Further, they discussed the supportive role that employers sometimes play, which can include financial support. While adult student support systems are largely outside of the sphere of influence of the college, TICUA member institutions benefit from understanding this essential part of adult student college choice and, ultimately, success. TICUA institutions may also want to highlight the support systems available specifically to adult students. Faculty can play an important role in supporting adult students outside of the classroom. This finding is also supported by literature on adult and commuter students.

Question 5) what factors are most influential in the adult students selection of an institution of higher education in which to enroll?

This question produced the largest number of findings, however three factors were found to be of central importance for adult students in the selection of a college or university

- The institution offers a program that closely aligns with student's career or personal goals
- Faculty, institutional services, and academic supports are professional, efficient, and address the specific needs of adult students
- The institution recognizes and award credit for previous coursework, professional skills, and relevant experiences

The survey and interviews with adult students and staff reveal a variety of ways in which adult can be encouraged to select a TICUA institution. Answers related to field of study selection show that adult students are keenly aware of the connection between studies and career opportunities. However, a substantive percentage of survey respondents also mentioned the role that personal passions or missions played in their selection process. The religious affiliation of TICUA institutions was attractive to survey respondents and interviewees. While students in religious programs noted the role of passion in their selection, many such student also expect to create careers from their religious studies. TICUA institutions seeking to improve the experience of their adult students should ensure that their students are confident the investment in school will pay-off in the workplace. While response numbers were too low to find statistical significance, survey evidence suggests there may be a relationship between confidences in career prospects with lower levels of concern over debt.

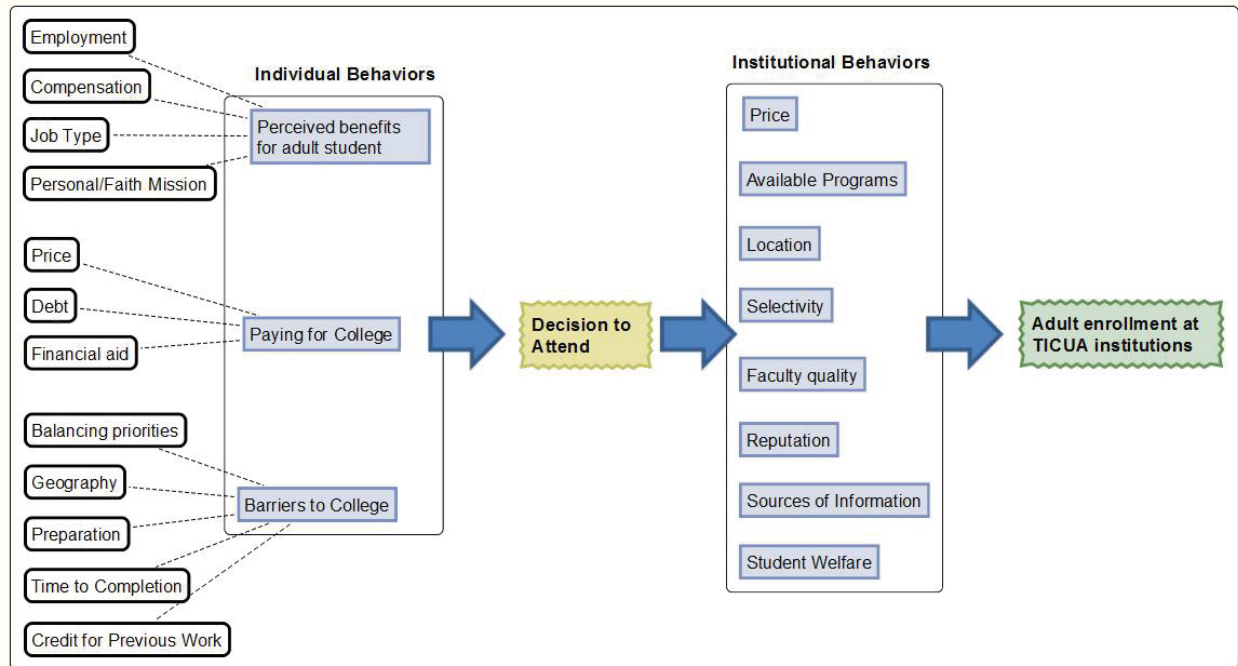
Survey and interview results also demonstrate the essential importance of supporting adult students in a variety of ways. Adult students expect professional and efficient

administrative services. Interviewees spoke of their appreciation for services that accommodated their work scheduled, informed them of deadlines, helped with paperwork, and saved them time. Adult interviewees also noted the importance of faculty support. Special mention was made of faculty who were willing to address adult student questions on evenings and weekends, when adult students are able to shift from their jobs to their studies. The survey shows the importance of awarding credit for prior coursework, work experience, and for testing out of requirements. However, when adult perceive that receiving such credit will be a long or drawn-out process, their satisfaction is reduced. A one-day intensive evaluation seems to be much preferred over self-paced writing assignments that can take several days to complete and are submitted to unknown reviewers.

Adult student interviewees specifically mentioned selecting TICUA institutions for the hands-on support. Adult students are motivated and willing to work, but expect their institutions to support them in important ways. While students are mostly satisfied with the services provided by their institutions, two areas did show approximately 20% dissatisfaction. These two areas involved providing help with financial aid paperwork and with tutoring. Both of these areas are where TICUA institutions can show additional care for their adult students. Finances were shown to be a substantial concern for adult students and large percentages use loans to pay for school. TICUA institutions should consider ways to assist adult students with financial paperwork where feasible. Free tutoring is available on many college campuses, but the survey results indicate that these tutors may not be available or convenient for adult students. This is another area where adult students want to feel that the institution cares about their individual success. Adult-focused orientations also seem to play an important role and were mentioned by several student interviewees. Additionally, the staff at one institution mentioned feedback about developing an adult-specific orientation.

The process of reviewing institutional factors and adult student motivations inspired the research team to re-evaluated elements of the conceptual framework. Figure 2 shows the updated conceptual framework based on the findings of the study. TICUA institutions are all four-year, private, non-profit colleges and universities. As such, little was learned about the importance of institutional type during the surveys and interviews. The institutional type concept has been removed from Institutional Behaviors. Also, the original conceptual framework failed to account for the importance of personal and religious mission among the perceived benefits for adult students. Therefore, a new concept was added to Individual Behaviors under perceived benefits for adult students.

Figure 2: Updated Conceptual Framework



Question 6) what are the most pressing concerns of adult students enrolling at TICUA member institutions of higher education?

Two areas of concern stand out for adult students in their pursuit of higher education

- Balancing the demands of school with their work and family obligations
- Accumulating too much debt or taking on costs that are unmanageable

From our student survey and interviews with adult students and TICUA institution staff we can see that the most pressing concerns of adult students enrolling at TICUA member institutions are balancing priorities and paying for college. The student survey findings show that adult students are most worried about balancing work and family with school, keeping up academically, and taking on too much debt. Approximately 47% of adult student survey participants responded that they worried a lot about balancing work and family with school. Roughly 44% and 36% of adult student survey respondents said that they worried a lot about keeping up academically and taking on too much debt respectively.

The interviews with adult students and TICUA institution staff findings show that both groups of interview participants acknowledged and discussed the challenges of balancing work and family with school. Both groups of interview participants also discussed the financial obligations of adult students and how cost could sometimes function as a barrier to college. For adult students that rely on financial aid to pay for college, required full-time enrollment for eligibility is an adult college student concern.

TICUA member institutions may not have a direct role in balancing work and family with school for adult students, but institutions can build their administrative and staff understanding of adult student needs and concerns. Building an understanding of adult student needs and concerns could aid TICUA member institutions in refining policies and practices toward easing the burden

of adult students, increasing flexibility and options available to adult students, and, potentially, improving adult student persistence and attainment.

Adult students reported utilizing a variety of course modality models. Some students reporting taking all of their classes online, others reported only in-person classes. In between was a diverse mix of student responses. The interview provided details and support for the idea that adult students select the mix that works best for their learning preferences and for balancing their schedule. Approximately 50% of survey respondents were satisfied with their current mix of online and classroom coursework. Other students reported desires for more or fewer online classes. Adult students also reported mixed feelings about the level of discipline required for online courses. It would seem that TICUA institutions are best served by providing a variety of options where possible.

Balancing family and school may also be related to the age of adult students. The greatest concern for balancing school, work, and family was reporting among the 35-44 year old age group. This may be related to the likelihood of children during these years. Additional study of this topic might verify this relationship. Similarly, the greatest concern for staying focused was observed among the 25-34 year old age group. Social distractions may be most common among this youngest age group, but this relationship required further study. Finally, adult students living alone or with one other person indicated higher levels of concern for dropping out – a concern that showed relatively low prevalence among surveyed students. The relationship between living alone and dropping out may be related to support structures, but this relationship also required further study.

