

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS COURSES  
ON ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AMONG STUDENTS  
IN A COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By  
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## ABSTRACT

### THE EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS COURSES ON ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AMONG STUDENTS IN A COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

By

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of academic success courses on the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university. Following a grounded theory case study methodology, historical data, vis-à-vis 234 previous student writing assignments, were examined. The purpose of the data analysis was to explore student perceptions relative to the effectiveness of academic success courses in increasing academic self-efficacy beliefs. Students identified interpersonal and external factors that led to increased academic self-efficacy beliefs. The interpersonal factors included time management practices and using what was defined as creator language and mentalities. External factors that helped the students were meeting with their professors outside of class and participation in activities and services on campus. Specifically, students reported positive changes in their academic self-efficacy beliefs through a discovery that they were not the only students who struggle academically, a belief in self, increased

confidence, and a sense of pride. Notably, while the specific factors that influenced student self-efficacy were consistent across student groups, male and female students tended to write about their future plans for success differently. The majority of male students wrote using passive language, whereas most of the female students used active language in their writing. Finally, a theoretical model is presented along with recommendations for practice as well as future research.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics data shows in 2012, 68% of public university students failed to complete any degree program four years after starting college, and only 53.9% completed in six years. The majority of these students, and a full 46.4% of all students, were no longer enrolled at the end of the six years (NCES, 2013). This staggering number is even higher for students who are African-American (50%), Latino/a (52.9%) or in the lowest quartile of income (51%) nationally. This study attempts to address the problem that a full 46% of public university students have not graduated at the end of six years. When asked how they came to be on academic probation, many students reported feeling unmotivated to succeed (Boretz, 2012). Others have found that student success can be partially attributed to student self-discipline (Heyman, 2010).

Academic probation has been studied for eight decades, beginning with an article in the *Journal of Education* (1931) when a university in Cleveland, Ohio first adopted a new probation policy. Today, academic probation is in effect at all universities. According to the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 2004/09 (NCES, 2011), 24.6% of students at public four-year universities have had a grade point average below 2.0. Lindo, Sanders, and Oreopoulos (2010) found that male students placed on academic probation in the first year are far more likely to leave a university at the end of the first year and not return.

In recent studies, students have shown improvement roughly half of the time when enrolled in academic success courses or success courses in both online (Seirup & Tirota, 2010) and traditional (Boretz, 2012) formats. The importance of success courses

or orientations to further online success and motivation are also described by Heyman (2010), Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey (2009), and Wickersham & McElhany (2010). Further research is needed to explore what students on academic probation feel will help them to succeed academically.

### **Problem Statement**

This study addresses a gap in the empirical literature relative to the perceptions of students who are on academic probation regarding academic success courses and the associated factors these students believe affect their academic self-efficacy. Currently, what we know about public university students who are on academic probation is limited to unrelated studies. Academic probation research often centers on student motivation (Domene, Socholotiuk, & Woitowicx, 2011; Kim & Frick, 2011; Schwinger, Steinmayr, & Spinath, 2009). Academic interventions and success courses are studied in relation to their effect on academic probation (Boretz, 2012; Thrombley, 2001; Tovar & Simon, 2006), but not in relation to their effect on student academic self-efficacy. Overall, few studies explore student perceptions of academic success courses. Further, existing research regarding gender differences relative to academic success courses is limited. Accordingly, this study explores the factors of academic success courses which affect the academic self-efficacy of students who are on academic probation at a comprehensive public four-year regional university, and specifically examines how academic self-efficacy effects of academic success courses differ by gender.

### **Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this grounded theory case study is to examine the influence of academic success courses on the academic self-efficacy of students on academic

probation who are enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university.

Following a grounded theory methodology, I generated a model that I hope explains the effective components of an academic success course offered to students and how these success courses can be used to increase student academic self-efficacy.

Studies have shown that interventions and success courses help to increase the success of students (Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey, 2009; Heyman, 2010; Seirup & Tirotta, 2010; Wickersham & McElhany, 2010), and that higher GPAs are linked to high degrees of academic self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Elias, 2008). What we don't know is what students feel will help them succeed. Accordingly, the significance of this study lies in exploring the specific components of academic success courses that students believe help to increase academic self-efficacy beliefs, and how the success courses affect students of different genders differently. This information can be used by counselors and administrators to increase the effectiveness of academic success courses in the future, which will lead to an overall increase in student success.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, I asked the following research questions:

1. What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university?
2. In what ways does an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university?

3. How do the factors that affect academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university vary by gender?

### **Conceptual Framework**

To help understand the effects of academic success courses on the self-efficacy beliefs of online students who are on academic probation, this study is rooted in Bandura's (1977) work regarding self-efficacy. Bandura described self-efficacy as being based on four sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states.

Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences, which Bandura (1977) presents as the most effective factor in increasing self-efficacy. Importantly, enhanced self-efficacy stemming in part from personal mastery experiences has shown a tendency to generalize to other situations, resulting in behavioral changes that transfer even to activities which are not related. While personal mastery is important, vicarious experiences – seeing others perform activities successfully - also help to shape an individual's self-efficacy beliefs. Although not as effective in shaping one's abilities as personal experiences, clear outcomes from modeled behavior does indeed present efficacy information.

Perhaps more readily available than vicarious experience is the use of verbal persuasion, however verbal persuasion is less effective at raising self-efficacy than personal mastery. The final contributory factor in this model is physiological state, or emotional arousal. In fact, Bandura argues that stressful and taxing situations elicit emotional arousal, which might inform personal competency due to anxiety. For

example, when thinking about previous failures, some individuals experienced even higher levels of anxiety than they had during the situation they initially found threatening.

Using Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy, I will examine components of academic success courses as they relate to personal mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Specifically, this study will further develop Bandura's theory by exploring the perceptions of students who are on academic probation and the effect academic success courses have on those students' academic self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

I conducted this study using a grounded theory case study design to understand student perceptions of academic success courses for students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university. I examined document data primarily comprised of assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at a public university. Following a review of the empirical literature, I developed guiding research questions that drove the examination of the data. I organized the data in Microsoft Excel to aid in data analysis and organization. I analyzed data through coding and looked for common themes which led to the development of a theory that adds to the current body of knowledge.

The primary data source for this grounded theory case study was documents which consisted of course syllabi and announcements as well as assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at Southwest Valley University, a pseudonym for a public four-year university in the Western United States, between fall semester 2012 and spring semester 2014, a total of eight sections with an

approximate range of 10-20 students enrolled per section for an overall total of students enrolled between 121 and 136 during the period. The majority of the students were on academic probation when they registered for the course.

The overall sampling strategy was mixed, consisting of both criterion and stratified purposeful sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). With respect to criterion sampling: in order to be eligible for participation in the study, students had to have been enrolled in the academic success course studied between Fall 2012 and Spring 2014 semesters at Southwest Valley University and have actively taken part in completing the course assignments given. In concert with criterion sampling, I employed stratified purposeful sampling. I considered all student responses during data analysis, and broke them into subgroups by gender for each assignment I examined. Sampling across gender groups ensured that I was prepared to examine differences in perception based on gender.

Moving forward from the initial literature review, I analyzed data and found recurring themes across document data sources. Through iterative data analysis, I interpreted results along thematic lines that correlated with, or added to, the existing literature. I examined document data which consisted of course syllabi and announcements as well as assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at SVU between Fall 2012 and Spring 2014 using Microsoft Excel as a primary repository for data and codes that I developed while looking for emerging and ongoing themes.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in both scope and size due to the sample consisting of a relatively small number of students from a single public university. All of the

participants were students who enrolled in an academic success course that was designed to raise student GPA and academic self-efficacy beliefs, so there is no comparative data relative to students at other universities. Additionally, because student assignments were de-identified, it is not possible to determine if the students did raise their GPA, maintain long-term increased academic self-efficacy beliefs, or continue to use the tools learned during the success course. This limited sample may prove challenging to apply to other educational institutions, but similarities across college campuses and the diverse student groups examined here might allow for a transference of findings from this study.

### **Delimitations**

This study was limited to document data from approximately 121 to 136 participants, all of whom were students who took part in an academic success course, and most of whom were on academic probation. The small sample size allowed for in-depth study of the data in order to discover how academic success courses affected the self-efficacy beliefs of students. While previous research has centered on the overall success of success courses, few studies have examined the specific effects of success courses on academic self-efficacy beliefs of students.

### **Organization**

Following this introduction will be a literature review and a detailed description of the methodology. The literature review will explore academic self-efficacy, academic probation, and their links to student motivation, and academic interventions and success courses. In the methodology chapter, I will present the grounded theory case study design of this study. Additionally, I will offer a description of the research site and sample as well as the data sources, instruments, and procedures that I used.

## Chapter 2 - Review of the Empirical Literature

The National Center for Education Statistics data shows in 2012, 68% of public university students failed to complete any degree program four years after starting college, and only 53.9% completed in six years. The majority of these students, and a full 46.4% of all students, were no longer enrolled at the end of the six years (NCES, 2011). In California public four-year public universities, 54.3% completed a degree or certificate program in six years, and 33.1% had not attained a degree, and were no longer enrolled in the same period (NCES 2013). Given that one third of all California public university students, and nearly half of all public university students nationally have not attained a degree and are no longer enrolled at the end of six years, educators must continue to work towards ways to help students who struggle academically succeed.

Fortunately, there is hope for these students through the use of academic success courses and interventions (Boretz, 2012). Academic success courses are typically for credit and can be offered in a traditional, on-ground format as well as an online format. Some schools offer mandatory success courses while others make them voluntary. Most often, a success course is offered before a student takes other courses, and is used as a preventative measure. Interventions are offered after students have been placed on probation, can be taken mid-semester or between semesters, can be either mandatory or voluntary, and are intended to help students who are on probation raise their grade point average (GPA) above the traditional 2.0 level. One of the keys to increased GPA is a high level of academic self-efficacy (Elias, 2008; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001).

Bandura (1996) describes efficacy expectations as beliefs that one can complete the behavior required to produce an outcome. Bandura (1996) further states that self-

efficacy beliefs are tied to academic achievement, motivation, and interest, as well as career aspirations and pursuits. This is to say that if a student does not believe he or she is capable of performing a task, there is a link between their beliefs and what those students accomplish academically in school as well as their career choices. Self-efficacy beliefs contribute to accomplishments through support of strategic thinking and motivationally (Caprara et al, 2008).

This chapter continues with a review of the empirical literature. Specifically, the following three broad topics will be explored: academic self-efficacy, academic probation and student motivation, academic interventions and success courses. Following the review, I will discuss the existing gaps in the literature. The chapter will conclude with an explanation of the conceptual framework for the study and a chapter summary.

### **Academic Self-Efficacy**

There has been significant research conducted that encompasses many elements of academic self-efficacy, also sometimes referred to as self-regulatory efficacy (Caprara, et al., 2008). However, there are gaps relative to students' perceptions of self-efficacy, and the effects of academic success courses on those perceptions. Furthermore, little research is found that examines gender differences in perceptions of academic self-efficacy, particularly among students who are on academic probation. For this study, I categorized self-efficacy factors as interpersonal and environmental, in similar fashion as Korgan, Durdella, and Stevens (2013).

### **Interpersonal Factors**

Elias (2008) studied the correlation of anti-intellectualism and academic self-efficacy in business school students in three United States universities spanning both

undergraduate and graduate students in separate regions. The researcher found that students with lower GPAs had higher anti-intellectual attitudes and lower academic self-efficacy. The study reported strong relations between academic self-efficacy and academic performance. Similarly, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) found academic self-efficacy and optimism to be strongly related not only to academic performance, but also to stress and commitment to stay in school. Additionally, Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade, (2005) found that academic self-efficacy is a predictor of academic success in their study of 107 college freshman, predominantly immigrant and minority students.

It is possible that one of the components of academic self-efficacy is resilience. Mak, et al. (2011) conducted a study of college students in Hong Kong to test whether positive views toward self, the world, and the future - the positive cognitive triad - could explain the relationships among resilience, life satisfaction, and depression. The authors found that students with higher levels of resilience showed higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depression. In another study of resilience, Block and Kremen (1996) found differences of resilience based on gender, and suggest that people will attempt to shield themselves from risk using personal and social resources. Further, gender differences were discovered by Camgoz, Tektas, et al. (2008) who found that self-efficacy is not a predictor of academic attributional style, but that gender and culture are both significant predictors of AAS.

### **Environmental Factors**

One of the environmental factors that helps shape a student's academic self-efficacy seems to be the student's parents. Bandura, et al. (1996) found that parent's senses of their children's academic self-efficacy were linked to the children's academic

achievement. This lends weight to the theory that others have an influence on the perceived self-efficacy of students (Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens, 2013). Steca et al. (2011) also showed that students reported a higher degree of academic self-efficacy if their parents' perceived parental self-efficacy was higher. This study of Italian teenagers and their parents reinforces the environmental impacts on student academic self-efficacy. The students' perceived academic self-efficacy was measured using the 19-item scale developed by Bandura, et al (1996). Most notably, the authors found students whose parents displayed a high degree of self-efficacy also reported a higher degree of self-efficacy beliefs than those students whose parents had lower self-efficacy.

Students themselves can influence the learning environment as well. Jungert and Rosander (2010) studied 275 Swedish students enrolled in engineering Master's degree programs. Those students who studied according to problem-based learning showed higher perceived self-efficacy than the students who did not use the PBL strategies. Additionally, the researchers found that the students who reported higher academic self-efficacy were more likely to attempt to influence the study environment by talking to their instructors both inside and outside of class as well as filling out course evaluations. While no differences in academic self-efficacy perceptions were found between genders, lower-achieving students reported significantly lower academic self-efficacy than did their high-achieving peers. Although the participants were graduate students, the study's findings showing overall lower academic self-efficacy in low-achieving students is significant for all students on academic probation.

Diseth (2011) also found links to learning strategies and self-efficacy. The author studied Norwegian undergraduate psychology students and showed that earlier

achievement, as measured by high school GPA, predicted self-efficacy and subsequent achievement. Further, the results showed that approach motives such as self-efficacy predicted deep learning strategies as opposed to surface learning strategies. While this study is limited to Norwegian students, it offers compelling evidence that higher academic self-efficacy could lead to increased student success. Similar to Jungert and Rosander (2010), the Diseth (2011) study found a higher academic self-efficacy in those students who are high-achievers relative to their peers.

Other members of the school community can also influence a student's perceptions of self-efficacy. Uwah, McMahon, and Furlow (2008) studied African American male high school students. The researchers found that feeling encouraged to participate and individual educational aspirations were both significant and positive predictors of academic self-efficacy. The study found that African American male students placed a higher importance on authentic interactions with members of the school community who believed the students could perform at a high level than they did on their own perception of how much they are liked by others. Although more research is needed regarding the specific nature of that relationship, this study may offer clues regarding an effective component of an academic success course.

The amount of time already spent in school may also be linked to self-efficacy perceptions. Lundberg et al. (2008) studied adult undergraduate students enrolled in an accelerated organizational leadership degree program at a midsize research institution. Students at the beginning of their coursework scored lower than those who were finishing their degree programs in terms of self-efficacy for academic achievement. Although the authors' sample included only a small subset of non-traditional aged students at a single

research university, the study underscores the importance of working with students early in their academic career to increase self-efficacy.

