UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF DUAL ENROLLED STUDENTS AND
THE INFLUENCE ON THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS DECISION

by

DAVID CHARLES JENKINS

(Under the Direction of Diane Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Dual enrollment is a form of accelerated learning that allows students to earn college credit during high school. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of dual enrolled students and the factors that influenced their decision-making regarding where to continue their postsecondary education. The study included a review of credit-based transition programs including advanced placement, international baccalaureate, and dual enrollment. Credit-based transition programs provide high school students with an opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. A history of dual enrollment along with the types of programs and the different course environments are discussed.

This qualitative research study used Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) as a framework for understanding the student’s dual enrollment experience and the influence on the college admission decision. To understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of dual enrolled students, the study included personal interviews with 13 first-year students who earned college credit through dual enrollment in high school. The study took place at a small, public, four-year university in a rural area of the southeastern United States and identified reasons why dual enrolled students either
persist or choose to leave the institution where they earned their dual enrollment credits.

Five themes emerged when analyzing the data including college preparedness, financial incentives, college readiness, challenges encountered, and college selection. These insights into the students’ dual enrollment experiences may help postsecondary institutions better recruit and retain students.

INDEX WORDS: DUAL ENROLLMENT, JOINT ENROLLMENT, CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT, ADVANCED PLACEMENT, INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE, DUAL CREDIT, EARLY COLLEGE
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by

DAVID CHARLES JENKINS
B.B.A., Georgia Southwestern State University, 2000
M.B.A., Georgia Southwestern State University, 2007

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DAVID CHARLES JENKINS

Major Professor: Diane Cooper
Committee: Laura A. Dean
Matt Varga

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and students who have been there for me during this journey.

To my parents, Charles and Lisa, who have always supported and encouraged me through whatever endeavors I chose to pursue.

To my brothers and sisters, John, Maranda, Michael, Jennifer, Tom, Angela, and Robert, for always supporting me and for keeping me grounded.

To my 11 nieces and nephews, Jackson, Josh, Ward, Peyton, Kallan, Hallie Kay, Bryson, Katy Beth, Brooks, Braden, and Briggs, I hope I can always serve as a role model of how important education is, to always follow your dreams, and to never give up.

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To my colleagues and students who inspire me to do what I love each day working in higher education.

Finally, to my loved ones that were taken too soon. To my mother, Mary, I hope I have become a son who you would have been proud of. To my Nanny, who I lost along the journey of writing this dissertation, I know your spirit and love are always with me.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Learning</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Enrollment Opportunities</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticisms of Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning from High School to College</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Design</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Site</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of Subjects</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness and Positionality</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FINDINGS</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Profiles and Experiences</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Study</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

A  INITIAL EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS.................................112
B  QUALTRICS SURVEY ................................................................................113
C  CONSENT FORM.........................................................................................116
D  INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ........................................................................118
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Participant Demographics</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

High school students who like to be challenged and desire to get a head start on college may have the opportunity to earn college credit by being dual enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Dual enrollment programs provide high school students an introduction to college with the opportunity to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. It is estimated that 1.4 million high school students earn college credit through participation in dual enrollment each year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Dual enrollment programs vary with students taking courses on the college campus, at the high school, and online (Tinsberg & Nadeau, 2011). Dual enrollment is also referred to as concurrent enrollment and introduces students to the academic challenges and accelerated learning of college (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Dual enrollment supports the goal of the No Child Left Behind Act to promote rigor during their high school experience (Rhodes, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Participating in dual enrollment gives students the benefit of easing into the transition from high school to college and exposes them to the academic challenges of college-level coursework (Redden, 2007). For many students and parents, participating in dual enrollment could mean saving time and money when working towards a college degree.

The competitiveness of college admission has significantly increased with the pressure for students to matriculate at postsecondary institutions academically ready for college (Lerner & Brand, 2006). Being prepared for college has made dual enrollment
increasingly popular for high school students who are college bound (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). In addition to advanced placement (AP) courses, dual enrollment courses can also prepare students for the academic rigors of college by introducing them to college-level curriculum.