Concerns over debt were dominant across all adult student groups, however, there is potential for this concern to be especially acute when students are less confident that their degree will improve their job prospects. TICUA institutions can directly address this potential problem area by ensuring that adult degree programs make clear connections between classroom learning and the workplace – this action has already been shown to be important for a number of other reasons. The findings for remedial coursework make up a relatively small sample, but produced different result from studies of traditional undergraduates. Low number prevent a statistically significant finding, but reported adult student attitudes regarding remedial classes is supported by findings from other recent studies of non-traditional students (Hutchens, 2016).

Recommendations for Practice

As was mentioned previously, institutions can only directly influence their behaviors and practices. Institutions can cultivate prospective adult student interest, but ultimately institutions cannot change the intrinsic motivations and values of adult students pursuing higher education. For these reasons, recommendations provided to TICUA from this project will specifically address practices that institutions can adopt to recruit and retain adult students. Findings from our quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, supported by the literature, suggest the following recommendations for practice. The information presented on institutional characteristics and perspective of adult students map directly back to the conceptual framework. Where additional insight presented in the quantitative and qualitative data, we added an additional sub-theme that is related to, but unique from, the concept of student welfare. Institutional consideration of adult students needs emerged as an important area for institutional practices based on the survey and interview data.

Institutional Characteristics	Recommendation 1	Recommendation 2	Recommendation 3
Price of Institution	Early discussions and help with paperwork about costs, financial aid, and ways to manage both	Structure programs in ways adults can qualify for financial aid, federal or otherwise	Consider adult student tuition discounts and be prepared to discuss them early in the recruitment process or in advertising
Type of Institution	Advertise workforce advantages of bachelor's degree	Highlight religious affiliations and campus missions consistently	Stay informed about changes to Tennessee programs targeting adult students and four-year programs
Available Programs	Educate adult students on employment opportunities associated with program offerings, especially related to the bachelors degree; connect academic work to professional experiences or new opportunities	Programs should be designed for flexibility (accelerated, partial term, etc.)	Highlight religious affiliations and campus missions consistently
Selectivity	Advertise rigor of adult programs and support from faculty and staff	Development classes should include discussion of specific knowledge and skills necessary for degree	Award credit for work experience or demonstrable knowledge and skills relevant to degree
Faculty Quality	Create a culture of responsive and timely communication from faculty and staff	Feedback on assignments should be appropriate to structure of the course (short terms, etc.)	Faculty should draw on personal and professional experience to show the applicability of learning objectives
Reputation	Conduct entrance and exit interviews about hopes, fears, and past disappointments, and be sure that academic advisors have this information about students as well	Anonymous student feedback should be collected and shared with faculty, staff, advisors, and other student-facing offices for corrective action	Connect with local employers to inform them of program offerings, the skills of graduates, and availability of flexible adult programs
Sources of Information for Prospective Adult Students	Advertising should address local population	Coordinate with employers to advertise postsecondary options and programs	Information relevant to adult students should be easily accessible on institution website; institutions should also work to ensure that traditional and adult program admissions offices speak to each other and collaborate--especially if adult student admissions and enrollment is handled by an office separate from traditional admissions
Student Welfare	Dedicated staff for adult students can ensure consistently professional and	Orientations, information sessions, and activities should be strongly	Required action steps like enrollment, registration, and graduation should be as

	responsive services; these faculty and staff who work with adult students should be trained regarding common adult student issues and concerns	encouraged or required to build sense of welfare and community among adult students and with faculty and staff of adult programs	easy, immediate, and automatic as possible--most adults will enroll in an institution within 6 months of starting a college search process
Institutional Consideration of Adult Student Needs	Institutions should consider the ways in which they are structurally organized only to consider traditional students in their policies, and adjust appropriately to meet adult student needs	Adult students often need faculty to offer some flexibility, i.e. reasonable deadline extensions or offering assignments that focus on adult perspectives or work experience	Ability to get financial aid is tied to full-time status; working with students to manage full-time school schedules for loan eligibility;

Recommendations for Future Research for TICUA and Member Campuses

Comparisons of our survey answers, interview responses, and existing research literature point to a number of possibly important findings for adult students. However, non-random selection and small sample sizes limited the power of statistical inferences. TICUA institutions could benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of adult student perceptions around barriers, pricing, and the benefits of attending private, non-profit institutions. Our survey and interviews uncovered the importance of personal goals such as finishing a degree, role modeling for children and employees, and contributing to a community of faith. This perceived benefit could be explored in greater depth in order to better understand its power to mitigate concerns over barriers. TICUA institutions are in a unique position to advertise their religious affiliations, their tight-knit communities, and their small class sizes compared to the larger state institutions.

Additional study may also illuminate the nuances around adult student's perceptions of career and workplace benefits. Tennessee's higher education programs place a lot of attention on two-year institutions and associates degrees. However, TICUA institutions offer the bachelors degree that is more flexible and in greater demand among employers nationally. Before TICUA institutions consider adopting two-year programs, bootcamps, or certificate programs, they may benefit from a better understanding of adult student motivations and the niche they serve. A better understanding of this market position could be support new marketing initiatives, program tweaks, or website designs that more closely align with adult students' needs and desires

Finally, future research could also investigate the adult college student experience beyond the college choice process into adult college student persistence and degree completion. Our study focused on the building understanding of the adult college choice process, specifically for TICUA member institutions. Building understanding of adult college student persistence and degree completion could benefit adult students through an improved college experience and institutions through increased adult college student retention.

Conclusion

This study finds that adult college students are drawn to TICUA institutions by high-demand, career-focused programs that recognize and reward the skills and experiences of adult students. When adults arrive on campus, they expect professional and efficient administrative services that can support them toward a degree. The biggest concerns of adult students are

balancing the demands of school with their work and family responsibilities. Therefore adult students need clear timelines and manageable costs on their way to their degree of choice.

TICUA institutions are in a unique position within Tennessee higher education. The faith-based and mission-driven campuses draw adult students who expect to improve their employment conditions as well as fulfill personal goals inspired by faith and community. Adult students appreciate the one-on-one support of high quality faculty and caring support staff. We recommend that TICUA campuses continue to focus on these strengths and to consider areas of improvement based on the findings of this study. TICUA institutions will play an important role in the Tennessee Drive-to-55 initiatives and produce adult graduates who contribute substantively to the state's economic future.

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Appendix A: Literature Review

Institutional Practices for Recruiting and Retaining Adult Students (Research Question I)

Institutional behavior is one side of the adult college student choice process. Institutions only have control of their side of the college choice relationship. Institutions cannot do much to change adult student priorities or values or the way adult learners choose to pursue postsecondary education. But institutions can understand how students gather information about the college choice process, how students prioritize that information, and institutions can respond accordingly in their recruitment and student support activities in order to present the most compelling message in attracting adult students. We review pertinent literature to address these issues.

The Role of Information in the College Search Process. In a nationally representative survey of over 800 individuals aged 18-55 who do not have college degrees but are interested in pursuing higher education, Public Agenda found that word of mouth through family, friends, and colleagues are the primary ways that adult learners find out about college options available to them (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Doctoral research completed in 2015 finds that institutions can influence enrollment and retention of veteran students through consistent communication and branding strategy aimed at veteran and military audiences (Drew et al., 2015). In the 2013 Public Agenda report, entitled, *Is College Worth It For Me?*, prospective adult students indicate that they gather information about college through advertisements and from those in their personal and social networks. A majority of adults also view college and program websites during their college search process (Hagelskamp et al., 2013).

Available Programs. Recent research findings by Hutchens (2016) also show that the “availability of a specific major” and program “cost were the two most important institutional characteristics” to adult students (Hutchens, 2016, p. 42). Hutchens’ work confirms that certain factors, like cost and the availability of desired academic programs, cut across the college choice process, regardless of student demographic of age. Of great interest to this project specifically, Hutchens’ findings (2016) also state that for highly nontraditional students, the availability of a specific major replaces cost as the primary concern for an adult learner in the selection of an institution of higher education. Hutchens (2016) found that especially for adult students who work full time, the availability of a specific major is an especially important factor in the college selection process. Hutchens (2016) found that for nontraditional students “college is serving a very specific purposes, or [adult learners] waited to attend college until it was financially feasible”--i.e. academic program availability and cost of attendance can be “deal breakers” for adults in the college selection and enrollment process (p. 62). These findings have specific implications for institutional behavior and this project--in the recruitment process, the research suggests that institutions can highlight the availability and attractiveness of their academic programs and majors to adult students in the college search process.

Clarity on the Financial Aid Process. While research finds that financial concerns are not always exclusively the top priority for adult students when searching for postsecondary education options, cost and financial aid are certainly still a decision making factor for adult students in the college search. Public Agenda’s 2013 report reveals that adult learners are

worried about taking on too much debt and that their priorities are to find a school that has affordable tuition and fees. Relatedly, adult learners report that they would be a lot more interested in school if institutions provided hands on assistance with financial aid applications (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Further, Seftor and Turner (2002) find that when aid is available, not only will adult learners use it, it can be a major factor in the college choice process. With more experience in filing taxes and other more complicated and official forms and paperwork, adult learners are less intimidated by financial aid and loan application processes than their traditional aged counterparts (Seftor & Turner, 2002). Institutions may or may not have institutional aid or many other financial aid options available to adult students, but the research reveals that this is an important part of the institutional package when adult learners are selecting a school.