Students also form their self-efficacy perceptions by comparisons to their peers. Hutchison-Green, Follman, and Bodner (2008) performed a qualitative study of 12 students enrolled in a first year engineering course at Purdue University in Indiana. The authors found the students' perceived academic self-efficacy to be influenced by performance comparisons based on grades, mastery of material, speed at which tasks were performed, and the amount of contribution made when working with others.

Student perceptions of academic self-efficacy are influenced by many factors, both interpersonal and environmental. Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by parents and other members of the school community, the learning strategies employed by students, student resilience, GPA, how long students have been enrolled in school, and performance comparisons students make between themselves and their peers. What is not known is how academic success courses affect the self-efficacy perceptions of students who are on academic probation. Moreover, we do not know in what ways the effects of success courses on student perceptions of academic self-efficacy differ by gender.

### **Academic Probation and Student Motivation**

As self-efficacy beliefs and motivation are often linked, so are academic probation and low student motivation (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Thrombly, 2011; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). It is common for students on academic probation to show or report low motivation towards completing assignments, studying, or attending classes. A higher level of motivation, however, can be an indicator of greater academic success.

## **Academic Probation**

Academic probation was first discussed in the *Journal of Education* (1931) following the new probation policy adopted by the Adelbert College of Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio that placed entering students on probation for their first two years, and required them to perform at a certain level if they were to continue at the University. Today, probationary students are not limited to a single university in Ohio, of course. Probation affects students at all levels of higher education, from community college to universities attracting top students. Nor is academic probation a uniquely American problem.

James and Graham (2010) conducted an empirical study of students on academic probation at a public Canadian university. Students at this university are informed via letter of their placement on academic probation. This study showed a disproportionate number of males and of students who identified as First Nations (native) students on academic probation. Of the students interviewed 72% did not understand their situation based solely on the letter they were sent, and could not explain what academic probation meant or what the implications were. In fact, only 5% actually had a clear understanding of the situation. The second most common reason for their situation that students identified was a lack of motivation. Students with a somewhat more intrusive intervention that involved a follow up phone call were somewhat more likely to return to school the following semester. This is consistent with the Molina and Abelman (2000) study on intrusiveness of interventions.

Some authors recommend pre-enrollment strategies to help avoid academic probation instead of interventions to help students improve after they have struggled.

Balduf (2009) conducted her study of freshmen, who were on academic probation, at an elite university. She interviewed seven freshmen online, over an instant messaging program, to allow for participant convenience in scheduling and for what she identified as a natural setting for the participants in order to encourage more honest participation than a face-to-face meeting. While her chosen medium limits the nuances of body language and inflection, and limits the study accordingly, her research reinforces previous literature on academic probation and motivation. The main reasons study participants expressed for their underachievement were lack of preparation for college, time management problems, and motivation. The author recommends a freshman orientation event or course to help mitigate some of these factors, however many students do not attend a freshman orientation that is voluntary (AACC, 2011).

Another voluntary course was studied by Tovar and Simon (2006) to determine differences in levels of academic probation status and academic motivation amongst students of different ethnicities and genders. Their study consisted of 325 students who voluntarily completed a reorientation that was piloted for students on academic or progress probation. They drew from previous studies and standardized instruments, as well as instruments of their own design to conduct their study, adding validity to their methods.

The initial findings showed Latino students having the largest proportion of probation at the college, as well as participants in the reorientation courses, at a percentage much higher than their proportion college wide. Additionally, Latinos were shown to be more likely to drop out. Overall, the authors found differences in confidence and receptivity to academic assistance among different ethnic groups. They state that the

students need support, goal directedness, and motivation to change.

The authors state that further research is needed to systematically assess the link between academic interventions and key success indicators such as retention and persistence. They also assert that students welcome academic interventions. While this study consisted only of participants who were struggling, some researchers use a comparative method.

In one such study, Trombley (2001) examined the differences between students on academic probation and students with good academic standing at a single community college. The author found a lower high school GPA for probation students, and also found that probation students were, on average, older than students not on probation. Further, a much larger percentage of students who are employed are on academic probation. Only 7% of students on probation reported a lack of motivation, a similar number to those in good standing. This finding is counterintuitive. Similar to Tovar and Simon (2006) and Balduf (2009), Trombley showed a very low (19%) attendance of voluntary academic interventions among students on academic probation.

In addition to the finding on motivation levels, the study has some limitations. There was no mention of socioeconomic status, and the sample population was not very diverse overall. Additionally, Trombley's initial hypothesis included 11 factors that would likely show differences between the two groups, casting too wide a net to gather substantive data.

Not all interventions are voluntary. Hsieh and Guerra's (2007) study involved a mandatory academic success course for students on academic probation. The authors sampled 112 students, 60 of whom were on academic probation; all were given a survey

on which they were asked to report their GPA and to rate their self-efficacy about being a student and goal orientation for learning. A limitation to this study is found in their sampling; all of the students on academic probation were freshmen, but the students on good academic standing were 94% upperclassmen, and 6% sophomores.

Their study found that students on good academic standing exhibited a higher self-efficacy and a tendency to set performance-approach goals as opposed to performance-avoidance goals. Overall, the authors revealed a difference in beliefs about academic capabilities between the two groups as well as the difference in academic goal setting. This study provides important insights into some of the potentially necessary aspects of an academic success course. Namely, there may be a need to teach students on academic probation how to adopt and implement goals that will help them succeed.

### **The Link between Academic Probation and Student Motivation**

A theme that frequently recurs among students on academic probation is motivation. Domene, Socholotiuk, and Woitowicz (2011) examined the effects of career outcome expectations in relation to academic motivation and found that students with high expectations for career outcomes showed higher extrinsic and intrinsic motivation than their peers who had lower expectations. Additionally, those with aspirations of a career in science, technology, or math showed significantly higher motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) than other career paths.

The authors used portions of two previously validated instruments to gather most of their data, which increases the validity of the study. However, they used a single item indicator to assess the aspirations in science, technology, or math. The single indicator, as the authors correctly indicate, could be a limitation to the study. Also, the average

student in this study had completed roughly three years of post-secondary education, so only students who were already successful in persisting were examined. This study brought an entirely different perspective to the motivation research. More often, motivation studies involve students who are struggling academically and students in high school.

In one such study, Schwinger, Steinmayr, and Spinath (2009) surveyed 231 students in the 11 and 12 grades. Schwinger (2009, 2012) has conducted several studies regarding motivational regulation for German high school students. The students provided self-reported data regarding their use of motivational regulation strategies and effort management. The students also took an intelligence test. While motivational regulation strategies were not directly related to GPA, they did show a positive effect on effort management, which is predictive of GPA. Intelligence was equally a strong predictor of GPA. The authors presented, and supported, a hypothesis that students with a higher intelligence would better use motivation regulation strategies, which will have an indirect impact on their GPA. The authors found a significant relationship between motivational regulation and effort management, and also between effort management and GPA. The authors identify limitations not only in studying only this small age range, but also in not assessing the quality of the motivational strategy application. Interestingly, the authors tie both intelligence and motivation to effort, but similar results are difficult to find in other studies.

Another study of pre-collegiate students was performed by Schwinger and Steinmeier-Pelster (2012) who studied 301 high school seniors regarding their use of motivational regulation strategies during exam preparation. The authors presented eight

strategies for motivational regulation in the article, including enhancement of situational interest (attempting to make a tedious objective more pleasant) and enhancement of personal significance, or finding connections between the task and one's life. The authors developed the "Motivational Regulation Model" presented to enhance previous studies of motivational models, in an attempt to help determine which motivational strategy should be used in specific situations. This model is an extension of Schwinger's previous research (Schwinger, Steinmayer, & Spinath, 2009). In part, the authors examined whether the use of motivational regulation strategies led to an increase in effort when controlling for the initial effort given. This controlling factor was not used in previous studies. The model presented suggests that the student should examine the motivational problem once they have identified the need for increased motivation, to determine if it is situational or fundamental. They suggest that determining this key factor will help to determine which motivational regulation strategy should be used. If the problem is situational, then motivation needs to be "refreshed." If it is fundamental, then "base-building" strategies should be used.

The additional step of determining the motivation problem is important, but may be difficult for students to do on their own. The study is highly theoretical, and the authors pointedly state that further research is needed to better develop this model.

Due to the ever-increasing popularity of online education, Sansone, Smith, Thoman, and MacNamara (2012) examined students enrolled in both online and traditional classes and the differences in their motivation and performance in the course. Specifically, the authors compared the use of strategies to enhance performance (studying-related outcomes) and strategies to enhance the studying experience. They

sampled the same upper-division psychology course in both online and on-ground formats. The majority of students who participated in the study from both groups were white females. While this is a limitation to the study, it's not clear if the makeup of the classes were similar to that of the study participants, so the extent to which this is a limitation is not known.

Of particular interest, the authors differentiated between types of motivation and tied them to performance and interest in the course. In both groups, they found that students who used motivational strategies that were focused on positive outcomes, such as good grades, showed a higher interest in the class and topic, regardless of context. However, some online students also reported attempts to make the experience more interesting, such as exploring the class webpage. These students experienced a trade-off between motivation and performance; their motivation was enhanced, but their performance was lowered. This finding shows that it is not motivation alone that is important for student success, but the right kind of motivation. This research is similar to the motivational regulation studies by Schwinger and Stiensmeier-Pelster (2012) and Schwinger, Steinmayer and Spinath (2009).

Kim and Frick (2011) surveyed 368 adult learners from both corporate and higher education settings, and examined motivation to begin and motivation during self-directed e-learning (SDEL) courses. The results of the study were consistent with other studies. Student motivation was highest at the start of the course, when the goals were perceived to be more relevant, and when their level of technological competence was high.

One of the significant factors of maintaining motivation in the courses was the student perception that "e-learning is right for me." Those students who showed an

initial affinity toward online learning at the beginning showed higher levels of motivation during the courses. This is consistent with the Seirup and Tirota (2010) study that showed students with previous online education experience had a higher level of satisfaction in other e-learning courses. Finally, one method educators can employ to help students increase their academic self-efficacy, including their motivation, is an academic intervention, or a success course. Interventions are typically offered mid-semester, after students are placed on academic probation. Success courses are often taken by students who are on academic probation, or are in danger of being placed on probation, and are usually offered for credit and last for several weeks. Both of these courses are frequently offered to help give struggling students the tools they need to succeed academically.

### **Academic Interventions and Success Courses**

Often, academic interventions and success courses are specifically offered to students on academic probation. Boretz (2012) explored the role of one such mid-semester academic intervention course on students who were on academic probation at a research university. Unlike Tovar and Simon (2006) and Thrombley (2001), Boretz explored the role of mandatory success workshops instead of voluntary courses. In part, she concluded that it is the responsibility of the institution to engage the student, not the other way around.

Boretz (2012) found that the workshops contributed to closing the gap between success rates among advantaged and disadvantaged students from 32% to 18%. Overall, student response to the workshop was positive, with many useful portions of the course being noted by the students. Although feedback was positive, some students still

remained on academic probation. Many of those students reported feeling unmotivated to succeed. This study is one of very few that explored student perceptions of an academic success course.

In a qualitative study of first-year students at a research university in the Midwest, Jessup-Anger (2011) found three major themes: participants showed significant motivational barriers at the beginning of the class, personal connection to the subject matter enhanced student motivation to learn, and students' motivation to learn was deepened by pedagogical strategies. The success course examined was a for-credit first year seminar similar to those described by Stovall (2000).

In the study, Jessup-Anger (2011) conducted interviews with four students and the instructor of one of the courses. The small number of students interviewed, and the fact that they were all from the same course, is a limitation of the study. It is unclear if these success courses were mandatory or voluntary. Student participants described the instructor as a key component to their greater motivation. The author states that she believes the students developed cognitive skills, and an appreciation of the importance of those skills while in the class. This study further illustrates the importance of motivational strategies in success courses. Similar studies should be conducted with students in other courses.

Academic success courses can offer more than just motivational strategies. Kenney and Reed (2009) examined the effects of academic success courses on psychosocial variables. Although not a direct measurement of GPA or other traditional indicators of academic success, these variables, such as self-control and resourcefulness, have been shown to contribute to a student's academic success. These success courses

were for-credit, like those recommended by Stovall (2000) and offered at a Canadian university to first-year students. The authors showed that the most disadvantaged students showed the greatest improvements following the course, consistent with Molina and Abelman (2000). This study provides additional support to the overall improvements in student success that can be gained from academic success courses. Although the courses examined in this study were taken as a preventative measure, the increase in student predictors of success such as academic resourcefulness and academic self-control are relevant, and should remain consistent with interventions.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of interventions and success courses is offered in a comparative study performed by McGrath and Burd (2012). The researchers studied a mandatory success course offered to freshman on academic probation at a large, public university. The authors looked at the differences in persistence between a group of students on academic probation that had taken a success course, and those that had not. Of note, there was not a significant difference in mean high school GPAs between the groups. There were, however, significant differences in the rates of reinstatement to a status of good academic standing, persistence into the second through fourth years of college, and rates of graduation within five years. To wit, the group that took the success course increased persistence to the fourth year from 9% to 47%, and graduation rates increased from 2% to 25% between groups.

As the authors correctly indicate, this study includes students from different years, so no causal relationship can be concluded from the study given the possibility of variables not captured in the study. That said, the results were consistent over time, which is promising. The authors found, similar to Tovar and Simon (2006) that voluntary

success courses showed a very low attendance lending further weight to the idea that success courses for students on academic probation should be mandatory.

In addition to mandatory, it is suggested that interventions should be highly intrusive. Molina and Abelman (2000) sampled 150 students on academic probation, divided equally between those at high and low risk for dismissal. Twenty five students of each group were randomly assigned to one of three interventions: nonintrusive, moderately intrusive, and highly intrusive. The nonintrusive intervention involved a letter to the student explaining academic probation and student support options on campus. Moderately intrusive interventions included a phone call following a similar letter. The highly intrusive group included a mandatory 30-40 minute meeting with the Coordinator of Academic Advising, during which resources relevant to the student's problems were identified, an action plan was developed, and appointments with counselors and tutors were formalized in a written contract.

The students with the most intrusive interventions showed the greatest increase in GPA, and were much more likely to attribute their academic standing to an internally-controllable factor. Additionally, those students at greatest risk for dismissal showed the greatest improvement using the highly-intrusive interventions. This study is consistent with Boretz (2012) and McGrath and Burd (2012) in showing mandatory interventions are successful in improving performance.

Stovall's (2000) article encourages community college administrators to create and implement success courses for incoming freshmen. The goals of the success course would be to facilitate student integration into the academic and social communities of the college, and to help the students to develop a positive mental attitude about learning and

their abilities. Ultimately, the course should lead to improved academic performance and retention.

The courses suggested by the author are for-credit courses, as opposed to the incoming orientations suggested by Balduf (2009) or those studied by Tovar and Simon (2006). She suggests classes that offer interaction with other students and faculty and offers an introduction to college resources. Further, the courses should include career development goals, a concept reinforced by Domene, Socholotiu, and Woitowicz (2011), and concepts such as time management. While the author suggests for-credit courses, but is unclear about the duration of the courses, the reader could presume the course lasts for a semester.