According to the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, approximately 2,000 colleges and universities nationwide offer dual enrollment opportunities (NACEP, 2017). Several different types of dual enrollment options may be implemented through collaborations between high schools and colleges giving students access to post-secondary education (Karp & Hughes, 2008). In addition to courses taught on the post-secondary campus, many high schools offer college courses taught at their high school, some offer an early college program option (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and some students choose to take online courses through distance learning options.

**Effectiveness of Dual Enrollment**

Determining the effectiveness of dual enrollment programs in regards to students’ college success can be difficult because of the lack of assessment data (Karp & Hughes, 2008). In addition, I found very little research on the influence of dual enrollment program outcomes or the factors that may influence those outcomes. Dual enrollment in the state of Georgia is part of the Move On When Ready program, which provides the opportunity for public, private, and high school students to enroll in postsecondary coursework beginning as early as the ninth grade (University System of Georgia, 2017). The tuition, mandatory fees, and a book allowance are covered by state appropriations. With pressure from the University System of Georgia to increase enrollment, institutions in Georgia are encouraging high school students to enter college early as dual enrolled
students. However, there has been little research conducted to determine if these students are prepared for college-level coursework and if postsecondary institutions have the policies and programs in place to service the students’ needs. There is also a lack of research on the impact that dual enrollment participation has on the college admissions decision following high school graduation and the influence dual enrollment may have on future career choices. The information collected in this study of dual enrolled students may provide a better understanding regarding any needed modifications or improvements to university practices. The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) provides the latest knowledge about best practices, research, and advocacy and is the only national accrediting body for concurrent enrollment partnerships (NACEP, 2017). According to NACEP, institutions should be accountable for adhering to the standards of program quality in the categories of curriculum, faculty, students, assessment and program evaluation (NACEP, 2017). It is helpful if colleges and universities are familiar with the NACEP standards for insight into best practices for dual enrollment programs. Improving programs and services for dual enrolled students may lead to increased student persistence, success, and retention rates during dual enrollment and as first-year students following high school.

**Problem Statement**

Typically, when high-achieving high school students participate in a dual enrollment program it is through their local postsecondary institution. Dual enrolled students are academically motivated and perform well in college courses with positive impacts being reflected in their college GPA (An, 2015). Participating in dual enrollment enhances a student’s prospect for college admission (Barnett & Hughes, 2010).
Postsecondary institutions will want applicants to have taken academically challenging courses in high school that will prepare them for college-level coursework. Colleges and universities desire to retain these students; however, only one-third of an institution’s dual enrolled students will matriculate at their current institution following high school (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Kinnick, 2012). Dual enrolled students are counted in the institution’s total enrollment. Not retaining dual enrolled students as first-year students can have implications for institutions including effects on institutional enrollment, freshman class profiles, and retention. Not retaining these students could lead to a decrease in total enrollment. In addition, having less first-year students entering with credit already earned may negatively impact the freshman class profile causing the institution to appear less competitive.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of dual enrolled students and the effect that participating in dual enrollment has on the student’s decision-making regarding where they will continue their postsecondary education. The study sought to explore the factors that influence why dual enrolled students persist at their current institution or understand the reasons why they select a different institution to attend following high school. Understanding these factors from the perspective of the student will help institutions improve their retention efforts when recruiting dual enrolled students to continue their education at their current college as well as promote a positive image of the university as a college of choice (Kinnick, 2012). Institutions hope participation in dual enrollment builds a sense of community and connection to the college for the students participating (Foster, 2010), but more importantly, learning about
the experiences of dual enrolled students will help institutions better serve this growing demographic of student as they select their college choice and make the transition from high school to postsecondary education.

**Research Questions**

Traditionally-aged, first-year students who participated in a dual enrollment program in high school were identified and invited to participate in this qualitative study. The questions were designed to draw insight into the students’ experiences as dual enrolled students and the factors that influenced their decision on where to attend college after high school. There were two main questions in this study:

1. How did students who were in a dual enrollment program experience the process of transitioning to college after having been dual enrolled?
2. How did dual enrollment influence students’ decision-making regarding where to continue their postsecondary education and their career decision?