Sources of Information: Use of Recruitment Materials. Traditional ways that institutions might advertise institutional value and effectiveness, like graduation rates, dropout rates, and loan default rates, do not have immediate meaning to adult learners (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). In recruitment materials and visits with admissions and enrollment officers, these institutional factors might be highlighted to indicate the strength of the institution and its ability to serve its students. But given that these factors do not connect with the adult prospective student audience, when institutions help adult learners understand this information in a “meaningful and engaging” way, prospective adult students can “understand why data can help them make good decisions” (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). An understanding of these collective findings indicate that institutions should tailor their recruitment messaging specifically for adult students.

Institutional Characteristics that Lead an Institution to Recruit Adult Students (Research Question II)

Adult Student Demand for Higher Education. According to U.S. Department of Education, adult students--those age 25 years and older--accounted for over 7.5 million students enrolled in college, or about 37% of total college enrollees in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In the state of Tennessee, 900,000 adults over 25 already have some college, but no degree and 1.4 million Tennessee adults over 25 have only a high school diploma or equivalent. There are a number of factors that might lead an institution to recruit adult students. First, the demand from adult students to secure a postsecondary degree is evident in the number of adult students or prospective adult students mentioned in the previous paragraph. Several TICUA institutions have high numbers or percentages of adult students in their current enrollment. Fourteen of TICUA’s 34 institutions have higher than 20% adult undergraduate student populations. The largest concentration of adult students (55%) are found in a few majors, including Business Management & Administrative Services, Health Professions, and Liberal Arts & Sciences. Among TICUA schools, there are additional concentrations in Criminal Justice, Teaching, Social Work, and Pastoral Counseling & Ministries. Overall, 33% of TICUA undergraduate degrees are awarded to adults (THEC, 2014-2015 Tennessee Higher Education Adult Student Fact Book).

At least sixteen TICUA member institutions offer programs designed to accommodate adult students age 25 and older. Programs lead to baccalaureate degrees and acknowledge that many enrolling adults will have transfer credits. Most of the degree programs are for business or health care. Programs often include flexible schedules and classes on nights and weekends for

working students. Some institutions offer financial aid specifically for adult students and may lower costs compared to traditional degree programs. Specific programs include: Accelerated Baccalaureate Degree * Certificate Programs * Credit for Prior Learning Experience * Dual Credit Courses * Dual Enrollment Courses * Dual Admission * Offsite Courses * Online Courses * Transfer Articulation * Reverse Transfer * Dual Degree * Remedial Education * Veterans Resources * International and Global Education * Experiential Education * Workforce Development * and Other (TICUA, 2014 Alternative Academic Offerings of TICUA Member Institutions: Expanding Educational Opportunities).

Economic and Policy Drivers. Additionally, the economic and policy context in the state of Tennessee create a conducive environment for working adults without college degrees and institutions of higher education to connect so that students can earn beneficial credentials, and that institutions can connect with this additional student population where there is interest and demand for higher education. Further, colleges and universities in the TICUA membership, that have unique missions as private institutions and/or faith-based institutions may feel compelled to offer education to adults as a way to expand the reach of the institution's mission.

Reputation and Institutional Mission. College and universities that would choose to serve more adult students, or begin serving adult students for the first time, would benefit from understanding the unique qualities of the adult student population. Adult students take longer to complete their postsecondary degrees and credentials than their traditionally aged counterparts (Shapiro et al., 2016). Further, if adult students have children, only 40% of them earn their degrees after 6 years (Miller, Gault & Thorman, 2011), and adult students with children are more likely to drop out (Lumina Foundation, 2016). Also, nontraditional students have low degree completion rates when compared to traditional students (Hutchens, 2016). Nontraditional students leave before the completion of their college degree at a rate of 42% (Hutchens, 2016). Almost 90% of “highly nontraditional” students (i.e. those students who have multiple nontraditional characteristics [USDE, 2015]) do not complete their bachelor’s degree within 5 years of starting their coursework (Hutchens, 2016).

Institutional Factors that are Important in Adult Recruitment & Retention (Research Question III)

Search Timeline. Findings from a Vanderbilt University doctoral dissertation (2016) show that the adult college search process is brief. The findings from this study show that 65% of adult students choose to enroll within 6 months of beginning a college search process (Hutchens, 2016). Hutchens (2016) also found that highly nontraditional students--those with multiple nontraditional student characteristics--were even more likely to have a short search process. 75% of highly nontraditional students enroll within 6 months of starting a college search process. Review of the literature on institutional factors that impact effective recruitment and academic success of adult students includes consideration of academic programs, advising, institutional fit, and institutional capacity to recognize students as individuals.

Student Welfare. Institutional policy, procedure, and programming communicates to students the level of institutional commitment to student welfare and student academic growth and development (Braxton et al., 2014). How and when institutions offer academic programs,

services, and support resources impact how accessible enrollment in college and degree completion are for adult students. Not providing classes and university services at convenient times for adult students is a critical barrier to adult students enrolling in a college or university.

Most colleges and universities are not designed with the adult student in mind. This becomes especially apparent when considering the admissions and financial aid experience adult students have at institutions that have traditionally served the 18-22 year old college-going population. More complex family or financial situations are often experienced by adult students, and these complexities are typically outside of the knowledge base of the traditional financial aid counselor (Hutchens, 2016). Further, because financial aid policy dictated by institutions, states, or the federal government, are designed for traditional students, and are typically immune to individual adjustments or case-by-case considerations, these financial aid policies do not offer much flexibility to adult students with more dynamic life circumstances (Hart, 2003).

Once students enroll, research on academic success and persistence for commuter students, and what we extrapolate for adult students, shows that specific institutional behaviors promote a student's commitment to their college or university (Braxton et al., 2014). Institutional behavior is a central way that colleges and universities demonstrate their concern and consideration for their students. Institutional behavior can include what academic and student support programs are offered to students and when, institutional policies, and campus procedures. These policies, procedures, and academic programs can either operate in such a way that they accommodate the needs of adult students and offer the flexibility needed by the adult student population, or institutional practices can operate in a more "one-size-fits-all" model that does not consider the unique characteristics of adult students. "The more a student perceives that their college or university is committed to the welfare of its students, the greater the degree of the student's academic and intellectual development" (Braxton et al., 2014, p. 184). This finding from Braxton et al. (2014) on the significance of institutional commitment to student welfare holds true for traditional students at residential campuses and for traditional-age commuter students. This same significance of commitment to student welfare of adults will be considered in this research project, given that adult learners are likely to be commuter students, and are typically employed, as well. For working students, Perna's 2010 research suggests that it is critical that faculty and administrators serving adult and working students understand this population and adapt to the needs of these students.

Other ways that institutions can communicate their commitment to adult student welfare include how academic advising and academic programming is offered to adult students. Braxton et al. (2014) shares specific recommendations on how institutions should offer advising and academic programming to commuter students. Academic advising is central to the academic enterprise of the university. Proper and effective advising encourages and supports student academic process. Braxton et al. (2014) highlights how academic advising helps students realize "their academic potential" (p. 189). As it pertains to adult students, academic advising should be convenient to adult student schedules and should keep in mind the class scheduling needs and time demands of an adult student who is likely balancing work and family demands in addition to school responsibilities. Academic advisors can also aid students in registration and the course schedule development process so that students can enroll in classes that allow them to balance both attending class and keeping a consistent work schedule. Further, when students see academic advising as a key component of the academic experience, the more students perceive institutional commitment to student welfare (Braxton et al., 2014, p. 193). Additionally, advisors can be critical in ensuring that students stay on track to graduate and make adequate progress

each semester. Errors or issues with advising and subsequent course registration and enrollment can create significant barriers for students in the path of degree completion. More intrusive advising--for example, the use of mandatory advising sessions--can benefit adult students by "meeting students where they are" in their educational progress, rather than waiting for students to come to their advisors (Goldrick-Rab, 2007).

Institutions serving nontraditional students can communicate a commitment to student welfare by intentionally structuring services and schedules to accommodate non-traditional student schedules. The hours of operation of dining services, study centers, library services, university offices, and access to other campus facilities for evening and weekend hours is a critical way that institutions show their concern for student welfare which leads to student commitment to the institution (Braxton et al., 2014). Straightforward processes for student experiences in registration, using campus technology and services, and clear communication to students also impacts a positive impression of concern for student welfare and subsequently increases student commitment to the institution (Braxton et al., 2014). These institutional factors increase student commitment to their college or university and also positively impact student academic experience and retention at their institution.

Faculty Quality. Institutions must also make sure their professors and administrators understand the prevalence of working students in the adult learner population, and how to adapt to the needs of these students. This includes adapting to non-traditional student schedules, providing time for one-on-one interaction with faculty, and addressing feelings of disconnect for these students that come from having other obligations (Perna, 2010). The multiple roles that adult students occupy (employee, parent, spouse, etc.) can add stress and interfere with student persistence and the completion of a college degree (Perna, 2010; Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011), so institutions must consider these external factors when working with students if colleges and universities are concerned with adult student persistence.