Interventions do not necessarily have to be a group session. Wlazelek and Coulter (1999) studied 414 undergraduate students who were on academic warning or probation, and found that those who participated in counseling showed a significantly higher increase in GPA than their peers who did not. It is interesting to note that those who attended more than one session showed similar results to those who attended only one.

Unlike the studies by others such as Boretz (2012) and McGrath and Burd (2012) Wlazelek and Coulter's (1999) study involved individual counseling sessions that acted as interventions, as opposed to group courses. Their study was limited in that the authors examined the GPA of participants only in the semester following the intervention, allowing for the possibility that the improvement was short-lived. It shows further evidence, though, that interventions for students on academic probation are a successful tool for increasing student success.

## **Gaps in the Empirical Literature**

There are several gaps in the existing literature. Few studies examine the student perceptions of academic success courses. In addition, research has not examined the factors of success courses that lead to increased academic self-efficacy of the students who attend them. Finally, there is scant research that looks into differences between gender groups as related to academic success courses. It is the intersection of these key concepts that will be examined here.

This study addresses these gaps by answering the guiding research questions:

What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university? In what ways does an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university? How do the factors that affect academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university vary by gender?

## **Conceptual Framework**

While it is possible that the students on academic probation do not have a high enough perception of their academic self-efficacy to effectively succeed, an academic success course could offer the tools needed to improve the students' perceptions. To help understand how academic success courses can affect the self-efficacy perceptions of students on academic probation, this study is rooted in Bandura's work regarding self-efficacy.

Bandura (1977) described self-efficacy as being based on four sources of

information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences. The expectations of mastery are raised and lowered by successes and failures. The negative effect of failures is lower once strong efficacy expectations are formed through repeated success. Importantly, enhanced self-efficacy stemming in part from personal mastery experiences has shown a tendency to generalize to other situations, resulting in behavioral changes that transfer even to activities which are not related. “The substantial benefits of successful performance are typically achieved in less time than is required to extinguish arousal to symbolic representations of threats.” (Bandura, 1977, p. 196)

While personal mastery is important, vicarious experiences also help to shape an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs. Although not as effective in shaping one’s abilities as personal experiences, clear outcomes from modeled behavior does indeed present efficacy information. Bandura (1977) also asserts that diversified modeling, in which the observer sees positive outcomes by a variety of models, is much more effective at helping the observer to increase their own self-efficacy perceptions.

Perhaps more readily available than a diversified model with which to afford the observer the benefits of vicarious experience is verbal persuasion. Due to the lack of an authentic experience, however, verbal persuasion is less effective at raising self-efficacy. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) suggests that verbal persuasion alone, without the addition of prearranged conditions to help facilitate effective performance may lead to failures that discredit the persuaders and work to undermine the individuals perceived self-efficacy.

The final contributory factor in this model is physiological state, which Bandura

(1977) presents as emotional arousal. In fact, Bandura argues that stressful and taxing situations elicit emotional arousal, which might inform personal competency due to anxiety. Anxiety can be reduced through modeling, but as is the case with all of the other factors presented, personal mastery experiences are the most effective at reducing the negative effects of the physiological state.

Using Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy, I will examine components of academic success courses as they relate to personal mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Specifically, this study will further develop Bandura's theory by exploring the perceptions of students who are on academic probation and the effect academic success courses have on those students' academic self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Summary**

Public university student success rates are low both nationally and in California, with students showing about 54% success after six years. One way to address student success is to help those students who are on academic probation. While some students on academic probation struggle with the difficulty of their coursework, many students with a low GPA report having low motivation. If these students are helped early enough, many of them have been shown to successfully improve their grades enough to be taken off of probationary status.

This help typically comes through either academic success courses or interventions. Success courses are sometimes offered for credit, and can be taken online or on-ground. These courses are a preventative measure taken to encourage student success and motivation from the onset of their studies. Interventions can also be offered

both online and on-ground, and are usually taken by students after they have been placed on academic probation. Interventions are sometimes offered mid-semester, and sometimes after a semester has been completed. Both success courses and interventions are offered on a mandatory basis at some universities and are a voluntary offering at others. Voluntary programs have a low attendance and therefore a low success rate for the overall population of students on academic probation. Mandatory attendance however shows a far greater number of students affected, and therefore a dramatic increase in student success is seen. In addition to mandatory attendance and participation, it is recommended that interventions be highly intrusive.

There are gaps in the literature where these concepts intersect. There is limited research regarding student perceptions of academic success courses. Additionally, the empirical literature has not examined the specific factors of success courses that lead to the increased self-efficacy perceptions of the students who attend them. Finally, there is scant research that examines the differences between gender groups and their unique experiences on academic probation or during academic success courses.

This study will attempt to fill those gaps as a qualitative grounded theory case study rooted in academic self-efficacy beliefs. I will focus on student perceptions of their academic self-efficacy and how it is affected by academic success courses.

### **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The purpose of this grounded theory case study is to examine the influence of academic interventions on the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university. Following a grounded theory methodology, I hope to generate a mode that explains the effective components of an academic intervention offered to students, how these interventions can be used to increase student academic self-efficacy, and how the effect of the courses differ by gender.

In this study, I will attempt to answer the following research questions:

What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university?

In what ways does an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university?

How do the factors that affect academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university vary by gender?

Following this brief introduction, this chapter will discuss in-depth the grounded theory design of the study. The setting, a comprehensive public four-year regional university, will be described next, along with the historical context of the college. Next, I will discuss the sampling strategy along with the historical and document data sample itself. Finally, my multiple roles as the researcher, higher education professional,

student, and former student on academic probation will be detailed, and followed by a summary of the chapter.

### **Research Design and Tradition**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand student perceptions of academic success courses for students on academic probation who are enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university. Further, this study will add to the existing body of knowledge about the effective components of an academic success course offered to students, how these success courses can be used to increase student academic self-efficacy, and how the efficacy of the success courses may vary based on gender of the students. Given the purpose, a grounded theory case study design is most appropriate for this study.

The research tradition best suited for this study is a grounded theory case study. The focus and purpose of grounded theory is aiming to develop a substantive theory that is grounded in, and derived from, data. A grounded theory methodology examines data by coding and looking for both similarities and differences, examines causal relationships, and holds that human beings are purposeful agents who interpret and respond to complex and problematic situations. Importantly, the theories developed using a grounded theory methodology are traceable to the data used to formulate them. The research questions guiding a grounded theory study seek to further understanding of a process, or a change over time (Schram, 2006).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as a research methodology with the purpose of developing a theory grounded in the data collected by the researcher and using comparative analysis to allow an alternative form of research to that of

generating a specific hypothesis before beginning the work (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

In a grounded theory approach, qualitative or textual data, in this study consisting of student responses to questions given as an assignment in an academic success course, are coded in an effort to find similarities and differences between the data in the various coded categories. The researcher will concurrently generate and analyze data by coding the data gathered from an initial purposive sample before gathering further data (Birks & Mills, 2011).

After the researcher gathers the initial data, he/she will assign labels, or codes, to words or phrases which will help the researcher to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in the data. As an ongoing process of data collection and analysis, the researcher will then compare coded incidents with previous incidents across other groups and categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During later iterations of coding, I will combine, eliminate, and further break categories into subcategories as appropriate (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Within the tradition of a grounded theory tradition, I will use a case study approach. Merriam (2009) asserts that a case study should be particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and bounded. While bounded, the case study involves in-depth examination of the gathered data and holistic, descriptive write-ups (Glesne, 2011). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state further that the goal of a case study is transferability, or the application of knowledge and understanding in a similar contexts or settings – other educational institutions in the case of this study.

This study conforms to a grounded theory case study methodology and the data obtained from historical data will be coded and used to generate a substantive theory that

is traceable to, and grounded in, that data. I will examine the causal relationship between academic success courses and student self-efficacy beliefs. The questions guiding this study focus on student perceptions of a change over time, namely the effects of academic success courses on academic self-efficacy.

## **Research Setting and Context**

### **Site Demographics**

The setting for this study will be Southwest Valley University (SVU), a pseudonym for a comprehensive public four-year regional university in Southern California. SVU was founded in the mid-twentieth century and is one of the largest comprehensive public four-year regional universities in California. SVU is a Hispanic serving institution, with over a third of the students reporting as Hispanic/Latino, and an undergraduate student body in excess of 25,000 students. Further, SVU was ranked as one of the top universities in the country that awards degrees to Hispanic students. Approximately 55% of the student population is female. Nearly half of SVU students obtain a degree within six years, giving them a higher than average success rate when compared to other public four year universities.

### **Site Selection**

The research purpose, to examine the influence of academic success courses on the academic self-efficacy of students who are enrolled at a comprehensive public four-year regional university and are on academic probation, informed my site selection. I employed a criterion sampling strategy, with five primary criteria needed for site selection. First, the site must have been a public higher education institution. Next, the institution must have offered a for-credit academic success course. The course must have

been offered recently. Additionally, the course must have been designed to improve student academic self-efficacy beliefs and grade point averages. Finally, students who were on academic probation must have taken the success course.

Given the five criteria used in the site selection strategy, Southwest Valley University, a pseudonym for a public four-year university in the Western United States, was used for this study because the university offered a success course in recent years and students were asked to discuss components of the course they found to be most effective. Further, the success course had a stated purpose of raising academic confidence (self-efficacy beliefs) and was taken primarily by students who were on academic probation.

### **Access and Researcher Roles**

The primary gatekeeper for this study was Dr. Johnathan Williams, a pseudonym for the Student Counseling Services Director at SVU. Williams created the success course and taught the first section before other professors took over teaching the class. He then facilitated obtaining de-identified copies of student assignments from each of the sections held, as well as related document data and a copy of the textbook for me. Assuming the role of principal researcher, I also obtained a letter of exemption from the IRB office at the university.

### **Research Sample and Data Sources**

#### **Data Sources**

The primary data source for this grounded theory case study was documents which consisted of course syllabi and announcements as well as assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at SVU between fall

semester 2012 and spring semester 2014, a total of eight sections with an approximate range of 10-20 students enrolled per section for an overall total of students enrolled between 121 and 136 during the period. The purpose of the success course was to increase academic confidence and to help students raise their GPA. In addition to the specific student assignments, I examined fliers used to announce the course, course syllabi, and the textbook used for the courses.

In each section of the course, students were given various graded written assignments. Based on student responses received, these assignments broadly included a project asking students what components of the course they found most helpful (referred to in this study as “Final Project”), a reflective journal that asked what specific things the students learned from the course (Reflection), and a plan of action the students developed to help them going forward (Action Plan). In total, 234 student assignments were examined.

All of the assignments were scanned and sent to me in two pdf documents. Because the files were all received together, it is unknown if any of the assignments given were written by the same student. Accordingly, each assignment was examined separately and correlations between final projects, reflective journals, and action plans could not be specifically made.

### **Sampling Strategies**

The overall sampling strategy was mixed, consisting of both criterion and stratified purposeful sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). With respect to criterion sampling: in order to be eligible for participation in the study, students had to have been enrolled in the academic success course studied between the fall 2012 and spring 2014

semesters at Southwest Valley University and had to have actively taken part in completing the course assignments given. In concert with criterion sampling, I employed stratified purposeful sampling. All student responses were considered during data analysis, and they were broken into subgroups by gender for each assignment examined. Sampling across gender groups ensured that I was prepared to examine differences in perception based on gender. By doing so, I found there are differences in the effect of academic success courses on students based on gender.

With the help of Williams and the university counseling staff, I was given electronic copies of student responses to reflective assignments given during the academic success courses taken from fall 2012 through spring 2014. All student responses made available to me were examined and included in this grounded theory case study. It is unknown how students learned of the success course, although announcements were posted in the University Counseling Services area, and counselors were encouraged to tell their advisees about the courses.

I also examined the course syllabi provided to me by Williams, as well as the textbook used for the course. These additional document data helped to form a more complete picture of what students were asked to do and aided me in reconstructing their assignments.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The research sample consisted of a balanced group of male and female students. There were a total of 118 responses from female students examined, and 109 male student responses. There were seven instances where the assignment was from a participant of unspecified gender. The assignment breakdown is shown in the table

below.

**Table 1**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Unknown Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Final Project</b>	11	5	4	20
<b>Reflection</b>	61	52	2	116
<b>Action Plan</b>	46	52	1	98

### **Ethical Issues**

As with any study that involves human participants, there are ethical considerations that were taken into account. Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss several, including maintaining participant anonymity, informed consent, maintaining cultural sensitivity, and ensuring the integrity and quality of the research. Each of these potential ethical issues were mitigated during this study.

In order to protect participant identity, I received all data de-identified from the University Counseling Services office. Student assignments were coded only as male or female and were scanned into PDF format before they were sent to me en masse via email. I assigned numbers to each paper for purposes of organization. Although no identifiable student information was gathered, all study information was kept on a password protected hard drive on my laptop computer. Hard copies of the assignments I printed were kept at my home.

Since the assignments given to the students over the course of the years were not intended for research purposes originally, there was no informed consent process. The IRB office at the university determined that no consent was necessary because all data

was given to me de-identified in aggregate form. Dr. Smith obtained permission from the faculty members who taught each of the sections of the success course before granting me copies of the data.

During the course of my research, I maintained cultural sensitivity, and ensured I was mindful of the integrity and quality of my study. To do so, I included all student responses in the data, which came from diverse group of students. To help ensure integrity and quality, I critically read the student responses several times to be certain I understood their words and intent as fully and accurately as I could since I was unable to contact individual students for verification. To ensure this study meets legal and ethical standards, I submitted my research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Northridge, as well as at my selected site.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The instruments used to collect the data were assignments that instructors gave during the course. I received all document data ex post facto. There were three distinct assignments given to students that were sent to me. They were a Final Project, a Reflective Journal, and an Action Plan. The assignments provided overlapping data, but were separately given.

#### **Final Project**

One of the instruments that I examined was an assignment that instructors gave in the first offering of the success course in fall semester of 2012. This instrument is referred to as “Final Project” because several students used the phrase as the title of the assignment. This instrument was given as the final assignment to the class and asked the students to respond to four questions. The questions are:

1. Identify three of the most important lessons you have learned from this class. Please explain why you chose each one.
2. What do you wish you would have done differently in this class to more fully take advantage of the opportunities afforded to you?
3. If you were the professor in this class, what would you do the same? And what would you have done differently? Suggestions to improve the class.
4. What will you commit to for next semester in terms of improving the way you will learn and do better academically? Be very specific.

### **Reflection**

Another assignment that the course instructors gave to students was a reflective essay. This assignment appeared to be a general reflection from the students, discussing the specific components of the course they found most useful and why. Students mentioned assignments they found helpful or impactful, in what ways the exercise was beneficial, and sometimes briefly discussed how they would continue to benefit from it. This assignment appeared to be very similar to question one of the Final Project assignment given during the first semester the course was offered.

### **Action Plan**

The final assignment examined was an action plan. Instructors asked students to provide a specific plan of action for their future using specific activities from the course. This assignment appeared to be very similar to question four of the Final Project assignment given in the first section of the course offering.