In interactions at their institutions, adult students find that classroom interactions are positively related to the adult student experience and retention (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Kerka, 1995). Similar to their traditional-aged peers, adult college students also benefit from small class sizes and engaged professors (Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Adult students, like their traditional-aged counterparts, find that faculty members' availability, level of respect for students, quality of classroom instruction, and contact with students lead to a perception of faculty engagement with students (Graham, 1998; Drew et al, 2015), and that engagement by faculty has a positive impact on student learning (Braxton et al., 2014; Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Because of the limited social connections with classmates, relationships with faculty connect adult students to the classroom. These adult student/faculty relationships should be considered important in understanding the adult college student experience.

To positively impact student achievement, institutions serving adult students should be mindful of how congruent or incongruent their policies, procedures, and environment is for adult student support and services. These factors of institutional practice that give an impression of concern for student welfare should be consistent with each other. Feldman et al. (1999) reference Holland's theory of congruence of person and environment being related to higher educational stability, satisfaction, and achievement. If the actual practice and implementation of institutional values and policies do not seem to fit with articulated concern for student welfare, this can lead to less educational stability, satisfaction, and lower achievement for students (Feldman et al.,

1999). According to Feldman et al. (1999), students should clearly see institutional goals and purpose as prioritizing serving adult students well. This effective and accurate alignment of institutional practices and valuing adult students and their experience has positive impact on student achievement (Feldman et al., 1999).

Individual Behavior in Adult Student College Choice

To examine the adult college choice process, it is critical to understand what elements are included in the term “college choice.” Perna’s research and review of the literature in “Studying College Access and Choice: a Proposed Conceptual Model” (2006) outlines the generally accepted view of college choice as a three stage process: predisposition, search, and choice (Perna, 2006). Our study will mirror these three stages of the college choice model as we examine the individual behavior factors in the college choice process where predisposition is reflected in a student’s reason to enroll, the search process is reflected in how the student hears about college and what factors are most important in selecting a school, and the ultimate choice of an institution where the student will enroll. Perna’s (2006) concept of habitus, or the way an individual's thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions are developed by the individual's environment, is connected to the college choice process for traditional students, and arguably for the adult college student choice process.

Understanding the factors most important to individual adult college students in deciding to enroll in college, and in understanding where adult college students choose to enroll, reveal what is important to adult students and what factors will support adult students in successful degree completion. “Creating links between a theoretical understanding of how students choose whether and where to attend college and the practices that enhance their decision making can contribute to higher completion rates across the many student populations higher education institutions serve” (Bergerson, 2009). We examine three major categories of considerations in the adult college student choice process: perceived benefits for adult students of degree completion, ability to pay for college, and perceived barriers to enrollment. In consideration of the benefits of college to adult students, we examine the impact of completion of a college degree on employment (i.e. promotion opportunities), compensation (salary increases), and job type (changing industry). In consideration of the ability to pay for college, we examine tuition price, possible debt accumulation, and financial aid, and the impact on an individual's choice to attend school in light of ability to pay factors. The last category of consideration is identifying and articulating barriers to college. Barriers in the college choice process may include balancing priorities and obligations, geography and location of student and programs, level of preparedness for return to school, and credit for previous work. The Bers & Smith (1987) study and more recent research (Hutchens & Franklin, 2013) confirms some of these priorities for adult students--convenience and affordability of programs were factors that influence adult student choice to return to school.

Most Influential Factors in the Adult Student Decision to Enroll (Research Question IV)

Perceived Benefits. Intrinsic motivations often lead adult learners to enroll in postsecondary education. A study on nontraditional student choice published in 1987 revealed that a significant personal or professional event can be the catalyst for an adult’s choice to return to school (Bers & Smith, 1987). A 2016 Vanderbilt doctoral dissertation found similar results--

full-time working adults seeking to complete college do so to find a better paying job (Hutchens, 2016). The opportunity for a promotion, or the anticipated increase in financial needs through the birth of a child can be the inciting incident in the life of an adult who would choose to return to or enroll for the first time in a postsecondary institution. Review of the literature reveals that, in terms of predisposition for college, adults tend to fall into two categories: professional predisposition and “right time” predisposition (Hutchens & Franklin, 2013; Hutchens, 2016). Findings from Hutchens’ 2016 doctoral research indicate adult students reported that their reasons to enroll in college included “personal growth, professional reasons, and a sense it was the ‘right time’” (p. 53).

The 2012 U.S. Department of Education publication, the Adult College Completion Toolkit, states that college completion and postsecondary degree and credential attainment is critical in order for adults to compete for good jobs in the 21st century global economy” (p. vii). For increased employment opportunities, increased earning potential, and career advancement, higher education is required in most industries (Tolbert, 2012; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). For high demand fields that provide a sustainable income for a family, post secondary education is crucial, and higher education can be a welcome challenge and skill building opportunity for adult learners (Tolbert, 2012). While this idea of college Return on Investment (ROI) is important in the college choice process, if adult learners do not have access to this information, or have access to quality postsecondary options that are located within a reasonable distance, adult learners will still experience obstacles when making the decision to enroll in higher education (Blagg & Chingos, 2016). According to findings from the Public Agenda survey (2013) prospective adult college students are interested in an academic experience that is connected to their work experience and professional goals and provides some additional or new job experience (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Further, prospective adult college students would like career coaching or advising from their faculty or student support staff to connect what they are learning to the professional environment outside of the university (Hagelskamp et al., 2013).

Barriers to College. Perna’s 2010 research on working college students (primarily traditional-age students but findings overlap with non-traditional adult students) explains how consideration of the financial cost of returning to school, and consideration of student workplace experiences are important factors to working students, which is the majority of adult college students (Perna, 2010). In order to counteract the level of stress faced by adult college students, Perna suggests that colleges and universities support students through manageable tuition rates, institutional financial aid support, need-based aid, and financial aid counseling (Perna, 2010). Perna also suggests that it is important to working students that they receive recognition, and often credit, for their work experience (Perna, 2010). Other factors that influence whether and where students chose to enroll in higher education emerges from Bergerson’s 2009 research on college choice and access to college. Bergerson finds that family engagement, early intervention of students, and access to college preparation curricula are all important factors that positively influence the adult student decision to enroll in college (Bergerson, 2009). Specifically, the support of family and significant others in the adult student’s decision to enroll and balancing the demands and stress of school, along with other responsibilities, is critical as adult students make the decision to return to school. A hands-on and intrusive engagement strategy with adult students early on in the college process is helpful for adult students in the enrollment and assimilation experience to college, Bergerson (2009) finds. Additionally, providing some college

preparation support and resources are important in the college enrollment process for adult students (Bergerson, 2009).

Failure to address student needs and remove barriers to students can negatively impact the college decision and enrollment process. Research on traditional students finds that failure to address student needs reduces student motivation to enroll in higher education (Holliday, Rushing, & Williams, 2015). Relatedly, adult learners often need assistance balancing “multiple competing responsibilities in their lives” (Tolbert, 2012, p. 21). Failure to address adult student financial needs, family obligations, and transportation, for example, can reduce student motivation and ability to enroll in college.

Location of and availability of college programs can be a deciding factor for adult students to choose to enroll in college. A study by Blagg and Chingos in 2016 examines the reality of Virginia students who lived in an “education desert” or “choice desert” where these students either chose to enroll in a lower quality institution or were without many viable options for choosing to enroll in higher education (Blagg & Chingos, 2016). This study also cites national trends in college decision making that reveal distance to higher education options as a factor in the college choice process (Blagg & Chingos, 2016). A study by Jepsen and Montgomery in 2009 also reveals location and geography as an influencing factor in the college choice process. Specifically, Jepsen and Montgomery find that distance to the physical location of an institution of higher education had an impact on the decision to enroll at community college for older students. An increase in distance to a community college in this study reveals a decrease in the likelihood of attendance by 14% (Jepsen & Montgomery, 2009). In a later study, Jepsen and Montgomery (2012) find that the older a student is, the less likely they are to enroll in higher education. A 35 year old is approximately 60% less likely to enroll in higher education than an otherwise identical 25 year old. Older individuals see a shorter timeline in which they can recoup, through promotions and higher salaries, the financial cost of returning to school. This phenomenon is reflected in Hutchens’ 2016 dissertation that finds students with only a few nontraditional characteristics (and likely younger) had a predisposition to enroll in college because it felt like the “right time”. Adult learners with more nontraditional characteristics, and likely older in age, felt that professional reasons were the driving force behind college enrollment (Hutchens, 2016).

Most Influential Factors in the Adult Student Selection of an Institution of Higher Education (Research Question V)

Sources of Information. In the college search process, adult students use the internet and word of mouth as critical forms of information in the search and selection process (Hutchens, 2016; Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Campus visit days are less critical in the search and selection process for adult students, especially compared to their traditional-aged peers, but adult students do indicate they have awareness of the local colleges near where they reside, and these institutions are “at the forefront of a student's mind when seeing out institutions in which to enroll...” (Hutchens, 2016, p. 40). In-person campus visits do provide adult students with useful information about an institution or program where they might choose to enroll, and adult learners are likely to use these visits and also use phone calls to programs or institutions to find out information for use in their postsecondary choice process.