### **Data Collection**

Dr. Williams' office collected the data from the faculty initially. All student

assignments from the success course were filed in boxes in a storage room in the offices occupied by Williams and his staff. The papers were de-identified, labeled as being the work of a male or female student, and scanned. Electronic copies in PDF format were sent to me via email directly from Dr. Williams. All assignments were examined for this study, with a total of 496 pages being analyzed.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an ongoing process that begins as soon as data are collected in the field. Moving forward from the initial literature review, I gathered and analyzed data, and found recurring themes across data sources. Through iterative data analysis, I interpreted the results along thematic lines that correlated with, or added to, the existing literature. I examined document and student assignment data for thematic elements using Microsoft Excel to maintain a list of student responses based on the number assigned to the paper, the specific assignment examined, and student gender. Using this method, I was able to sort data quickly to look for emerging and ongoing themes.

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

Prior to data collection of document data and student assignment review, preliminary data analysis generated the initial concepts for codes and themes based on a review of the empirical literature. Through a thorough review of existing studies on academic probation and academic success courses, I found emerging codes and themes that helped guide me when analyzing the student assignment and document data that I collected. I kept a journal of these themes electronically using Microsoft Word and added to it as the literature review continued. I also used hard copies of relevant studies with hand-written notations on them to help myself organize articles by thematic element.

I referred to this journal during later data analysis stages for guidance as necessary to help ensure I was analyzing the data I collect thoroughly.

### **Early Data Analysis**

The next form of data analysis consisted of document review and student assignment analysis. I examined all relevant documents collected earlier in the research process as provided by Dr. Williams. I initially reviewed these documents to determine the existing structure and stated intent of the success course. As I collected the document data, I looked for thematic elements similar to those identified in the literature review, such as those related to academic probation, student motivation and success, or academic self-efficacy beliefs.

In conjunction with the document review, I analyzed student assignment data. I separated the assignments by assignment type and further separated each assignment type by gender. I gave each paper a number for ease of reference at a later time. As I examined the student responses I identified key thematic elements and began to code the data by keeping lists using Microsoft Excel. This allowed me to quickly sort data and codes to further explore recurring themes in the data. Multiple readings of assignments were necessary to refine, expand, add, and modify the thematic codes found in light of the additional student responses examined. During this stage I identified several representative quotations from the data.

### **Thematic Data Analysis**

Once initial coding was complete, I looked for themes in student responses and document data. As similar codes showed up in multiple areas, I was able to connect the various codes to create code families—or clusters of codes that share meaningful

associations. Then, I grouped these code families together into thematic data, recurring themes that occur between many of the student responses. Based on overarching themes that I found, I began to link themes I found in my data to the literature, noted what I did not find in my data collection and analysis, and also noted any new themes I found that were not represented in the literature.

After the data was initially coded, I continued to analyze the student responses iteratively to further refine the codes and themes found in the data and began to make initial interpretations of the results. A more thorough analysis of common themes across student responses and document data highlighted shared experiences among participants.

### **Interpretation of Data Analysis**

In the final stage of data analysis, I sought to describe patterns of data and began to draw conclusions about the emerging themes found during the previous stages of data analysis. I interpreted the data codes that I had previously used and found relationships among them. In doing so, I made the coded data more meaningful and related the relationship of the coded data to each other as well as to empirical literature. I formed clusters of information by linking relevant data together to further discover and develop the themes that emerged from the data. Finally, through iterative analysis, grouping, and re-grouping of data, I was able to draw conclusions based on the information clusters, and explored relationships between the various themes.

### **Roles of the Researcher**

In this grounded theory case study, I played several major roles. My primary role was that of principal researcher. As such, I designed a study, gathered appropriate document data about the college, the students, and the academic probation and success

course process, and ultimately developed a theory driven by the data gathered. Another role I played is that of a learner. Through my research, in particular through my interactions with study participant writings, I learned a great deal about these students and what they feel will help them to succeed. Additionally, I played the role of a professional, who is currently employed at another higher education institution. This role allowed me to bring the results of this study to my current workplace to help improve overall student success in a California Community College by improving the academic success courses offered based on empirical data.

Finally, I have a role as a student who was on academic probation during my early semesters at a suburban community college in the early 1990s. As a former student who was on academic probation, I know that a lack of motivation to succeed, fueled by a low-perceived value of the classes I was enrolled in, was one of the primary factors that led to my poor grades, and ultimately my placement on probation. I did not have the benefit of a success course program offered through the school, as the students at Southwest Valley University do, but I think an active success course program may have helped me, as well as the others who found themselves in the same predicament that year.

While low motivation may be a factor for the participants of this study, I was mindful not to try to fit their answers and experiences to that preconception. To help mitigate this bias, I used the students' words relative to their assignments and specific feelings instead of interpreting their responses broadly to fit my biases.

During the data analysis process, I was careful not to select participants based on how well they seem to fit my experiences as a student. To do this, I included all student responses given and recorded data from each paper. This allowed for maximum variation

of responses and removed any potential bias for selection I may have had. It is unknown which students, if any, improved their academic standing long-term. Further, I was able to use an informant, Dr. Williams, to help me gather historical and contextual data about the success course (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Summary**

This study was conducted following a grounded theory case study design in order to understand student perceptions of academic success courses for students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university. I examined document data primarily comprised of assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at SVU between fall semester 2012 and spring semester 2014. Following a review of the empirical literature, I developed guiding research questions that drove the examination of the data. I organized the data in Microsoft Excel to aid in data analysis and organization. I analyzed data through coding and looked for common themes which lead to the development of a theory that adds to the current body of knowledge.

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

To understand the effects of academic interventions on academic self-efficacy among students in a comprehensive public four-year regional university, this qualitative study used a grounded theory case study design. Historical data collected and reviewed from a comprehensive, regional California public university revealed several recurring themes linking academic interventions to student academic self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data source for this grounded theory case study was document data which consisted of course syllabi and announcements, as well as assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic success course at SVU between the fall semester 2012 and spring semester 2014, a total of eight sections with an approximate range of 10-20 students enrolled per section for an overall total of students enrolled between 121 and 136 during the period.

Data were gathered from academic success courses offered at the beginning of the fall semester 2012 running through the spring semester 2014. The purposes of the success courses were to increase academic confidences and to help students raise their GPAs. Although any student could have enrolled in the one credit course, the founding faculty member stated that over 90% of those enrolled had been on academic probation (Personal communication, 05/08/2014).

One section was offered in fall of 2012, two sections each during fall and spring 2013, and three sections in spring of 2014. During each of these sections, students were given journaling assignments. The assignments analyzed include a final project asking students what components of the course they found most helpful, and what they would

change, a reflective journal asking what the students learned, and an action plan for which students were asked to devise a specific plan of action for future success using some of the concepts learned during the course.

The assignments were de-identified, but separated by male, female, and unknown gender. The breakdown of the assignments can be seen in the table below. As this study examines in part the differences between male and female student responses, those assignments of unknown gender were not included in the results.

**Table 1**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Unknown Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Final Project</b>	11	5	4	20
<b>Reflection</b>	61	52	2	116
<b>Action Plan</b>	46	52	1	98

All of the assignments were scanned and sent to me in two pdf documents. Because the files were all received together, it is unknown if any of the assignments given were written by the same student. Accordingly, each assignment was examined separately and correlations between final projects, reflective journals, and action plans could not be specifically made.

### **Emerging Themes**

I organized the data using Microsoft Excel to aid in data organization and analysis of assigned codes and Microsoft Word to keep an initial journal of emerging themes. I followed a general four-stage process for data analysis consisting of segmenting, coding, clustering, and thematizing the data. I first separated the different assignments and then

grouped them together so that I could analyze each assignment type separately before looking for the common elements between them. This separation and subsequent analysis allowed me to explore the possibility of finding both recurring themes across assignments and characteristics that may be unique to one group or another. I identified three distinct assignments: final projects, reflective journals, and action plans, and further segmented each assignment by gender.

After segmenting the assignments, I began coding the data. I entered the codes into Microsoft Excel, allowing me to quickly sort the data and identify recurring codes. As I found recurring codes, I identified representative quotations and clustered them together into code families – clusters of codes that share meaningful connections. As I further analyzed the clustered data, general recurring themes emerged. I continued to analyze the thematic data iteratively to discover the common themes represented across the student responses to find the shared experiences among participants.

These themes represented both interpersonal and environmental factors of academic self-efficacy. Interpersonal factors of self-efficacy are those characteristics internal to the subject, such as attitude, resilience, and confidence. Environmental factors that affect self-efficacy beliefs are things that are external to the student such as their parents' beliefs, student learning environments, and the relationships between students and their professors. The interpersonal factors that I found were intrinsic in nature and included time management preferences as well as languages which implied the student felt externally controlled or internally in control of their environments, known as a victim versus creator phenomenon in this study. Students wrote primarily about three distinct time management concepts – a time waster journal activity, the use of academic planners,

and prioritization and delayed gratification concepts.

The environmental factors that I found to be effective included the student writing a letter to or visiting a professor outside of class time and finding an activity or service on campus to take part in or use. Students reported a positive change in their academic self-efficacy beliefs overall, and many expressed relief in the realization that they were not the only student struggling.

Although male and female students wrote about the same factors leading to a positive change in their self-efficacy beliefs, one interesting result found a difference in how male and female students presented their future action plans. While the majority of female students presented their action plans in an active voice, most of the male students used more passive language.

### **Interpersonal Factors**

During data analysis, I found two primary themes that are interpersonal factors influencing academic self-efficacy beliefs - time management and the use of a victim versus creator language or mentality. Time management was further subdivided into three recurring subthemes: a time waster journal assignment, the use of academic planners, and prioritization and the concept of delayed gratification. As referenced above, Bandura (1977) hypothesized and proved that personal mastery of experiences has a tendency to alter the behavior of individuals. This study looked for signs that students' natural physiological states were changed by their new learning environments and activities, in this case time management endeavors.

### **Time Management**

Time management was a primary theme mentioned by both male and female

students throughout all of the assignments given. During the analysis, most of the time management theme was further broken into the above-mentioned subthemes. The simple application of good time management skills is not only practical in that it helps keep the students organized, some of the students specifically discussed the effects this component of the class had on their physiological state. Bandura (1977) confers that one of the factors that influences student self-efficacy beliefs is the student's physiological state, such as a feeling of stress or anxiety. Some students found good time management practices, specifically related to reducing the amount they procrastinated, caused them to feel less stress or anxiety. One female student described the feeling of procrastination and stress as "horrible" but found a simple solution to help her cope with the anxiety she was feeling:

Being stressed for me was horrible...the reason why I became stressed [was] due to worries which came from procrastination. The way I'm handling procrastination is by having a calendar. If I follow through with my plans there would be less stress and anxiety.

For this student, the managing of her time using a calendar is a perfect example of a student's personal mastery of a task or of using tools. Additionally, the positive feeling experienced by the student shapes her behavior and sends her on a trajectory where she will want to model the same behavior again anticipating the same positive feelings.

Another female student experienced similar feelings and felt less stressed when she stopped procrastinating and put forth a better effort on her assignments. She wrote, "I have tried to take my time when doing something rather than doing it all the night before. It feels more relaxing and I can actually give it my best when I plan

accordingly.”

In both of the above cases, students found themselves experiencing lower stress and anxiety which led to their improved academic performances. The reasons for these improvements included appropriate time-managing activities in which the two female students accomplished their work objectives, also known as gaining personal mastery over one’s activities, followed by the intrinsic self-efficacy effect, which in this case is a positive physiological state, or emotional arousal.

One female student wrote how planning out her semester helped her feel less stress. By following step-by-step directions she was able to change her habits and found the most effective time for her to study was early in the day:

This semester how I managed my time wasn’t so difficult with the worksheets we have received during class. The green work sheet...gave us a few step-by-step analysis of managing our work and not letting it manage you, where the goals that needed to be met this semester to keep on top of my work and grades. I felt less stressed this semester when I had it all planned out...I know it’s best for me to study in the morning, so I managed my time in the morning and got to school really early to sit at the library and study of the class I was about to have.

As Caprara et al. (2008) and Bandura (1996) contend, a person’s self-efficacy beliefs and understandings will interest and motivate them to achieve their aspirations and pursuits whether they are academic or career goals. In the above case, when the early-morning learner discovers that she retains more information at the beginning of day, she is motivated to act on this information by going to the library early.

Male students also discussed feeling less stress by using good time management

techniques. Like his female counterparts, one male student felt stress when he procrastinated. The time management techniques he learned, specifically using an agenda, helped manage those feelings of stress:

Lately, I have been on track in keeping up with my assignments and haven't been dealing with any stress that comes with procrastination. Having an agenda has really kept me on track. I know it may seem a bit weird that an agenda has me on the right track but it does because it shows me all of the assignments that I have to do.

Here, another male student talks about the effectiveness of his planner in managing stress. He describes the semester he took the success course as the first semester during which he did not feel stress about his assignments:

One of the most important things I learned from this class was planning...this semester was the first time that I made an academic planner for the whole semester and for the first time this semester I was not stressed about my assignments and was always able to look back at my planner if I was ever confused or needed to know when something was due. I really enjoyed this aspect of the class.

Clearly, all of the above students, both female and male, discovered that procrastination causes stress. But more importantly, they used their personal mastery of tasks to change their approaches to their work thus changing their self-efficacy beliefs for the better. These new understandings of how to motivate unorganized and stressed out students is attributed to the academic interventions and tools these success courses offered these students.

**Time waster journal.** One of the specific tools used in the course that helped students was the time waster journal. Students were asked to plot how many hours of their days were spent on activities such as watching television. This activity helped several students come to the realization of how much of their time they were wasting instead of spending on productive tasks. One student found she was wasting more time shopping than she had originally thought:

Second, the time waster's journal helped me see how I was frivolous with my time. It really formed a solid understanding of time. I had the feeling I was spending too many hours shopping online and at stores, but seeing the actual log make it a more urgent concern. I have reduced this bad behavior to a very large extent. I only go out once a week now for groceries and other things I need. It has allowed me a lot more study time.

Another student, who found the time waster journal helpful, used it to discover how their day was being spent, and then to plan exactly where their time should be spent in the future:

“The most helpful activity for me was the Time Wasters exercise/journal in which I plotted out exactly how I spend my time during any given week, identify areas I spend the most time doing, thinking about whether these activities keep me on course or drag myself far off course, and devise a plan in which I can spend more of my valuable time focusing on positive activities in which I can become more on course with my goals, and keep myself on track with what it is that I want to achieve....”

Some students also discovered how much of their time was spent watching

television. One student was surprised to see how much of his time was spent watching television:

“Another thing I learned a lot about myself is that I wasted a lot of my time watching TV. Ever since I completed the time wasters journal I was shocked to realize how much of my time went to watching TV.”

Another student who didn't realize how much of their time was spent watching television also understood that having some down time is important, if not taken to excess. In fact, this student described a feeling of reward after completing tasks:

“We discussed the daily tasks that consume most of our day and the time we devote to these tasks. I know that I dedicate too much time to guilty pleasures like watching TV or surfing the Internet. I also know that it's alright to spend a little time on leisure activities but first spend time on important and urgent items like family, school, or work. I've found it really rewarding to put in time and effort and be able to reward myself after I've completed a daunting task.”

Another discovery a student made was how much time was spent sleeping instead of doing school work:

“The time analysis project was also a very important assignment. It made me realize how much time I actually [waste] on nonproductive activities. I sleep a lot more than I thought I did and I do not spend as much time on homework and school related activities as I would like to.”