Adult students who work full-time “deemphasize the importance of the spouses’ and future employers’ opinions” in the college selection process (Hutchens, 2016, p. 50). The

findings of Hutchens suggest that the support of spouses, significant others, and employers is important to adult students when these individuals decide to enroll in higher education, but the opinions of these groups about the college selection process is not important to adult learners. The overall findings from Hutchens' 2016 research show that top priorities in adult college student choice process are academic factors. Non-academic institutional elements are less important for adult learners in the college choice process (Hutchens, 2016).

Location and Available Programs. According to the *Is College Worth It For Me?* findings, adult students are looking for options to take coursework online (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Somewhat surprisingly to our capstone team, Public Agenda (2013) reports from their survey and other sources that older adult students are especially interested in online course offerings. The desire to have access to online education is tempered by the fact that adults surveyed by Public Agenda do not think employers value online education as highly as an in-class educational experience.

In the college choice process for adult learners, not only are students more aware of their local options for higher education, the proximity to home becomes a key factor in adult learners selecting a college or university--adult learners are looking to enroll in programs near where they work or live (Hutchens, 2016). An additional finding of note regarding the adult college choice and search process is that for those in this process, adult learners select a school and decide to enroll in one step (Hutchens, M. K., 2016). Rather than decide to attend college, identify possible schools where to enroll, and then selecting a school, adult learners simultaneously decide they will attend college and pick their college to attend all in one step (Hutchens, 2016).

In summary, Hutchens (2016) finds availability of a specific major, costs, quality of faculty, access to faculty, variety of course offered, and overall academic reputation of greatest importance to nontraditional students. Additionally, adult students appear to gravitate to "default" institutions, or institutions that have a degree in the desired field and are local to the nontraditional student in question (Hutchens, 2016). The 2013 Public Agenda survey, *Is College Worth it For Me?*, reveal similar findings to Hutchens' research. Three quarters of survey respondents indicated that enrolling in a school where faculty care about students and are effective teachers is a top priority in selecting an institution for postsecondary study. Tuition cost and the ability to gain practical skills also rank as top priorities for adult learners returning to school (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). These convenience factors can override other factors for adult students.

Most Pressing Concerns of Adult Students Enrolling at Institutions of Higher Education (Research Question VI)

Barriers to College. Returning to school or starting college for the first time is a major transition, and as can be expected, adult learners approach higher education with some concerns and fears. Among the challenges faced by adult students, according to the literature, are lack of support from financial aid counselors and other necessary campus services, scheduling challenges, and college or university institutional culture that is focused on traditional student services, rather than adults (Hagedorn, 2005; Monroe, 2006; Hart, 2003). Understanding the pressing concerns and doubts of adult learners is critical--the past experience of adult learners leads them to doubt their ability to succeed in higher education (Chartrand, 1990; Klein, 1990).

This may be due to past college attempts by adults who have some college experience but have yet to complete their degree.

The 2012 U.S. Department of Education publication, the Adult College Completion Toolkit, cites the challenges and obstacles to enrollment and success in higher education programs. These challenges for adults include lack of academic preparation, college readiness skills, and issues with financial aid and support (Tolbert, 2012). According to this Department of Education resource, issues related to academic preparation include the necessary math, reading, and writing abilities to be successful in college level academic work. College readiness includes the skills of time management and study strategies. Lastly, according to the Adult College Completion Toolkit (2012), adult learners are also hindered by lack of knowledge of financial aid and other available support, and the financial resources needed to return to school. The results from Public Agenda's *Is College Worth it For Me?* (2013) also reflect similar findings--adults age 25-55 returning to school are most worried about taking on too much debt, balancing responsibilities, and keeping up academically.

Additionally, according to Tolbert (2012), adult learners may require developmental classes to improve their academic readiness before they begin their postsecondary coursework. Adult students expect that they will be required to complete remedial or developmental coursework (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). But the completion of developmental courses may slow the momentum of students in the pursuit of their higher education goals. At four-year institutions, 20% of enrolled students must complete remedial courses (Complete College America [CCA], 2011). Adult learners are likely among this population of those enrolled in developmental or remedial classes. Data from Complete College America (2011) shows that older undergraduate students are less likely to succeed in and move through remedial coursework, which can cause a further delay in degree completion.

Paying for College. To combat the concerns of adult learners about financial aid and affordability of higher education, Tolbert (2012) suggests that colleges and universities need to increase awareness of college counseling and financial aid. Increasing the awareness of financial aid support and resources can help assuage concerns that adult learners have about the cost of higher education. Tolbert (2012) recommends that institutions use online and in person resources to help adult learners in their search for a college or university based on financial aid and cost criteria. Online resources and financial aid counseling should be made available to adult learners in the college search and enrollment process (Tolbert, 2012).

Beyond financial considerations, adult learners have concerns about balancing all of their roles and responsibilities simultaneously while enrolling in school. Adult students often serve as caretakers for family members in addition to being employees, parents, or a spouse. These roles can, and frequently do, take precedence over the role of being a student (Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011). This idea of “role strain” from the research of Deutsch & Schmertz (2011) is very relevant to the adult college choice process. The burden of balancing multiple roles simultaneously, especially if these roles are in conflict, can lead to adult student departure (Deutsch & Schmertz, 2011). The concern for balancing work with school can be a difficult challenge for adult students. Because work is not optional for adult students who are often financially supporting themselves and their families, work can become a top priority to adult students and can compete with school (Berker, Horn, & Carroll, 2003; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kerka, 1995). Findings from Hutchens’ dissertation (2016) indicate that female students more severely experience this “role strain” and the “negative impact of multiple life roles.” In

contrast to traditional students, adult learners have been characterized as “employees who study” rather than “students who work” (Berker, Horn, & Carroll, 2003). Being able to manage all of their responsibilities can be a major concern to adult learners when considering college enrollment.

While adult learners experience many concerns and obstacles as they begin their postsecondary work, this population of students is highly motivated to complete a degree and persist through their college experience. Additionally, findings from Hutchens (2016) indicate that adult students get better at managing multiple roles and responsibilities the longer they are in school. This ability for increased capacity and the level of adult student motivation does bode well for adult college student academic success. Motivation to graduate positively impacts student persistence (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). Further, motivation to make steady progress toward degree completion also positively impacts student retention (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). Providing counseling and advising on the educational process and career pathways can also be helpful to students in overcoming any barriers as adult learners begin the college process (Tolbert, 2012).

Appendix B - Literature for Framework

	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3	Source 4	Source 5	Source 6
Framework Decision						
Employment Benefits	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Offerings	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)		
Compensation Benefits	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)			
Job Type Benefits	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)			
Price for College	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)				
Debt for College	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)				
Financial Aid for College	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)		
Balancing Priorities as a Barrier	Giancola et al (2009)	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Bergerson (2009)	Braxton et al (2013)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)	
Geographical Barriers	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Offerings	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)		
Preparation Barriers	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Offerings	Bergerson (2009)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)	
Time to Completion Barriers	Lumina (2013)	Offerings	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)			
Credit for Previous Work Barriers	Lumina (2013)	Lumina (2016)	TICUA (2014) Alt Offerin	Xu et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)	
Framework Institution						
Price of Institution	Lumina (2013)	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)			
Type of Institution (2-yr, 4-yr, etc)	Xu et al (2016)	Perna, L.W., (2000)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)	Montgomery, M.		
Available Programs at Institution	THEC (2014-2015)	Offerings	Braxton et al (2013)	Blagg et al (2016)	Drew et al (2015)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)
Selectivity of Institution	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)				
Faculty Quality at Institution	Lumina (2016)	Tolbert, M. (2012)	Braxton et al (2013)	in Tennessee. (2016)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)
Reputation of Institution	Blagg et al (2016)	in Tennessee. (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)			
Sources of Information about Institution	Blagg et al (2016)	in Tennessee. (2016)	Blagg et al (2016)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)		
Student Welfare at Institution	Bergerson (2009)	Braxton et al (2013)	Caboni et al (2005)	Drew et al (2015)	Hutchens, M.K., (2016)	

Appendix C - Survey Protocol

TICUA Survey

The following information is provided to inform you about this survey and your participation in it. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You can decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation at any time. A few survey questions are required for routing to later questions, but aside from those, you may skip any questions you do not want to answer. The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of adult college student access and choice. The survey is intended to gather information on respondents' attitudes and experiences on campus. Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA) or their member campuses may use information from this survey as part of an evaluation of the services and supports available. Survey results will not be used to evaluate individuals. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The team of researchers from Vanderbilt will keep all of the information you provide confidential and will only use it for the purposes of the study. Responses will be statistically compiled into summaries and will never be presented in any way that would permit readers to identify you or your school. No one at your school will have access to survey responses that include respondents' names or any other information that could potentially be used to identify individuals. You are being asked to participate in a research study because you are a current, former, or potential student at an independent college in Tennessee. Online completion of the survey should take no more than 15 minutes. By using your personal survey link provided in the invitation email, you will be able to complete the survey in multiple sessions; responses you have already entered will be saved. However, once you click "submit" at the very end of the survey, you will no longer be able to return. You will be entered into a raffle to receive an Amazon gift card for completing the survey. The winning participant will be randomly selected, notified, and will receive a gift card valued at no more than \$50. In order to qualify for the gift card, you must provide a valid email address at the end of the survey. If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Shane Crouse, Lygie Hinkle, or Christin Shatzer at shane.crouse@vanderbilt.edu, lygie.c.hinkle@vanderbilt.edu, and christin.shatzer@vanderbilt.edu or our Faculty Advisor, Dr. John Braxton at john.braxton@vanderbilt.edu. For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, to discuss problems, concerns, and questions, or to offer input, please feel free to contact the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll free at (866) 224-8273.

- Yes
- No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Survey is adapted from a 2013 survey by Public Agenda a non-profit.
<http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/is-college-worth-it-for-me>. Additional questions are based on models from Perna (2006) and Braxton et al (2013).

What is your age?

- Younger than 25
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+
- Prefer not to say

If Younger than 25 Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey
If Prefer not to say Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Please select the best description of your current enrollment status:

- Enrolled and pursuing a certificate or degree
- Enrolled but not pursuing a certificate or degree
- Not currently enrolled
- Don't know

Are you looking to graduate with a certificate, an associate's degree or with a bachelor's degree? Or are you taking classes but not looking to graduate from this school?

- Certificate
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Taking classes but not looking to graduate from this school
- Some other degree, i.e. diploma _____
- Don't know

What is the name of the college or school you are currently enrolled in?

- Specify Name _____
- Don't know

Are you a full-time or a part-time student?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Don't know

At your current institution, have you transferred course credit, received credit for previous work experience, or taken a test to receive course credit?

- Transferred course credit
- Received credit for previous work experience
- Took a test to receive course credit
- Other (please explain) _____
- No - I did not receive course credit beyond normal course completion
- Don't know

If No - I did not receive cour... Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of these best describes the MAI...
If Don't know Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of these best describes the MAI...

Did transferring credit or receiving credit play an important role in your decision to enroll?

- Yes - it was important
- No - it was not important
- I'm glad I received credit, but it wasn't important
- Don't know

Which of these best describes the MAIN reason you are pursuing a (degree/certificate/diploma)?

- To get ahead in your current job or career
- To get a different kind of job or career altogether (Please describe) _____
- To get a good education and learn about the world
- Other _____
- None of these
- Don't know

Are you taking your classes...

- All online
- Mostly online
- Half online and half in the classroom
- Mostly in the classroom
- All in the classroom
- Don't know

For how many years have you been taking classes at your current school?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year but less than 2
- 2 years but less than 3
- 3 years but less than 4
- 4 years but less than 6
- 6 years or more
- Don't know

What is the main reason why you chose this school rather than some other school for your studies?

- Convenience/Location
- Affordability
- Exactly the program you wanted
- Admission requirements easier to meet/that is where I got accepted
- Best school for this field/degree
- This school gave me the most credit for previous work or experience
- Someone recommended it
- Other _____
- Don't know

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your school?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

Please briefly explain why you are satisfied or dissatisfied with your school?

What is your major or program of study, or have you not yet decided?

- Major or Program of Study _____
- Not yet decided
- Don't know

Would you say you chose this field because it is your passion, because it is likely to improve your job prospects, both or neither?

- Passion
- Likely to improve job prospects
- Both
- Neither (specify) what is the reason you are pursuing this specific field?

- Don't know

Here are some things that students sometimes say they worry about. Please indicate how much you worry about each one. Do you worry about this a lot, some, a little, or not at all?

	A lot	Some	Only a little	Not at all	Don't know
Balancing work and family responsibilities with the demands of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping up academically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staying motivated and focusing on school work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dropping out of the program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fitting in with other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking on too much debt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting the schedule and classes that will allow you to graduate on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not gaining the skills and knowledge you need for a job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have remedial classes helped you become a better student, have they not helped, or have you not taken them? (A remedial class is a class to help you catch up with basic math or language skills that you'll need to succeed in college.)

- They have helped
- They have not helped
- Have not taken them
- Don't know

Which of the following two things are MORE important for you?

- A clearly structured program that lays out the exact courses and exams you need to take to graduate on time
- Being able to explore different classes and areas of interest before deciding what to focus on
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

Thinking of the people closest to you, to what extent are they supportive of your education and encourage your studies?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- Only a little
- Not at all
- Don't know

Is your current school conveniently located, or not?

- Conveniently located
- Not conveniently located
- My school is only online
- Don't know

Does your current school offer lots of classes online, or not?

- Lots of classes online
- Not lots of classes online
- Don't know

Overall, is getting the classes you need at the times you need them a problem, or not?

- It is a problem getting the classes I need at the times I need them
- It is not a problem
- Half and half
- Don't know

Does your program allow you to make good progress, or does it hold you up from graduating as fast as you like?

- Allows me to make good progress
- It holds me up
- Neither/NA
- Don't know

How confident are you that your current school is teaching you skills and knowledge that you will need to succeed?

- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not too confident
- Not at all confident
- Don't know

If you needed career advice and guidance on how to prepare for the job market, is there someone at your college whose advice you trust?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Would you say your school is very expensive, somewhat expensive, not too expensive, or not expensive at all?

- Very expensive
- Somewhat expensive
- Not too expensive
- Not expensive at all
- Don't know

Compared to other colleges, is it your sense that your school's reputation among employers is excellent, good, fair, poor, or don't you know?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Don't know

Please explain why you believe your school's reputation among employers is excellent, good, fair, poor, or don't you know?

Please tell me whether your school is succeeding or falling short on each of the following:

	Succeeding	Falling short	Neither	Don't know
Giving students effective guidance so they can stay on track	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making top-notch tutors easily available when students need help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing good opportunities to work in teams with other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving students hands-on help with financial aid applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having instructors who care about their students and know how to teach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing students with valuable internships and work experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping class size small	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you feel your school cares MORE about making money or more about the education of its students?

- Cares more about making money
- Cares more about the education of its students
- Neither
- Don't know

Do you know how many years it takes the average student to graduate from your school, or is that something you really don't know?

- Yes, I do know (please indicate number of years) _____
- No, I don't know

And do you know how much debt the AVERAGE student graduates with from your school, or is that something you really don't know?

- Yes, I do know (please indicate amount) _____
- No, I don't know

Before you picked your current school, did you learn about colleges and programs from the following sources?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Interactive websites that allow people to rank and compare college according to personal priorities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual college websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College recruiters who promote and market their school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High school guidance counselors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guidance counselors at individual colleges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial aid advisers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Books with information on colleges and programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television commercials, billboards or other ads	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends, family or colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An employer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When it comes to choosing the right college and program, which of the following comes closest to your view?

- There is a lack of information and advice for people to make good choices
- There is enough information already out there, people just have to make the effort to find it
- Both
- Neither
- Don't know

Here are a few things that may help future students make good decisions about college. Please indicate whether each could help future students a great deal, somewhat, only a little, or not at all.

	A great deal	Somewhat	Only a little	Not at all	Don't know
Interactive websites that allow people to rank and compare college according to personal priorities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online forums where people can ask questions to current students and college experts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A Facebook feature that connects people who search for colleges so that they can share information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workshops with college experts at community centers or public libraries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College information sessions at work sponsored by employers for their employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Suppose you were helping someone choose a school or program of study. Which of the following would you tell them is the MOST important to consider...?

- Being excited about your classes
- Graduating as quickly as possible
- Getting skills that are directly relevant in the workplace
- Other (please describe) _____
- Don't know

Compared to traditional in-person classes, is it your sense that online-only classes are generally harder to pass, easier to pass, or are things about the same?

- Harder to pass
- Easier to pass
- About the same
- Don't know

Compared to in-person classes, is it your sense that online-only classes require more discipline from students, less discipline, or are things about the same?

- More discipline
- Less discipline
- About the same
- Don't know

Compared to in-person classes, is it your sense students learn more in online-only classes, less, or are things about the same?

- Students learn more
- Students learn less
- About the same
- Don't know

Would you prefer to be taking more classes online, fewer, or are things about right?

- More classes online
- Fewer classes online
- About right
- Don't know

Are you confident that completing your (certificate/degree) will greatly improve your job prospects, or are you worried that it won't?

- Confident it will greatly improve job prospects
- Worried that it won't
- Neither
- Don't know

When you hear the term “for-profit college” what – if anything - comes to mind?

- Response _____
- Nothing comes to mind
- Don't know

How much would you say you know about for-profit colleges?

- A lot
- Some
- Only a little
- Nothing at all
- Don't know

In general, is your impression of for-profit colleges mostly positive, mostly negative, or neutral?

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Neutral
- Don't know

Currently, are you yourself employed full-time, part-time, or not at all?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Not employed

Including yourself, how many people are there living in your household?