The time waster journal assignment helped students learn how they were currently spending their time, and allowed them to reflect on how their time could better be used. To that end, one additional tool the students found helpful was a planner. Instead of

allowing themselves the freedom to do something, they were asked to plan out their days ahead of time. Many students found the use of planners to be very helpful.

**Use of planners.** One of the primary subthemes of time management was the use of planners, agendas, or calendars. As a part of the class assignments, students were to use a planner for the semester. Some students found general changes in their attitude or outlook, and many students saw a decrease in procrastination, and found creative uses for their planners.

*Female.* While use of a planner serves to help students stay organized, it can also have an effect on their overall feelings, once again showing a change in physiological state. One female student found she had a better attitude because she used her planner: "It is much easier to take on your day with a good attitude when you know what is going to happen." Another student talked about a change in how her life feels due to her using a planner: "Since I began using the next actions plan, I have found that it makes my life less chaotic and more structured."

Several students talked about using their planners to help break their habits of procrastination. This student found that simply not procrastinating helped her turn in her work because it had been completed: "With having each and every deadline written down it has helped me to not be a procrastinator and also actually complete and turn in my work."

While other students talked about procrastination in relation to forgetting to do their assignments, this student found a sense of personal mastery (Bandura, 1977) in her new system of organization, and found herself better prepared for things to come. She describes herself as previously forgetting and missing appointments and assignments:

I would tend to forget what assignments were due, or miss appointments. Now I have mastered my organization system. I keep a weekly planner, in which I highlight upcoming tests or assignments that are due...I also write what I need to do in each day individually so I can be prepared for my future instead of procrastinating.

Another student talked about how using the planner helped her to not forget to do important things. She takes ownership of her previous behavior, and appears to show a positive change in both attitude and action:

Forgetting is a choice...After hearing pretty much my life through the way the professor explained the quote, I realized I can no longer just 'forget' to do something, especially as important as school work...After realizing how I would simply just not remind myself of important things and realized that it always turned out to be a bad outcome, I told myself that forgetting is a choice, and not a good one. Now I have changed my ways and write every important thing in my life down in a calendar or planner because I will never just 'forget' to accomplish something.

Another student's response followed the same theme of personal responsibility coming from the use of her planner. She describes her feelings of the planner starting with an "eye roll" and ending with gratitude:

Receiving handouts in class about managing and scheduling...really put my life into perspective...I learned that to be able to have control over my life I had to learn how to manage my time...At first, I remember giving this assignment an 'eye roll' because I didn't see the purpose and looked at the assignment as 'busy

work,' now...it is still the one thing I am so grateful for.

Students found the planner to be helpful tools not only for this class, but something that could be carried over to their lives in general. This student, realizing she is more successful because of her planner, intends to continue using a planner long-term: "This semester I used an agenda to plan out all types of assignments and projects...I did well using this method. I will definitely use the same method for the rest of my life."

The planner was not simply used to track due dates for assignments, but students were encouraged to use it for other things as well. One student described how she was able to use the planner to take charge of her online life as well:

Writing everything down in our agenda books. I have had trouble doing this in the past. I would write important information on random pieces of paper, and when I needed the information I would waste time hunting for it. Sometimes I wouldn't find it at all. I would always have to have email reminders of passwords for accounts...That part that really helped me was being able to look in [my agenda] and see important due dates for assignments and exams.

The above seven female students experienced self-efficacy beliefs generated from improved organization skills and a belief that changing one's behavior produces positive outcomes including better academic habits. This is the positive direction we want learners to move in our universities, but the possible lifelong effects should not be ignored.

As per Mak, et al. (2011), a person's positive view towards him or herself as well as the world and the future have lasting effects on that person's satisfaction with life and self. The above students have described new inner and personal understandings of their

weaknesses and the tools that gave them the strength to overcome those distractions that get in the way of their personal, professional, and academic objectives. Programs which supply learners with tools that provide satisfactory and quantifiable results will likely find those tools being used beyond the classroom doors.

For example, one student also found the planner useful not only to plan their school work and assignments, but also to help them plan their personal life. This student is going to bring one with her in her purse: "I will buy a smaller planner that I can carry in my purse, so that I can mesh my personal responsibilities with my school responsibilities." Another student talks about using the planner to keep her personal life in check as well. In fact, she specifically will schedule time not only for work and school but for her friends and other personal relationships:

I believe ...using a planner...will allow me to keep more on top of assignments that typically fall by the wayside when I am in a class. Also I believe that the planner will help me schedule my time better when it comes to friends, relationships, and work.

For the course, students were expected to keep their planners in their notebooks so they always had it with them in class. One factor unique to some of the female student population was the use of additional calendars as well as the assigned one. These examples and the following statement from another female student may confirm that in some cases female students may be more active when physically planning their time than the male students in this study.

For example, the below quoted student mentions it was helpful to keep her planner in her notebook, but it was also helpful to have a wall calendar in her room:

I used a calendar on my wall with dates and times of when things were due. I had not done that previously. Also having to have that in our notebooks as well helped out. It allowed me to plan things in the future since I would have an idea of when I would be done with something instead of just guessing.

Instead of using a calendar on their walls, some of the students found their smartphones to be effective tools as well. One student used her phone in conjunction with the written planner used for the class: “Filling in my planner and calendar with things that are maybe due in a few days and setting alarms on my phone as reminders are all great tools to use to stay on track.”

So, while some of the students, both male and female, used the assigned class calendar per the course requirements, many of the female students expanded their organization tools with additional small or wall calendars, while other students used technology to keep track of their assignments, social events, and goals.

I usually use my phone calendar and write in important dates, when things are due, work schedules, and days that I plan to go out with my friends so that I can visually see what needs to be done and how much time I have in between activities.

The above student, who used her phone instead of the written calendar, still used the language of “writing” things into a planner and was able to keep her planner with her not only in class, but at all times. Thus whether it is written or typed, it is the activity of planning and the trade-off between effort and performance outcomes which motivated many students. In other words, students realized the effective ways they were managing their time using the planners and they liked the benefits they received including having

fewer late assignments turned in, having more time with friends and family, and having less stress and more confidence.

**Male.** Male students also found the use of planners to be helpful. One of the students talked about a change in his physiological state (Bandura, 1977) when he described how he can think more clearly because he is using a planner:

The calendar allowed me to schedule my days, weeks, and semester. By utilizing this tool it not only allows me to effectively move through the day, but it also allows my head to be more clear rather than feel like I have a copious work load. I now am able to complete everything I need and I am able to complete much more too.

As exemplified in the motivational regulation studies by Schwinger and Stiensmeier-Pelster (2012) and Schwinger, Steinmayer and Spinath (2009), the reward behind the motivation needs to be important enough to the student. In the above case, the male student likes having a clear head and to be able to effectively move through his day thus the reason he likes using the planner.

Another student sees a planner not only as helpful, but as essential for his future success: "I think that keeping a calendar is going to be essential for my success in the future. Taking this course and being assigned the calendar assignment really opened my eyes to how much more organized I could be." Again, the benefits of having his future plans come to maturation are so important to this student that the effort of using the planner is worth it to him.

The male students who talked about using the planners not only found the overall calendar useful, but many of them also talked about making a list of the next actions they

should take:

The academic planner is one of the most useful tools that I could implement in my everyday activities. It provides the opportunity to see all activities and due dates at a glance. It also allows me to create a plan or next-actions list based on what needs to be done first.

Through these student's reflections, we discover that the action plans devised by the course creators are working in that the tools are effectively helping students process their daily, weekly, and monthly activities. With many students, like the one below, we find these planning exercises become part of their personal mastery because not only did this student find the next action list helpful, but he describes it as the best tool for success he has found:

This class introduced me to the next action list. This, I believe, will be the best tool I can use in order for me to achieve success. The next action list is simply amazing as it allows and enables me to focus on the next important due assignment and once done, move right to the next assignment due. This will allow me to always keep on top of the material and never fall behind in class.

Understanding how one spends his time and schedules his tasks is another component of personal mastery. In the cases above, students learned the art of setting priorities, and they learned that instant gratification is not always in their best interest. Discovering that it sometimes takes extra time and effort to accomplish a task is another aspect of a well-rounded, successful person and once learned increases self-efficacy beliefs.

**Prioritization and delayed gratification.** The final subtheme of time

management found involves prioritization and delayed gratification. Students talked about prioritizing the important things in general, and specifically in reference to two exercises. One exercise was a guest speaker who talked about his distaste for lima beans as a child but also the necessity to eat them. The speaker told the students that he learned to eat his lima beans first to get it over with, and that he later grew to enjoy them.

The other specific exercise students referred to was the marshmallow experiment. Students watched a video of a speaker who told about a study on delayed gratification. During the study, researchers placed children alone in a room and gave them a marshmallow. The children were told if they could wait to eat the marshmallow until the researcher returned they would be given an additional marshmallow, but if they failed to do so they would only get one.

Students connected to these vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977) and learned to apply them to their current situations.

*Female.* Several of the female students talked about prioritizing the important things in a general sense. Some equated prioritization to simply not procrastinating. One student put the problem very simply: "Procrastination is what is hurting my grade." Another student applied the concept of prioritization on a broad basis, and talked about achieving her goals: "I want to be able to use my time effectively and be more productive. In this class I learned that if I want to achieve a goal I must first make time for the things that really matter. Everything else can wait."

Another female student wrote about the effectiveness of a handout the class had been given that included techniques to help students manage procrastination, and seemed appreciative that the handout itself got right to the point:

A particular handout stood out to me, 'A Short List of Techniques for Managing Procrastination.' I believe the conciseness of that handout made it highly effective; no one wants to read a five paragraph essay on how not to procrastinate...What I liked most about the handout was that it gave specific, manageable steps to take; some of the instructions were not steps, but helpful recommendations.

Some students realize the lessons they have learned about prioritization should include time for leisure activities as well. One student put it simply: "After taking this course it made me realize that I need to set my life in sections understanding the time for work and the time for play." Another student talked about making use of her new skills in the coming semesters as well:

Another part of time management was prioritizing my tasks. This semester I wrote out a to-do list every day to prioritize assignments and study time, as well as work. I found this to be very effective and I am excited to see how my learned time management skills will help me next semester.

Many students wrote about their prioritizations in less general terms. Several students were impacted by the lima bean lecture, and applied what they learned from the guest speaker. One student used the simple analogy as a way to get difficult things out of the way first: "When it is time for a big assignment that I do not feel like doing or it is hard [for] me, I will use the lima bean story to remember that I can get rid of the things that bother me first and move on."

What the above six female students recognized were the negative associations which come from procrastinating. The stories provided by the guest speakers informed

these young women that everyone deals with procrastination in some form and for many people it is easier to just get the least-favorite activity done or ‘eat the lima beans’ and reap the benefits. For most of the students in this study, the benefits included improved grades, more time for fun, less stress, and other rewards which altered their physiological state in a positive way. For other students, like the female student below, negative personal associations with procrastination had to surface before the rewards of accomplishing a task could become part of her functional being.

For example, this female student was able to identify the things she was avoiding, and realized that one of her problems was fear of failure. In the end, she understood that getting the difficult things done first can make everything else seem simple:

The last lesson that I felt had an immense impact on me was the one that we had to identify our ‘academic lima beans.’ This exercise made me face the final or class that I was avoiding. I had to come to terms that I cannot just avoid my most difficult subject just because I was fearful of not doing well, when in reality if I avoid it and do not do the work at all then I might not pass. I needed to learn to get rid of the most difficult things first to make everything else seem much easier.

In addition to a fear of failure, some students used the lima bean analogy to help manage stress. One student stated it this way: I’m also going to start off my day by eating my lima beans first...this helps me...to neither stress out nor feel overwhelmed.” In essence, the students who experienced harmful physiological states of stress and the negative emotional arousals and anxieties (Bandura, 1977) which accompany procrastination and unmet goals replaced those feelings with actions which are directly correlated to new positive emotions and empowerment.

As mentioned above, the other specific exercise students found informative was the marshmallow experiment related to delayed gratification. Several students stated they learned the difference between delayed and instant gratification in words very similar to this student who wrote: “I am constantly working on my ‘marshmallows’ because I know that at the end it will be worth it.”

One student related the marshmallow test specifically to her school work, but wrote that the material impacted her and she was able to better relate to it because of her new understandings as to how delayed gratification is often rewarding:

One of the many components of the class which helped me out a lot was the ‘Delayed vs. Instant Gratification.’ I feel this topic impacted me the most because I was able to relate to it and once going further in depth about working hard and being dedicated to my studies, I knew instantly that even though the material in classes may be hard I do have to be dedicated because hard work does pay off.

This female student may have provided the best example of the countless physiological rewards when one acknowledges and improves upon their personal time-management shortcomings. By combining the activity of delaying instant gratification while at the same time working on unappealing tasks that were hard, this student realized completed assignments pay off, in terms of improved grades and satisfaction.

Clearly the participating female students used the lessons provided in their courses to work on their learning and time-management styles and gained insights which shaped their actions.

**Male.** Some male students reported reprioritizing their school work in more effective ways. After one of the analyzing exercises, one male student realized that he

was not spending enough time studying and subsequently more than tripled the time he spent on his homework:

I manage my time consumption using the same analysis sheet provided for this assignment. I make sure that's prioritizing around school rather than work or leisure time, with more than enough time for my assignments. Rather than 9 total hours spent on homework [per week] I now devote about 35 hours per week...As a result I have seen a huge jump in my grades.

Upon assessing how much time he was wasting, the above student prioritized and more importantly, he saw his grades improve. While this one male student realized he needed to increase his work time, another male student realized he needed to lessen his play time. "One thing I will definitely do differently is not being active in my fraternity until I feel comfortable with my study habits and ability to succeed." Another male student found the delayed gratification lesson to be the most important lesson he learned: "The last thing that...really impacted my thought process was the delayed gratification topic...the delayed gratification and marshmallow example are possibly the most important thing I got out of this course.

While the above three male students realized that time management and delayed gratification helped them find the importance of schoolwork over spending leisure time with friends, and fraternities, the following two students were impacted by the lima bean lesson.

One student described the lesson as "memorable" and enjoyed the speaker's personal touch in the story. That student wrote:

I thought the Lima Beans assessment was fair. The guest you brought in really

built up and related his personal experience well. He was also very calm in his speech and engaging, allowing us to open up our minds to our own Lima Beans. We all have some that we don't want to get to in our lives. Taking those lima beans may lead us to what we need, one way or another. It was a simple presentation, but a very memorable one.

When encouraging students to become more motivated and to develop their time management skills, sometimes the simplest lessons are the most impactful. For example, the importance of the lima bean story not only affected the below student's studies but changed him for the rest of his life as well, "One of the most important lessons I learned recently is the metaphor regarding eating the vegetables first to get it over with. I learned that it not only applies to school work but really for real life situations." When one contemplates the young age of most university students and the impact these success course lessons are having on their academics, one can't help but imagine the positive influences these life lessons will have on these students' future lives and careers.

### **Victim and Creator Mentalities**

One of the lessons in the textbook used for the class discussed the differences between victim and creator mentalities as a tool to help the students accept personal responsibility. Those who adopt a victim mentality tend to blame others, complain, make excuses, and repeat self-defeating behaviors. While those who adopt a creator mentality seek solutions, take actions, and try new things. The lessons further presented examples of victims focusing on their weaknesses and creators focusing on how to improve (Downing, 2011).

Using the guided class lessons, two students discovered where they were making

mistakes and where they could make improvements. "It took [me a] little while to understand my mistakes so I need to be really careful with my choices." It's a personal responsibility to identify one's mistakes and to decide not to be a victim. "[People with victim] mentality waste energy and [they] remain stuck while creators improve their outcomes and experiences".

As shown in studies conducted by Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey (2009), Heyman (2010), Seirup & Tirota (2010), and Wickersham & McElhany (2010), interventions and success courses assist students in increasing their achievements and academic effectiveness, as well as help them understand how it is their responsibility to set and obtain goals.

**Responsibility.** As surmised by Schwinger, Steinmayr, and Spinath (2009), students' efforts are directly linked to improved GPAs and overall performances. Therefore, academic leaders must find ways to motivate students towards becoming responsible learners. Success courses provide students with opportunities and activities which gradually increase their levels of work effort and responsibilities and ultimately their success.

One female student discovered that by refining her choices and keeping herself accountable, she was taking responsibility for her future. "I believe every day that the outcome of my day depends on me and my choices. Taking self-responsibility is the key to my success." The male student quoted below gained an even bigger insight than the female student above because he was able to compare his present circumstances to his past situations.

Throughout this course I really learned how to think like a creator and not a victim...accepting personal responsibility was something I always had a struggle with...For example sometimes I would do badly in a class and I would blame the professor, not myself...through this course I started to identify the different types of behaviors between a creator and a victim. I started to see myself only as a creator...I started taking responsibility for myself...Being a creator and accepting responsibility for myself was something I think helped me the most.

Undoubtedly, the above student experienced what Downing (2011) would refer to as the shedding of repeated self-defeating behaviors. Overtime, those students who continue to battle against being a victim and instead view themselves as the creators of their own destinies will feel empowered to take on more responsibility. As stated by one female student, "I now tend to evaluate my situations thoroughly before over-reacting. If I know I'm responsible or at fault for anything, even though it's hard I take full responsibility for it." With continued successes, students will perpetuate a new cycle of actively creating their futures and blaming others less for their failures. "I want to be a better person and I think the only way to work on that is by analyzing the situation and accepting [responsibility]," wrote another female student.

This interpersonal growth is grounded more in actively making changes rather than listening to other people's success stories or living vicariously through another as hypothesized by Bandura (1977). "I [learned] that I shouldn't blame others when I [make a] mistake or get a bad grade. I have to find [the] problem from myself instead of others." As predicted, a student's personal mastery, like this male student, is directly correlated to their performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1997). Ultimately, the

above-quoted students have clearly experienced repeated successes thus will more than likely to continue down a path where they will take personal responsibility for their actions, blame others less often when they fail, and have higher expectations for future successes because they no longer think or feel like a victim.

**Mindset and language.** The victim and creator assignment helped students to change the language they used as well as their mindset. James and Graham's (2010) study found that the second most common reason students failed to accomplish and succeed with their academic tasks is because they have a lack of motivation. The following female student decided to have a different mindset when she wrote, "I am staying in the creator mindset and not making excuses". The following male student exhibits an extrinsic motivation described in Domene, Socholotiuk, and Woitowicz's (2011) study when he realized he had a personal choice of becoming a victim to or creator of his circumstances. "As I began to read the difference [between victim and creator mindsets] I discovered I more often than not went to the victim mindset of blaming others for problems I could have avoided if I tried. Now I take more creator thoughts into consideration whenever a problem comes up, I don't let the problem come without a solution." Over time, as these two students attain positive benefits whether they are in the form of improved grades, attitudes, or confidences, they will lean towards being performance-approach goal setters as opposed to performance-avoidance people (Hsieh and Guerra, 2007).

One strategy instructors of success courses can apply to their curriculum are exercises which enhance a student's performances both inside and outside the classroom (Sansone, Smith, Thoman, and MacNamara, 2012). For the following two female

students, the comparison of a victim versus creator mindset had a profound psychological impact which motivated them to apply their new found skills to all areas of their lives.

One of the biggest lessons...was...about the victim and creator mindsets. A person that has the mindset of a victim believes that things happen to them and that these things are out of their control. However, a creator mindset believes they are the reason that everything that has happened in their life has happened because of the choices that they have made; creators take responsibility, thus taking action and create what they want for their futures...I would rather be the one making the decisions.

These are new cognitive lessons for these students per Jessup-Anger (2011) whose study found students had a greater appreciation for the importance self-efficacy and confidence when they stopped making excuses and acquired different kinds of mindsets.

A bad habit I have had...is maintaining a victim mindset. I always blame others for my mistakes. I expect for my loved ones to fix my problems and get upset when they can't help me. I always made excuses for my difficulties. When I learned about this concept while writing my journal for this class I realized that I needed to change this about myself. Having a victim mindset makes my life more difficult and drama filled. Since then I...strive to uphold creator language. I now tend to evaluate my situations thoroughly before over-reacting. If I know I'm responsible...I take full responsibility.

The most critical part of the victim versus creator lesson and the subsequent change in mindsets learned by the two female students (quoted above) and the male

student (quoted below) is the intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

One [helpful concept] was the concept of a victim and creator...The idea of a victim being whiny and blaming others while not changing really got me to look at myself. How the victim partied or did everything else and left their important tasks at the end and then they blame other for it really made me see who I was, and when I saw that I didn't want to be that person...Now seeing the creator part made me say, 'Wow, I want to be that person.'

These three and other students learned that when they take responsibility for their actions, they build their intrinsic person also known as their internal character. However, when they blame others, or view the extrinsic environment as being the cause of their problems, they perpetuate a victim mentality and miss opportunities to strengthen and build up their character.

The following female student, determined not to burden others (a strong characteristic of integrity) with her responsibilities, has become aware of how futile and draining the blame game can be when one plays the victim.

The concept of victim mindset was very important to me because I have played the role of a victim my whole life. I used to complain, blame, make excuses, and have little energy to solve my problems. In turn, since learning about this term I now use different techniques and methods like evaluating my obstacles before reacting and taking responsibility for my actions. Being a victim was not only draining for myself but also for my loved ones. Instead I strive to use creator language and I now accept accountability for my problems because playing the victim does not make my problems go away.

As we see with the above students, their altered mindsets have motivated them to not be victims to their circumstances. “From using creator language, it has helped me avoid blaming and placating but rather be more confident in what I do and how I handle life,” wrote one female student. This change of language in how all of these students address themselves as creators perpetuates more of the same language. When a student calls him or herself a creator and not a victim, that student automatically has more self-control and is more resourceful (Kenney and Reed, 2009).

The best aspects of success courses are the activities and new information they provide, specifically about the techniques used by and characteristics of creators. Students may quickly and actively apply the techniques learned, or they may passively consider what it means to be a victim or a creator. These two female students actively applied the concepts: “A **creator** will find ways to do what she **intends to do**, even if it will take a great deal of effort...I will be a creator of my own physical fitness instead of a victim of the distance to the gym. In this way I will not allow circumstances beyond my control to decide my physical health” and “I will **refuse to be the victim** any longer.” Alternatively, the following male student wrote more passively, “[The difference] between victims and creators is that victims are the people who keep doing what they’ve been doing even when it doesn’t work; but creators are the people who change their beliefs and behaviors to create the best result they can.” The goal of success course educators should be to relay the message that creators accomplish more personal and professional goals and have characteristics including inner strength thus they will be preparing their students to be successful learners as well as quality citizens.

## **Environmental Factors**

A number of environmental factors shape a student's academic self-efficacy beliefs including meeting with professors outside of the class, applying new philosophies (lima bean model), and being exposed to vicarious experiences (seeing or hearing about other's successful activities). One student appreciated learning vicariously through her instructor's stories. "If I was the professor in class I would do exactly the same thing. I would interact with the students, use personal stories of victory, and use relatable material." Although personal mastery experiences are considered more effective (Bandura, et al., 1996), students are generally exposed to more vicarious experiences. If verbal persuasions are provided often and students are given opportunities to test their skills, their confidences are built up and perhaps mastery of skills can be developed as well. Therefore, instructors are encouraged to share their personal success stories and to provide students with steps and assignments that will help them create their own success stories. .

### **Meeting with a professor outside of class**

Students were assigned to meet with a professor outside of the success course; this is supported by Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens (2013) who found that other people influence students' self-efficacy, and Pascarella & Terenzin (2005) who stated that student-faculty interaction encouraged students to persist. "I thought that visiting my advisor twice every semester [would] not make a difference, but it did." "Meeting with my Anatomy teacher really helped because of her suggestion to draw pictures and to only read the text for 15 minutes at a time. This has made anatomy a lot easier." While Bandura, et al. (1996) reported students' academic achievements and self-efficacy

improved when their parents had positive self-images, the external influences that the success course faculty members had on the students in this are clearly positive.

For the following student, a visit to the professor's office changed how she viewed herself and caused her to associate more deeply with her work.

Another thing that I would definitely want to continue for my academic progress is visiting professors' office hours. My professor got to know me on a first name basis and now I feel that when she sees or reads my work she can really tell I put my all into it because she knows me more than just seeing me in class...It has made me feel more confident asking for help.

The contributing factor for this student is the physiological state or the positive emotional arousal that derived from her feeling like she made a connection with her professor. Additionally, as she realizes that the professor knows her by name and work, this student may produce better quality of work.

While Bandura, et al. (1996) observed people having heightened levels of anxiety based on their past failures, many of the emotional arousals the students in this study experienced were based on participating in unknown situations.

If it wasn't for the assignment of having to talk to one of our professors, I alone would not have gone into my professor's office hours to check how I was doing in the class. It helped me because not only did I make myself look like I actually cared about my grade in the class to my professor, but it also took away the stress of wondering how well...I was doing in class...This assignment helped me feel and look responsible and I think if I maintain that with my future professors they will assist me...without hesitation. It helped me grow as a student because it

made me realize that professors are not as scary as they seem in front of the class and if I am having trouble in class I should not just sit back and watch myself fail.

What the above female student gained was a personal mastery experience of speaking with an authority figure in an external environment, in this case the instructor's office after class hours. The next two female students demonstrate their personal mastery of having dialogues with their professors. "One area...I feel I changed the most is that I started using the professors' visiting office hours...Once going personally and talking to my professors I learned that it's better to ask questions personally so...my questions would be answered clearly." "It has become easier to talk to my teachers. All it takes is one step, and having an assignment to speak with my teacher outside of the classroom created a comfort zone, and I know that I can talk to any teacher that I need to." The success course assignment of meeting with a professor outside the classroom took many students out of their comfort zone. The natural behavior to avoid such situations was suppressed because it was a course requirement. However, once students gained confidence and mastered the art of communicating with their instructors, many found it to be helpful and stimulating as it enhanced their effectiveness in some cases.

[I was afraid to] meet my professors because I found most of them intimidating and I thought they wouldn't care about my grade. [It] turns out a lot of them like the idea that I was assigned to meet my professors...After meeting with the professors I felt a lot more comfortable in class and asking questions so in case I needed to meet with them again I wouldn't be afraid to ask those questions I needed.

Gaining more insight into what the instructor wanted was helpful for some

students. For the following female student:

The second thing that helped me drastically was keeping up with my professors. This is my fifth year at [University] and not once have I ever met up with a professor of mine during office hours and discussed my performance in class. This helped me stay on top and become more focused on my assignments and exams. I knew that if I was doing badly in the class then I would be ashamed to meet up with my professor. My goal was to do well, that way I wouldn't look dumb and confused as to why I am doing badly in the class.

According to Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001), being optimistic in one's ability to perform is directly connected to academic self-efficacy. Therefore it is critical for students to avoid looking bad which can be helped or hindered by the availability of instructors and their openness to assist and guide their students. "I learned...that teachers are here to help, not to make us feel stupid. I now will go to office hours and make better use of the LRC and tutoring." "Having my professors as motivators has to be the best and most important lessons I had." The above student statements show how effective instructor guidance and modeling can be towards shaping students' behaviors.

Conversely, for the students who did not follow the assignment to visit their instructors at their offices, opportunities to gain insight about their instructor's expectations was lost. "One thing I do need to work on is going to office hours for all my professors. I only went to one professor this year and I believe it will help me if I go to all my professors' office hours." "There were times that I was very confused and I was too afraid to ask for help because I felt that I should have known the answer. If I would have asked questions and visited office hours I believe that I would not have had a

difficult time understanding some of my assignments." For these two female students, who we could label as being passive learners, teaching approaches which require mandatory one-on-one meetings may help them reach a deeper level of self-efficacy and learning. Because although Jessup-Anger (2011) could not link student success to mandatory or voluntary actions, the study did conclude that instructors are a key component to students' motivation and subsequent success. "I really like the way the professor shows that he cares about his students... a professor that takes time to e-mail their students when they have missed more than one class; that really shows that the professor cares about their students." This example sent a clear message to this female student about the importance of attending mandatory classes. Thus when she missed more than one class, the professor made it clear what the course expectations were and subsequently raised the need of the student to meet those expectations.

In the beginning, some students may feel pressure to meet an instructor's expectations. For example, one male student adhered to the "meet the instructor" assignment, but then he felt exposed, if you will, in the classroom.

Showing the professor you're serious about your grade really puts you in that mindset. I felt a pressure to be in class after approaching the professor for checkups. I felt as if they would not take me seriously if I went in for the checkups but did not do well in class, it was pressure but [not] too much for me not to be able to handle, more as motivation.

While some pressures may overwhelm a student to a point where they do not or cannot produce, Jessup-Anger's (2011) study leans towards making students appreciate the importance of developing their skills, which in this case were communicative

competencies. “The assignments of the professor check-in were great. It was a good way to break the barrier of approaching a professor during office hours to discuss on how I can raise up the grade that I currently [have] and improve on the future exams.” For this male student, the success course task of meeting the professor motivated him to develop his cognitive skills on a deeper level.

### **External activities**

Students were also required to take part in activities outside of the course. This assignment is supported by Hutchison-Green, Follman, and Bodner’s (2008) study of engineering students found that some students formed their self-efficacy perceptions by comparing themselves to their peers. For some of the students in this study, getting involved with external activities, those beyond the classroom, and with other students increased their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The outside activities were also great because I was able to explore around the school and get involved with school activities instead of just staying home and playing games. One thing that stuck is the fact that I was able to find a club that had the same common interest as me and create friendships that depend on encouraging and building each other up.

Discussions about sports, grades, test taking, favorite professors, and assignments broaden a student’s perceived academic self-efficacy particularly if conversations revolve around performance comparisons. For those students who feel below par with their peers, external assistance can be very helpful.

**Writing and tutoring centers.** As summarized in Chapter 2, there are many reasons students struggle academically, have difficulty with coursework, and have low

motivation levels. Additionally, there are many approaches towards assisting students including voluntary and mandatory success courses, prevention programs, as well as projects and assignments. For the following six students in this study, the University's writing and tutoring centers were very helpful. One student wrote the following:

The outside activities helped me as well because I was able to meet different people. I was able to explore the resources [the school has]. The writing center helped me to improve my writing; I would get a better grade when someone else would revise my paper...I am so happy the school has this kind of service.

while one male student wrote,

By doing the first outside activity, I learned about a resource that I didn't even know was available on campus which helps you with papers. This is a great way to have someone read, proofread, and give you advice on an essay you may have due which can potentially help you get a better grade as well.