- Enter 1-7 _____
- Eight (8) or more people
- Don't know

Is your total annual household income from all sources, and before taxes:

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000 or more, but less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 or more, but less than \$30,000
- \$30,000 or more, but less than \$40,000
- \$40,000 or more, but less than \$50,000
- \$50,000 or more, but less than \$75,000
- \$75,000 or more, but less than \$100,000
- \$100,000 or more
- Don't know

If \$100,000 or more Is Not Selected, Then Skip To Are you of Hispanic origin or backgro...

Is that annual household income from all source, and before taxes:

- \$100,000 or more, but less than \$150,000
- \$150,000 or more, but less than \$200,000
- \$200,000 or more, but less than \$250,000
- \$250,000 or more
- Don't know

Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Are you African American?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Have you previously or are you currently serving in the US Armed Forces?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Sex of Respondent

Are you receiving support from the Department of Veteran Affairs to pay for your school, or not?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Sex of Respondent

- Enter _____

Does your employer help pay for college tuition and other college expenses?

- Yes, fully
- Yes, partly
- No
- Don't know

Have you taken out loans to pay for college?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Do your parents or relatives help you pay for college?

- Yes, fully
- Yes, partly
- No
- Don't know

Before enrolling at your school, did you enroll or did you seriously consider enrolling at a different school?

- Yes (enter name) _____
- No
- Don't know

Do you wish to be entered in the drawing for the \$50 Amazon gift card?

- Yes (You must include your email address. Please check spelling carefully. We have no other way to contact you.) _____
- No

Appendix D

Participating TICUA Institution Staff and Administrators Interview Protocol

Institution:

Interviewee (Title and Name):

Interviewer:

Other Topics Discussed:

Documents Obtained:

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

Introductory Protocol/Consent

To facilitate our note taking, we would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Additionally, we want to inform you that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not expect any harm or negative consequences for you as a result of your participation. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about adult college student programming on this campus. Our research project as a whole focuses on adult college student access and choice, with particular interest in understanding how processes and behaviors play out at independent colleges in Tennessee. Our study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about adult college student access and choice, and hopefully learn about institutional practices that help improve the adult college student experience on campus.

For purposes of this discussion, when we refer to adult students, we are talking about students aged 25 years and older.

1. Briefly describe your role (office, committee, classroom, etc.) as it relates to adult college students (if appropriate). (Institution:Program)
 - Probes: How are you involved in adult college student programming here?

- How did you get involved?
2. Do you find adult students to be easier or more challenging to work with than traditional age students? Can you describe the differences you see in your position?
 3. What is the strategy at this institution for working with the adult student population and supporting a positive adult college student experience? (Institution:Program)
 - Probe: Do you believe it is working – why or why not?
 4. What are the primary factors students tell you are the reasons they chose to enroll at this institution?
 5. Do you know if there is a price difference for adult programs? Additional or different funding sources available to adult students (grants, scholarships)? Do you use discount or institutional aid?
 6. Are there separate faculty for adult programs?
 7. What programs are available for adult students?
 8. What resources are available to faculty for working with the adult student population and supporting a positive improving the adult college student experience? (Institution:Program, Faculty)
 9. What rewards do faculty receive from the institution for engaging in innovative strategies towards improving the adult college student experience? (Institution:Faculty)
 - Probe: Do you see a widening of the circle of participants here on campus?
 10. What is changing about the adult college student experience on this campus? (Institution:Program)
 - Probes: How have campus-based initiatives changed? What effect have you seen on adult students?
 - Do you work with other departments and/or outside agencies, potential employers and coordinate adult college student programming? Is this different from in the past? What effect have you seen on adult students?
 - Are there any additional changes or initiatives that you believe would have a positive impact on the adult college student experience?

11. Is there more student support offered to adult students than what is offered to traditional students? Have you considered providing a one-stop shop?
 - Probes: If yes, can you offer examples of student supports?
 - Do you think sufficient support is provided to adult students? Why or why not?

12. Are you familiar with the Tennessee Drive-to-55 initiative, TN Promise, or TN Reconnect? How did hear about them? Do you or your colleagues discuss these initiatives on campus?

13. Do you have a sense of the best way to communicate with adult students? Email, text, phone?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix E Adult College Student Interview Protocol

Institution:

Interviewee (Title and Name):

Interviewer:

Other Topics Discussed:

Documents Obtained:

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

Introductory Protocol/Consent

To facilitate our note taking, we would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Additionally, we want to inform you that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not expect any harm or negative consequences for you as a result of your participation. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the adult student experience on this campus. Our research project as a whole focuses on adult college student access and choice, with particular interest in understanding how processes and behaviors play out at independent colleges in Tennessee. Our study does not aim to evaluate your experiences. Rather, we are trying to learn more about adult college student access and choice, and hopefully learn about institutional practices that help improve the adult college student experience on campus.

1. Can you describe your HS experience? (Decision:Preparation)
2. Tell me about your work experience.(Decision:Job Type)
3. Is your work experience connected to your college studies?(Decision: Job Type)
 - Probes: If yes, "in what ways?" (Perceived Benefits)

- If no, "what made you study something outside of your experience?"
(Perceived Benefits)
4. What influenced your choice to enroll in college?(Perceived Benefits)
 - Probe: what were the most important qualities (location, cost, programs offered, etc.) about this institution that lead to your enrollment?
 5. What are your perceptions on cost associated with completing your degree? Are you using any form of Financial Aid (loans, grants, scholarships) to pay for college?
 - Probe: Do you have concerns about financing your degree?
 6. How do you balance home, work and school? (Decision:Barriers)
 7. Describe your enrollment process. Did anyone on campus assist in this process? What resources did you use? (Institution:Programs)
 - Probe: Could you explain any issues you experienced during the enrollment process?
 8. Typically, how many classes are you able to take a semester?
 - Probes: Have you taken any courses on campus? Can you describe your experience? (Institution:Location)
 - Have you taken any distance learning courses? If so, was this an influence in your college choice? Can you describe your experience with distance learning? (Institution:Location)
 - Were you awarded any transfer credit? How much? How did that influence your choice to attend college? The college you enrolled in? Major? (Decision:Credit)
 9. Have you experienced any challenges while enrolled in classes? (Institution:Programs)
 - Probes: If yes, "can you describe how you overcame that?"
 - If no, "that's great. Can you anticipate any?"
 10. Can you describe any barriers that might prevent you from completing college? (Institution:Programs)

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix F - Interviewees

Institution Affiliation	Pseudonym	Classifier	Age	Sex	Degree Program
A University	Francina	Adult student		F	
	Charlie	Adult student		M	
	Isaac	Adult student	45+	M	
	Mary	Staff - Student facing			
	Barb	Adult student	45+	F	
B University	Maureen	Staff - Student facing			
C College	Nancy	Staff - Administrator			
D University	Vivian*	Adult student	25-34	F	Organizational Leadership
	Vivian*	Staff - Student facing			
	Noelle	Staff - Student facing			
	Kyle	Staff - Administrator			
	Karen	Adult student	45+	F	
	Tonya	Adult student	35-44	F	
E College	Louise	Staff - Student facing			
F College	Kate	Staff - Administrator			
G University	Tom	Adult student	35-44	M	Organizational Leadership
	Theresa	Adult student	45+	F	
	Laura	Staff - Student facing			
	Harriet	Adult student	45+	F	Organizational Leadership
	Christine	Staff - Administrator			
H College	Liz	Staff - Administrator			
I College	Victor	Staff - Administrator			

* Interview participant held a dual role and agreed to be interviewed with both interview protocols.

Appendix G - Survey Demographic Information

The online survey was started by 402 participants, however the respondents fitting the sample requirements of 25 years or older reduced the viable surveys to 321. Those students who were clearly pursuing a graduate level degree were coded and removed from report data. The remaining 263 survey responses were used for frequency data and statistical evaluation.

Survey Counts

	Count
Started survey	402
Older than 25	321
Coded as first degree	263

The weighting of answers to compensate did not appreciably change the survey findings. Additionally, comparisons of institution did not reveal statistically significant results on relevant questions.

TICUA institutions are organized into regional groups. Each survey respondent was first coded according to their institution of attendance and then by region. The western TICUA region provided nearly 60% of survey respondents.

Respondent Count by TICUA Region

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	East	31	13.0
	Middle	66	27.6
	West	142	59.4
	Total	239	100.0
Missing	System	24	
Total		263	

Respondents were grouped according to three age ranges. Only four respondents chose not to identify their age more narrowly than 25 or older. Age groups proved to be a factor that made a difference across several other relevant survey answers. Such differences were indicated as appropriate in the main body of the report.

What is your age?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	25-34	88	33.5
	35-44	80	30.4
	45+	91	34.6
	Prefer not to say	4	1.5
	Total	263	100.0

Respondents were asked whether they were taking courses full-time or part-time. This variable was then used to test for difference within groups across other survey answers. Approximately 70% of survey respondents indicated being enrolled full-time at their institution.