While the debate as to whether interventions should be mandatory or voluntary, it's clear that many students benefit from outside-the-classroom assistance.

When programs are not mandatory and require an active pursuit on the part of the student, the choices the student makes will more than likely be specific to what they believe are their needs. For one student, it was a need for the health center, "I have learned to take advantage of things on campus that can benefit me such as the writing lab or the health center." While another student needed the writing center and more campus offerings,

I have started using the many other resources...available on campus such as the writing labs, counseling centers, and the [University] library. Before I really

wouldn't use the writing labs, but...I went to one and I had received as much help as I could so I wouldn't be stressing towards the final day.

This type of academic self-efficacy and stressed commitment to succeed in school are the influences found in Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) study about optimism.

Additionally, while Chemers, Hu, and Garcia's (2001) contention that mandatory attendance increases the number of students affected could not be supported by this study, students reported they were motivated to seek help. One male student wrote

For this class, we had to complete 2 outside activities which included going to a place on campus that we didn't really know a lot about. Going to the tutoring center was a great thing to do because I realized that I could get help from other students for free. Now that I know this information, I will definitely be taking advantage of that amazing resource

As a female student stated, "I am going to use the math tutoring center and the chemistry tutoring center often. Also, thanks to this class I have found out there is a biology tutoring center [on campus]." Both students stated they went to unknown centers and discovered resources they hadn't known about, so when researchers state that voluntary programs have low attendance and thus low success rates, we must remember the students that are assisted.

### **Positive Change in Academic Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

#### **Discovering I'm not the only one**

Perhaps one of the most profound findings within the students' statements was the realization that they were not the only students struggling to succeed academically and build up their self-efficacy beliefs. One female student wrote

An area I have changed is I seek for help, I'm still working on it but my fear of going to tutoring has gone away. I used to think people would think I'm dumb for asking [for] extra help, and then I notice[d] I'm not the only one struggling in the classes and it's practically normal going to tutoring,

Another female student stated, "I would realize that I wasn't the only one feeling the same way or doing the same things. I felt I wasn't alone and that there was hope to get me back on the right track." As stated in Chapter 1, studies show that interventions like success courses help students increase their academic success rates (Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey, 2009; Heyman, 2010; Seirup & Tirota, 2010; Wickersham & McElhany, 2010). However, what researchers don't fully know is what students feel will help them succeed.

For many of the students in this study, the answer seems to sway towards not feeling like they are the only one in need of help. This female student wrote, "sometimes, actually quite often, I felt as if the lessons were structured around my behaviors until the rest of the class voiced the same concerns and were feeling the same way!" While another student wrote "I have seen that I am not the only one in this situation about raising my GPA." Numerous students, including this male student, were grateful to learn that they were not alone. He wrote,

Thankfully, all of us taking the class could relate to the struggle. Everyone had, at some point, struggled academically, and we all felt each other's mental pulse...No one was really better than another person here. We were all starting from point zero. This cleared the air for us to learn in a supportive fashion.

As did another female student, who wrote "I came to the realization that I am not

the only college student that is struggling with their classes and that solutions to problems are always present we just have to find them". The drive to find answers is a deeper cognitive processing and leads to an improved self-efficacy image.

Positive changes were found throughout this study's student body as classmates learned more about each other and how they were overcoming adversities. "I have noticed that other students have dealt with adversity in the past and have looked for solutions to improve their academic situations," wrote one male student. Which also helped this female student who wrote, "Hearing my peers...knowing they also struggle to get things done...assured me that I am not the only one." While vicarious experiences or verbal persuasions as explained by Bandura (1977) are not as effective in shaping students' self-efficacy as personal mastery, it is apparent that hearing about others' abilities to overcome adversities lends a type of sustenance for many students.

### **Belief in self**

As predicted by Diseth (2011), deeper learning strategies and personal confidences are directly correlated to self-efficacy. "I have to believe in myself and I learned that I have to start taking action instead of being home all day and doing nothing." Thus the goals of academic success course instructors and designers should be to increase opportunities for students to challenge their abilities by accomplishing small and large tasks as described by the following female student.

Another lesson I learned was how to increase my academic self-confidence. With this lesson, I learned to not give up at something...even if I fall and fail I still have to keep trying and I will succeed. I learned to be confident when entering a class...I know that for every class next semester I will walk into all my classes

with my head held high with confidence and with excitement of what new challenges will be coming my way...I learned to believe in myself and that I will and I can succeed at anything I set my mind to. Also became aware that it is best to take small steps in order to succeed...I feel I have raised my academic self-confidence.

Diseth's (2011) study also found patterns of higher academic self-efficacy in students who were high-achievers as seen in the following female student's statement:

As I wrote down everything I had learned in this class, I noticed that I have positively changed in three important areas: discovering self-motivation, believing in myself, and gaining self-awareness...by gaining self-awareness and discovering self-motivation, I was able to once more believe in myself...I once more began to believe in my great potential, strength to overcome obstacles, and once more recognized my self-worth.

While this study was unable to compare student success amongst the participants, it was able to collect data similar to Jessup-Anger's (2011) study. For example, in the Jessup-Anger (2011) study, students showed signs, at the beginning of the semester, of having motivational barriers that they needed to overcome. Those obstacles are similar to the ones described by the following female student:

This class helped me emotionally deal with school and I think it raised my self-confidence in my schoolwork. This semester was my best semester going into my finals with A's and B's and I think it was because I was more focused and kept on track. I had greater self-confidence this semester and I think it was from taking the small quizzes in class. In class we learned how to push away bad attitudes

and influences around you. I think that helped me a lot because I started to realize that having a positive attitude and surrounding myself with positive and determined people has such a great outcome. This class really helped me to stay focused and to believe in myself and the work I can do is up to me.

Believing one can overcome obstacles and then the act of actually overcoming those obstacles is what builds confidence in students.

### **Building confidence**

As found in Jessup-Anger's (2011) second theme, students who made personal connections to the subject and activities had enhanced or greater motivation to learn. "My Bill of Rights was not only an exercise that I enjoyed but it helped and guided me on what I really want in life and on being more confident." "I learned that I can raise my academic confidence by finishing all my assignments and that way I won't have the pressure of failing my courses and my academic confidence can always be high." For these two female participants, a clarity or new cognitive connection was made which increased their confidences making them feel they could accomplish more academically and beyond as stated by their male classmate who wrote,

I feel beyond more confident in my studies now that I have a set plan of what to do and what to avoid. I realize I really do have the ability to achieve in school as long as I put my mind to it and carefully plan out what I strive to do...I'm without a doubt leaving this class a better student.

As small accomplishments build into larger objects and accomplishments, students become deeply grounded in their pedagogical strategies, whether they know it or not.

For the students in the Jessup-Anger (2011) study as well as the participants in this research, consistent goal attainment proves to be a confidence builder. One male participant wrote, “My affirmations have helped me out very much this semester. I tell myself that I am capable of doing all my work and it makes me feel more confident and I have a better time doing my work.” While another male student described the effect long-term goal setting had on him.

One activity that had really affected me was setting the short, medium and long term goals. Setting personal goals over a certain period of times have really helped my self-esteem because looking forward to some kind of reward can be pretty relieving.

Finally, a third male student’s description of how his high personal confidences changed his outlook shows how success course steps can send a student down a path of academic and personal victory.

I now have the confidence to catch up with my class since I know I am the best student on this campus. It is time to show what I can do and prove this affirmation. Not for others, but for myself, and to move forward towards my goals.

The personal changes that emerged within the participants of this study can further be seen in the following three students’ testimonies. “I know I have had great personal change this semester...Instead of avoiding things because they appear to be difficult, I have learned to break work apart and manage my time to get the work finished.” “I feel so grateful to have been a part of this class...It allowed for self-reflection, and it brought back a sense of purpose to my life as a student.” "What I have

gained in this class is not another education lesson but rather a life changing experience." As hypothesized by Stovall's (2000) article, those community college administrators who create and implement quality success courses will facilitate an environment which integrates an academic and social community focused on building positive mental attitudes in its students as seen above.

### **Guilt, shame, failure, negative self-thoughts**

Using Bandura's (1977) outline, we confirmed in this study that when students are placed on academic probation they experience negative emotions including feelings of guilt, shame, failure, and of being stupid. "I am grateful for having been able to take this class because it has helped me for the better and I am no longer ashamed of my GPA," wrote one female student. If left unchecked, these feelings can elicit emotional negative arousals for periods of time beyond the initial probation as confirmed with another female participant who expressed feeling "really guilty when last semester I [was placed on] academic probation. [However] after [taking the class] I learned a lot of study skills but most important is I [became] more and more confident." Through success intervention programs, one male student avoided long-term negative self-perceptions.

Honestly one of the most important things I learned in this class was how to be more confident about myself. I lost any ounce of confidence that I had in myself when I saw my fall semester grades. I was so depressed when I found out that I was put on academic probation... This class has allowed me to get back on track.

These and other student testimonies confirm how critical instructor and program interventions are for nurturing a student towards success rather than leaving them feeling like depressed failures.

Educators need to remember the sources which increase students' self-efficacy including performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. By continuing to build programs and to have activities which strengthen these areas, educators can hope to guide students toward personal mastery and high levels of self-efficacy. "Before [the program], I thought I was stupid, useless, [will] not graduate...I can only have a job...I will not [succeed] no matter what...Now, I am smart, I pass hard courses with a B and A...I am graduating" wrote one excited and confident female participant, while her male colleague below described how he feels confidence enough to change his major:

The biggest thing I learned...is definitely that I am not stupid. I can remember something [from a lecture] earlier this semester about how sometimes when we grow up we were told something that is not true like we're stupid, and we believe it and we take it with us throughout life. That is exactly how I felt and it definitely has affected me during college years...Realizing that I am qualified and that I am smart made me decide to change my major to something that I have always been interested in.

Because the above male student feels he has successfully mastered a particular area which he formerly struggled with, his expectations of future success are high. This is the level educators want their students to be at, a high level of personal mastery, either derived from accomplishments, verbal encouragement, or activities that alter their physiological state for the better. For one female student, the success course gave her back her confidence:

Academic confidence has been something I lack of ever since I was put on academic probation, but with the help of this class I can honestly say my confidence got a boost. I was always putting myself down because of my grades and the fact that I was on probation, but...with time things began to change. I began to identify certain things I was good at. I started believing in myself once again.

With a renewed confidence based on her personal mastery, the above student will continue to perpetuate a cycle of confidence and mastery, followed by more confidence and more mastery. Additionally, those negative emotions that accompany failure will be replaced as it was for the following two female students who changed their negative thinking.

This semester I have also learned to forgive myself [for] the judgments and hurtful things I said to myself. I have accepted the fact that I am imperfect...and that people make mistakes. I have let go of anger and resentments and have left the negative energy behind.

“My academic confidence is pretty solid, as I brush off the negative self-talk and show up to class anyway.” Accordingly, as implied by Bandura (1977) and further shown by the above statements, negative effects or failures lower a student’s efficacy expectations and repeated successes changes a student’s behavior and thoughts in a positive direction.

### **Pride**

Not surprisingly, those students who replaced negative thoughts with actions and personal mastery of academic objectives began to feel proud that they were smart and

capable.

I also have changed the way I studied before a test...For my linguistics test that I was the most worried about, I studied a week prior and I ended up getting a B on my test. It made me proud of myself that I took the time and had the self-discipline to study and take control of the grade I was going to get on my test

“This semester, I have come to realize that I am a smart person and can do whatever I set my mind to.” Both female and male students, respectfully, above altered their behaviors and mindsets based on their positive accomplishments. Importantly, these types of behavioral changes can affect other areas and activities for students. For example, the below female student is using her new emotional outlook when planning her future.

I am proud of myself, that is the most important thing. I am happy that I will be pulling straight A's this semester, I have worked so hard. I will continue to learn, and use what I have learned in this course, to help me relieve stress and become a better student...I need to put school first, so that one day I can become very successful, and [give] back to my family for all they have done for me.

For Bandura (1997), “the substantial benefits of successful performance are typically achieved in less time than is required to extinguish arousal to symbolic representations of threats” (p. 196). For the student below, “There is nothing better than feeling relief, and feeling happy about myself when I see the results of all the hard work that I have been doing.” Reducing the anxiety students have about their failures and lack of confidence is the duty of the instructor. Those instructors who design or facilitate any academic plan including success courses have resources available to them. These

resources can help build up the student through exercises and assignments as well as expand the instructor’s cognitive platform so that he or she is more effective at providing their students, those who are struggling and those who are not, with the guidance they need because as stated above, it is their responsibility to do so.

**Active versus Passive Voice**

Student responses to the Action Plan assignment had either active or passive characteristics in them. Interestingly, there appears to be a difference in language based in part on the participant’s gender. Male students had a tendency to write in a more passive voice, whereas female students tended to use active language. In all, 3 male students and 4 female students did not answer the question according to the assignment, so those response have been eliminated. The table below shows the breakdown by gender of active and passive voice responses.

**Table 2**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Active Voice</b>	<b>Active %</b>	<b>Passive Voice</b>	<b>Passive %</b>
<b>Male</b>	21	42.9%	28	57.1%
<b>Female</b>	27	64.3%	15	35.7%
<b>Total</b>	48	52.7%	43	47.3%

The table illustrates that although about 53% of the total students used an active voice, female students were much more likely to do so. The same is true for male students relative to using a passive voice. In each instance the student groups were about 10% above or below the average.

I define the use of an active or passive voice based on specific student word choice. These female students use active language when they state that they will use a

planner in the future to help keep themselves on track, “I will start preparing for the next semester by getting my planner outlined,” “I will make a schedule in my agenda that shows the times each subject will be worked on,” “I will of course stick to using a planner to have all of my work written in and when it is due.” In each of these examples, the students use specific examples of something they will actively do.

In contrast, the following male students use passive language when discussing their future use of planners, “I need to work on improving the calendar as time goes on,” “I’m going to try my best to use a calendar from now on,” “I have been thinking of purchasing a big white eraser board monthly calendar where I can plan out what I want to do.” While each of these students identifies a need to use a planner, none of them states definitively that they will do so. Each will “try,” “needs to improve” or is “thinking [about]” taking action.

Some students wrote about using positive affirmations to keep their confidence levels high. Again the male and female students showed differences in their language. While this male student recognizes the positive results of affirmations, he does not commit to using them, instead he simply states that he wants to do so because it will probably help with his anxiety, “What I want to do is apply the ‘affirmations’ lesson to this issue because this can probably help me when it comes to subduing my anxiety.” In contrast, his female counterpart has very specific affirmations for her future self, and explicitly states that she will use them, “My positive affirmations for the future will include: ‘I am a good sister and daughter’ [and] ‘I am a good student and will do well in my graduate studies.’” It appears that the female students may have more fully embraced the concept of the creator mentality and language than the male students.

One recurring theme for the male students was the statement that they will “try” in the future. Multiple students used this same language that, while positive, does not commit to any specific course of action. “I will try my best to participate the first day of class in every class I have next semester,” “I will try to continue to take what I learned from this class with me and apply it for my academic progress,” “I have to be confident and to try harder in everything.” There is certainly a self-awareness exhibited in each of these students, but again the language, while positive, is passive.

Both male and female students wrote about basic time management practices. This female student actively lays out a specific plan, “Starting now, I will prioritize and create a list of what I need to do immediately...first...study for the final exam I have coming...Next...I will need to start assembling my resume and transcripts for my grad school application,” whereas this male student passively identifies a basic strategy, “I will try my hardest to remain focused on organization and planning for homework/quizzes. Procrastinating is also a problem of mine that I plan on fixing in the near future.” This student identifies that he needs to be organized, but doesn’t state how he plans to organize himself. More surprisingly, he plans on fixing his procrastination problem – in the future! Perhaps the most passive statement a student made is from this student, who identifies several areas in which he needs to improve,

I will make an effort to better organize myself...Regarding self-care, since I am aware of the importance of self-care and all its aspects, I will make an effort to stay true to this...I will have to go out of my way for a few days even and get my daily diet figured out...I will strive to be assertive.

The student realizes his need for assertiveness, yet doesn’t make an assertive

statement about what he will do in the future – he will make an effort, he will try, and he will strive to, but he does not commit to an action.

While there is a clear difference in the language students used to describe their future action plan, what is unknown is what happened to the students relative to their academic careers. What is clear, however, is that the female students enrolled in these courses stated their future plans for continued improvement and success much more definitively and precisely.

### **Summary**

For this grounded theory case study, I examined document data which consisted of course syllabi and announcements, as well as assignments completed by students who participated in a for-credit academic between the fall semester 2012 and the spring semester 2014 at a comprehensive public four-year regional university. In total there were between 121 and 136 students' assignments examined, most of whom were on academic probation. The assignments were part of academic success courses intended to increase academic confidences and to help students raise their GPAs.

Assignments fell into three categories, a final project asking students to identify components of the course they found helpful, a reflective journal, and a final action plan. The assignments were de-identified, but separated by gender, scanned into pdf documents, and sent to me via email. I examined the assignments to identify the factors of an academic success course that students found led to increased academic self-efficacy beliefs. I identified both interpersonal and environmental factors (Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens, 2013), that influenced student academic self-efficacy beliefs.

The interpersonal factors identified included time management practices and

victim versus creator language. Time management concepts included a time waster journal activity, the use of academic planners, and prioritization and delayed gratification concepts. The environmental factors found to be effective included the student writing a letter to or visiting a professor outside of class time and finding an activity or service on campus to take part in or use.

Students exhibited a positive change in academic self-efficacy beliefs through personal mastery as well as vicarious experiences and exhibited changes in their physiological state, all in line with Bandura's (1977) writings and were influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Positive change was exhibited in students' statements of realization that they were not the only one struggling to succeed academically, increased confidence and belief in self (Diseth, 2011, Jessuup-Anger, 2011) leading to increased motivation, and a feeling of pride.

Interestingly, male and female students tended to use different language in their final plan of action. Male students were more likely to use passive language, while female students were more likely to use active language. Active language includes phrases such as "I will" whereas passive language includes phrases such as "I will try." In both instances, gender groups were about 10% more or less likely to use active or passive language than the average. Overall, male students used passive language 57.1% of the time, whereas female students used active language 64.3% of the time.

Overall, both male and female students identified the same components of the academic success course they found to be most effective in improving their academic self-efficacy beliefs, but male and female students wrote about their plans to continue their improvement or success in different ways.

## **Chapter 5 - Summary, Implications, and Recommendations**

This qualitative study used a grounded theory case study design to understand the effects of academic interventions on academic self-efficacy among students in a comprehensive public four-year regional university. I collected and reviewed historical data from a California public university and found several recurring themes linking academic interventions to student academic self-efficacy beliefs.

### **The Factors of an Academic Success Course that Affect Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs**

During data analysis, I examined student assignments to determine what factors of an academic success course affect student self-efficacy beliefs in order to help answer the first research question: What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university? Students identified both interpersonal and environmental factors (Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens, 2013) that influenced their academic self-efficacy beliefs. The internal factors included time management practices and the use of victim and creator mentalities and language. Students identified meeting with a professor outside of class and taking part in activities outside of the classroom as the environmental factors influencing their beliefs.

#### **Interpersonal Factors**

During data analysis, I found two primary themes that are interpersonal factors influencing academic self-efficacy beliefs - time management and the use of a victim versus creator language or mentality. Time management was further subdivided into three recurring subthemes: a time waster journal assignment, the use of academic

planners, and prioritization and the concept of delayed gratification.

**Time management practices.** Students frequently wrote about the use of time management practices in their journals. Specifically, students discussed a time waster journal, using an academic planner, and the concepts of prioritization and delayed gratification. Students used the time waster journal assignment to identify how they spent their time. Many were surprised to see how much of their time was wasted watching television or on the Internet, and found the journal assignment helpful because it pointed out exactly where they could change or alter their time. Students also found using a calendar or planner to be very helpful. The simple task of writing down their assignments with due dates allowed students to visually see what was coming up and to plan for those assignments accordingly. Some students not only used the planner assigned in the course, but some students also used wall calendars or the calendars on their phones.

In addition to the above time management practices, many students wrote about using the prioritizing techniques and delaying gratification. Specifically, students related to stories, or vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977) that illustrated the general concepts of prioritization and delayed gratification. One of the most important stories was delivered by a guest speaker who talked about how he disliked lima beans as a child but also the necessity to eat them. The speaker told the students that he learned to eat his lima beans first to get it over with, and that he later grew to enjoy them.

The second specific exercise students referred to was the marshmallow experiment. Students watched a video of a speaker who spoke about a study about delayed gratification. In the study, researchers placed children alone in a room and gave

them a marshmallow. The children were told if they could wait to eat the marshmallow until the researcher returned they would be given an additional marshmallow, but if they failed to do so they would only get one marshmallow.

Participants in this study were able to connect to both of these vicarious experiences and apply the concepts to their own lives and studies. In addition to the above concepts, participants also discovered the differences between victim and creator mentalities and languages.

**Victim and creator mentality.** During one of the assignments, students learned that those who adopt a victim mentality tend to blame others, complain, make excuses, and repeat self-defeating behaviors, while those who adopt a creator mentality seek solutions, take actions, and try new things (Downing, 2011). Students related this concept to their need to accept personal responsibility for their actions and their lives. Many students referenced changing their language to creator language in their future action plans.

### **Environmental Factors**

In addition to the interpersonal factors that influenced academic self-efficacy beliefs, students wrote about some environmental factors as well. Specifically, students mentioned meeting with a professor outside of class time and engaging in activities external to classes.

**Meeting with a professor.** As an assignment, students were required to meet with a professor outside of class time. Students wrote about their experiences, and many stated that they would not have gone to visit a professor had it not been an assignment. Students wrote that the assignment caused them to view their professors differently, not

as frightening or intimidating, but as helpful. Students were able to get past a fear of visiting with a professor outside of class, and to experience small victories and personal mastery (Bandura, 1977), which led to improved academic self-efficacy beliefs. Student confidence was improved through their successes that came about from their interactions with others, as supported by Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens (2013).

**External activities.** As a result of another meaningful assignment from the success course, many students discovered writing, tutoring, and math centers on campus. Students found these resources, as well as various clubs, and other students with similar interests were useful and supportive. They found help for areas in which they were struggling academically and personally, and were happy when they realized they could improve their grades by taking part in the resources available to them on campus. Finding accessible help on campus, and meeting other people with similar struggles, lowered the stress level for many of the students.

### **How an Academic Success Course can Affect Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs**

Students wrote about the positive changes that occurred in their academic self-efficacy beliefs. Several recurring themes emerged that help to answer the second research question: In what ways does an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university? Notably, students realized that they were not the only student who was struggling academically. Student participants also detailed having improved belief in self, increased confidence, and a sense of pride.

### **Positive Change in Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs**

**I'm not the only one.** One of the principal factors that lead to an increase in

students' academic self-efficacy beliefs was a realization that they are not the only student struggling academically. Two female students demonstrated this change in mindset very well: "I used to think people would think I'm dumb for asking [for] extra help, and then I notice[d] I'm not the only one struggling in the classes and it's practically normal going to tutoring," "Hearing my peers...knowing they also struggle to get things done...assured me that I am not the only one." These quotes are further evidence of the effect of vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977) on academic self-efficacy beliefs, as students realize they are just as good as their peers.

**Belief in self.** Perhaps realizing they are, in fact, just as good as their peers helped these students to believe in themselves. This belief in self proved motivating, and as students in the Jessup-Anger (2011) study overcame motivational barriers, so did the students in this study. Their improved attitude about themselves, along with the increased confidence they found, helped to motivate the students to succeed. These personal confidences are directly correlated to self-efficacy (Diseth, 2011).

**Building confidence.** Overall, students reported increased confidences in their abilities to do their work and to succeed not only in school, but also in their lives. Participants in this research, in line with the Jessup-Anger (2011) study, showed that goal attainment helps to build confidence, as stated by these students, "My affirmations have helped me out very much this semester. I tell myself that I am capable of doing all my work and it makes me feel more confident and I have a better time doing my work." "Setting personal goals over a certain period of time have really helped my self-esteem because looking forward to some kind of reward can be pretty relieving."

**Pride.** As students build their confidence and believe in themselves, they begin to feel proud. These positive changes in self-efficacy beliefs affect not only student academic success, but can also affect other areas of their lives. This student expresses the long-term benefits of his positive change and personal mastery:

I am proud of myself...I will continue to...use what I have learned in this course, to help me relieve stress and become a better student...so that one day I can become very successful, and [give] back to my family for all they have done for me.

One overarching goal of the success course was to raise academic self-efficacy beliefs. Students showed a marked increase in their self-efficacy beliefs as demonstrated through a belief in self, confidence, and an increased sense of pride.

### **Gender Differences in the Affect of an Academic Success Course on Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs**

The third driving research question explored gender differences in self-efficacy beliefs: How do the factors that affect academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university vary by gender? While students of both genders wrote about the same factors within the success course, and experienced similar increases in their academic self-efficacy beliefs, students wrote about their future plans differently. More often than male students, female students wrote in an active voice, whereas male students tended to write using more passive language. This phenomenon should be examined in future studies, as it may potentially be linked to future academic performance.

### **Active Versus Passive Voice**

Interestingly, when writing about their future action plan, male students wrote in an active voice in 42.9% of their responses, whereas female students wrote in an active voice 64.3% of the time. I define the use of an active or passive voice based on specific student word choice. For example, the phrase “I will” is considered active, whereas “I will try” is passive language.

While there is a clear difference in the language students used to describe their future action plan, what is unknown is what happened to the students relative to their academic careers. What is clear, however, is that the female students enrolled in these courses stated their future plans for continued improvement and success much more definitively and precisely.

### **Theoretical Model:**

#### **The Effects of an Academic Success Course on Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs**

Academic success courses can have a profound effect on academic self-efficacy beliefs among students at a public university who are on academic probation. As shown in this study, and supported by Korgan, Durdella, & Stevens (2013), both interpersonal and external factors influence academic self-efficacy beliefs. As further demonstrated in this study, students were able to build confidence - which directly correlates to self-efficacy (Diseth, 2011) - by attaining goals (Jessup-Anger, 2011), by creating a positive view towards him or herself (Mak, et al., 2011) through the use of creator language (Downing, 2011), and through both personal mastery and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977).

Using Bandura’s (1977) outline, I confirmed in this study that when students are placed on academic probation they experience negative emotions including feelings of

guilt, shame, failure, and of being stupid. Further, while Bandura, et al. (1996) observed people having heightened levels of anxiety based on their past failures, many of the emotional arousals the students in this study experienced were based on participating in unknown situations. In response, many studies show that interventions like success courses help students increase their academic success rates (Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey, 2009; Heyman, 2010; Seirup & Tirotta, 2010; Wickersham & McElhany, 2010). This study supports this idea, and further shows that students were able to achieve interpersonal growth, specifically belief in self, greater confidence, and pride following a realization that students are not the only one struggling, through the activities in their course.

However, Bandura (1977) hypothesized that interpersonal growth such as this is grounded more in actively making changes than in vicarious experiences. I believe the term “active” may be key, and the passive language used by many of the male respondents could be indicative of continued academic struggles in the future.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

These and other student testimonies confirm how critical instructor and program interventions are for nurturing a student towards success rather than leaving them feeling like depressed failures. Educators need to remember the sources which increase students’ self-efficacy including performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. By continuing to build programs and to sponsor activities that strengthen these areas, educators can hope to guide students toward personal mastery and high levels of self-efficacy. As found in this study, the factors of an academic success course that affect the academic self-efficacy beliefs of students on

academic probation include time management practices, the use of a creator mindset and language, and activities external to the classroom such as visiting with a professor or exploring services available on campus.

### **Making Success Courses Mandatory**

Stovall (2000) recommended for-credit courses for incoming freshmen. Based on the positive results and student epiphanies uncovered in this study, the lead researcher agrees and suggests success courses be mandatory for students at all levels of higher education. Moreover, designers of future success courses should incorporate the themes found in this study confidently knowing that over time students will build improved learning and life habits as well as self-efficacy.

As found in McGrath and Burd's (2012) study, the group that took the success course increased persistence to the fourth year from 9% to 47%, and graduation rates increased from 2% to 25% between groups. While Tovar and Simon (2006) found that voluntary success courses showed a very low attendance lending further weight to the idea that success courses for students on academic probation should be mandatory. With the above percentages as well as the qualitative data of this study, the lead researcher agrees with Stovall (2000) who encouraged community college administrators to create and implement success courses not only for incoming freshmen, but for all students. In fact, given the high cost of remedial education at universities, it is possible that these success courses should be offered in high school. Early access to success courses may increase access to university, as well as degree and certificate programs in community college.

Boretz (2012) concluded that it is the responsibility of the institution to engage

the student, not the other way around and this includes providing students with working tools that guarantee their academic success. Teaching should not remain a passive distribution of information. Instructors must teach students how to cognitively process the data they give them and show them how to apply that new knowledge in a manner that builds up their self-efficacy. Successful learning can be easily measured as seen throughout this research, and only those instructors who consistently guide their students can claim to be successful teachers. Thus mandatory professional training for success course designers and instructors is also recommended.

### **Future Research**

In terms of longitudinal research, we don't know the post-study results. In other words, we don't know how many students were removed from academic probation. We were also unable to collect information pertaining to the success rates of the students who completed success courses. Also, as stated above, active and passive voices and language should be investigated as they may be potential indicator of success.

Thus, the recommendations for future success course designers, instructors, and researchers are similar. We should determine what environments best support on-going cognitive processing leading to positive successes and strong self-efficacy beliefs in students. Further, we should engage in measuring whether students' time management practices specified in the success course exercise improved students' study and life time. Next, we should uncover the levels at which students' belief in self, confidence and pride are enhanced by new victim versus creator mentalities and/or meeting with a professor or tutor. Also, there should be studies to determine if there are gender differences relative to which students are more likely to make lasting changes in their habits that lead to

increased student success. Finally, researchers, instructors, and designers of success courses should ascertain whether passive or active voices are equal learners, and if necessary find ways to build up the confidences of the passive male learners as they were defined in this study.

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