Are you a full-time or a part-time student?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Full-time	172	70.8
	Part-time	71	29.2
	Total	243	100.0
Missing	System	20	
Total		263	

Many adult students also work while enrolled in higher education. Respondents were asked about their employment status and this variable was then used to test for difference within groups across other survey answers. Approximately 66% of respondents reported being employed full-time while enrolled in higher education, while fewer than 20% indicated not being employed while enrolled.

Respondent Count by Employment Status

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Full-time	146	66.1
	Part-time	33	14.9
	Not employed	42	19.0
	Total	221	100.0
Missing	System	42	
Total		263	

Respondents reported how many years they have been taking classes at their current institution. The distribution of answers is most numerous in the first year and then reduces in years two and three. After year three respondents decrease substantially and would seem to reflect trends within the adult student population. Only 6 adult respondents indicated being enrolled for more than six years.

For how many years have you been taking classes at your current school?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	83	34.0
	1 year but less than 2	56	23.0
	2 years but less than 3	61	25.0
	3 years but less than 4	24	9.8
	4 years but less than 6	14	5.7
	6 years or more	6	2.5
	Total	244	100.0
Missing	System	19	
Total		263	

Household size has been identified in extant literature as a variable that affect adult student outcomes. Respondents were asked to indicate how many individuals (including themselves) reside at their current household. Respondents were not specifically asked about marital status or number of dependents.

Respondent Count by Household Size

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	1.00	23	11.6
	2.00	48	24.2
	3.00	46	23.2
	4.00	48	24.2
	5.00	21	10.6
	6.00	9	4.5
	7.00	3	1.5
	Total	198	100.0
Missing	System	65	
Total		263	

Veterans were a group of specific interest to the study and that information was collected in a single questions. This variable was then used to look for differences within groups across other survey questions. Only 22 survey respondents indicated being a current or former service member.

Have you previously or are you currently serving in the US Armed Forces?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	22	10.0
	No	199	90.0
	Total	221	100.0
Missing	System	42	
Total		263	

Family income was a variable of interest to the study and some extant research indicated that it may be an important characteristic in relation to adult student decision-making. Household or family income was collected using two separate survey questions. The first collected income ranges less than \$100,000 per year. The second question allowed respondent above that threshold to more narrowly define their household income range. No specificity was provided above \$250,000 per year.

Family Income

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Less than \$15K	13	5.5
	\$15K-\$25K	26	11.1
	\$25K-\$30K	19	7.9
	\$30K-\$40K	13	5.5
	\$40K-\$50K	35	14.7
	\$50K-\$75K	59	25.1
	\$100K-\$150K	25	10.7
	\$150K-\$200K	3	1.2
	\$200K-\$250K	1	0.3
	More than \$250K	9	3.9
	Total	237	100
Missing	System	59	
Total		296	

A variable of interest was the distribution of respondent coursework between in-person courses and online format courses. One survey question collected that information and it was used to test for differences among groups across other survey questions. Approximately 45% of respondents reported taking all of their classes online.

Are you taking your classes...

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	All online	110	45.5
	Mostly online	27	11.2
	Half online and half in the classroom	33	13.6
	Mostly in the classroom	24	9.9
	All in the classroom	48	19.8
	Total	242	100.0
Missing	System	21	
Total		263	

Several demographic questions were included at the end of the survey. Gender of respondent was captured using an open text field and then coded according to the text of the response. All answers except one were either male or female. Only one answer was provided that could not be

coded according to gender identity. The frequency data related to gender of the actual TICUA adult student population is not known by this study. However, the preponderance of female respondents would seem to approximate national trends in higher education.

Gender of Respondent

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Male	83	38.1
	Female	134	61.5
	Unknown	1	.5
	Total	218	100.0
Missing	System	45	
Total		263	

Frequencies of African American students among TICUA adult students is unknown to this study. However, the respondent totals for this category are substantive but did not reveal any statistically significant differences with across relevant survey questions.

Are you African American?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	45	20.5
	No	175	79.5
	Total	220	100.0
Missing	System	43	
Total		263	

The number of students who indicated Hispanic origin or background was small. Only 11 survey respondents indicated such a background. Frequencies of Hispanic students among TICUA adult students is unknown to this study. However, the respondent totals for this category seem to be unusually low compared to national trends of all institution types. The low number of answers precluded statistical tests for differences within groups.

Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	11	5.0
	No	208	95.0
	Total	219	100.0
Missing	System	44	
Total		263	

Appendix H - Summary of key findings for TICUA Capstone study

Question 1) what are current best practices among TICUA institutions for recruiting and retaining adult students?

- Websites that are easy to navigate and specifically address adult student programs and services
- Tailoring course delivery and administrative services to adult student schedules and needs
- Awarding credit for previous work

Question 2) what institutional characteristics or practices influence TICUA institutions to offer programming for adult students?

- Institutions whose program offerings address areas of high demand among adult students
- Institutions whose mission and religious affiliation are attractive to adult student learners

Question 3) what does literature and theory suggest are important factors in the recruitment and academic success of adult students?

- Information about adult programs at should be easy to access on the institutions website
- Institutions should place emphasis on the quality of faculty and services for adult students in a way that maximizes welfare

Question 4) what factors are most influential in the adult student decision to enroll at an institution of higher education?

- A career or personal goal will be supported by completing their degree
- The time and cost of degree completion is clear and manageable
- They are supported by family, friends, or colleagues in their decision to enroll

Question 5) what factors are most influential in the adult students' selection of an institution of higher education in which to enroll?

- The institution offers a program that closely aligns with student's career or personal goals
- Faculty, institutional services, and academic supports are professional, efficient, and address the specific needs of adult students
- The institution recognizes and award credit for previous coursework, professional skills, and relevant experiences

Question 6) what are the most pressing concerns of adult students enrolling at TICUA member institutions of higher education?

- Balancing the demands of school with their work and family obligations
- Accumulating too much debt or taking on costs that are unmanageable

Appendix I - Recommendations for TICUA Adult Programs

Institutional Characteristics	Recommendation 1	Recommendation 2	Recommendation 3
Price of Institution	Early conversations should include review of costs, financial aid, and ways to manage both. This can include assistance with paperwork.	Structure programs in ways that allow adults to qualify for financial aid, federal or otherwise	Consider adult student tuition discounts and be prepared to discuss them early in the recruitment process or in advertising
Type of Institution	Advertise workforce advantages of bachelor's degree	Highlight religious affiliations and campus missions consistently	Stay informed of changes to Tennessee programs relevant to adult students and four-year degrees
Available Programs	Inform adult students of employment opportunities associated with program offerings and bachelors degree	Programs should be designed for flexibility and connect academic work to skills applicable in the workplace	Consistently advertise and demonstrate religious affiliations, campus missions, and community engagement efforts
Selectivity	Award credit for work experience or demonstrable knowledge and skills relevant to degree	Advertise rigor of adult programs and consistent support from faculty and staff	Development or remedial courses should include discussion of specific knowledge and skills necessary for degree
Faculty Quality	Create a culture of responsive and timely communication from faculty and staff	Assignments and feedback should be appropriate to structure of the course (accelerated, online, etc.)	Faculty should draw on personal and professional experience to show the applicability of learning objectives
Reputation	Conduct entrance and exit interviews about hopes, fears, and past disappointments. Connect this information to individual academic advising	Anonymous student feedback should be collected and shared with faculty, staff, advisors, and other student-facing offices for coordinated action	Inform nearby employers of program offerings, the skills of graduates, and availability of flexible adult programs
Sources of Information for Prospective Adult Students	Advertising should focus on local populations, local labor demands, and the values that resonate with adult students	Coordinate with nearby employers regarding tuition assistance programs, job fairs, and other areas of overlapping interest	Create webpages specific to adult programs and services. Have dedicated adult admissions staff or staff should be well-versed on adult student programs and needs
Student Welfare	Faculty and staff who work with adult students should be trained regarding common adult student issues and concerns; separate adult staff may be preferable	Orientations, information sessions, and activities should be strongly encouraged or required to build sense of welfare and community among adult students and with faculty and staff of adult programs	Actions steps for enrollment, registration, graduation, etc should be as easy, immediate, and automatic and streamlined as possible
Institutional Consideration of Adult Student Needs	Institutions should consider the ways in which they are structurally organized toward traditional students and adjust appropriately to meet adult student needs	Adult students may need flexibility in assignments or deadlines, but may be hesitant to ask. Inform faculty of needs and inform adult students to ask	Financial aid is often tied to full-time status; work with students to manage full-time school schedules for loan eligibility

Appendix J--Interview Matrix

Concepts	Themes		Evidence		
	Theme	Theme	Key Quotes	Key Quotes	Documents
	Theme	Theme	Key Quotes	Key Quotes	Observations
Perceived Benefits					
Employment					
Compensation					
Job Type					
Paying for College					
Price					
Debt					
Financial Aid					
Barriers to College					
Balancing priorities					
Geography					
Preparation					
Credit for previous work					
Institutional Characteristics & Factors					
Price					
Institution Type					
Available programs					
Location					
Selectivity					
Faculty quality					
Reputation					