**Research Paradigm**

A constructivist paradigm fits my study of dual enrolled students because I wanted to expand my knowledge about how the experiences of dual enrolled students influence their college admission decision. Scholars using a constructivist paradigm view reality as socially constructed through the lens of human experiences (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). Through a constructivist paradigm, I listened to the research participants as they made meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2014). It is important for researchers using a constructivist paradigm to understand diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs of participants (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010).

Phenomenology was used to understand and make sense of the lived experiences of dual
enrolled students through conducting interviews. Phenomenology is the study of an individual’s lived experience from that person’s point of view (Smith, 2016). Using phenomenology allowed me to focus on the whole experiences of the students instead of being limited to one particular area (Moustakas, 1994).

Part of my responsibility at my current institution is to serve as the dual enrollment coordinator. My goal is not only to gain insight into the students’ experiences but to learn how I can interpret those experiences to improve practices for dual enrollment coordinators and admissions offices. Serving as the dual enrollment coordinator at my institution provides me with insights and experiences that could influence my research process. For example, I have advised and worked previously with many of the participants that I interviewed. However, through epoché, I bracketed my personal assumptions and judgements from my previous experiences with dual enrollment and focused on listening to the experiences of the participants and understanding their perspectives (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). By using a constructivist approach, I was able to examine the different socially constructed perspectives and experiences of dual enrolled students (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010).

**Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical lens in qualitative research is used to explain behaviors and attitudes in understanding other’s perspectives by using the data to build themes (Creswell, 2014). Dual enrolled students experience multiple chance events in their lives as they make the transition from being high school students to becoming college students. During this time in their lives, high school students are deciding where to attend college and planning
for their future careers. However, rapid change and unpredictability can make career planning difficult with the likelihood that chance events may have an effect on their career development (Rice, 2014). These chance events, including dual enrollment participation, and the influence they may have on students’ college and career decisions can be explored using Krumboltz’s learning theory (Rice, 2014). Also known as Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2009), the theory can provide a framework to understand the experiences of dual enrolled students and the influences they have on the college admission decision. The Happenstance Learning Theory implies that chance events can be capitalized on as an opportunity (Krumboltz, 2011; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Making a connection with a certain faculty member, the classroom environment, or being on the college campus may provide a chance event that may contribute to a dual enrolled student’s decision on where they will attend college following high school.

**Operational Definitions**

**Dual enrollment:** Allows high school students to take college-level courses and earn both high school and college credit.

**Joint enrollment:** Allows high school students to take college-level courses and receive college credit but not high school credit.

**Concurrent enrollment:** Allows high school students to take college-level courses taught by high school teachers that are approved to teach college-level courses; sometimes referred to as dual enrollment (NACEP, 2017).

**Advanced placement (AP):** Rigorous high school courses that will allow students to receive college credit if required exam scores are met (CollegeBoard, 2017).
**International baccalaureate (IB):** An international program that prepares high school students for college through learning key subject areas; students can receive college-level credit by meeting required IB exam scores (IBO, 2017).

**Dual credit:** College credit earned for both high school and college; credit received may come from advanced placement courses, international baccalaureate courses, or dual enrollment.

**Early college:** High schools usually located on college campuses that allow traditionally underrepresented students experience the college environment and culture while earning college credit (Leonard, 2013).

**Significance of the Study**

I believe the findings of the study could make significant contributions to the fields of college admissions, enrollment management, academic advising, career services, and our overall understanding of dual enrollment programs. The lived experiences of dual enrolled students will provide insights on how participation in dual enrollment may influence a student’s decision-making process as they decide where to continue their postsecondary education following high school as well as their career decision. The results of the study will be valuable to admissions officers as they look for new ways to recruit and retain dual enrolled students, help with students’ transition into postsecondary education, and encourage persistence for degree completion. The study may provide useful information to institutional administrators and state policymakers as they develop future educational policies and practices for dual enrollment programs. The data collected from the study may also guide high school and postsecondary institutions in building collaborations and improving their dual enrollment partnerships.
Chapter Summary

Dual enrollment programs provide high school students with the opportunity to begin earning college credits while still enrolled in high school. Dual enrolled students may be taking college-level courses at the postsecondary institution, at the high school, or online. Participation in dual enrollment prepares students for the academic challenges of college while helping them ease into the transition from high school to college. During this time in their lives, high school students are beginning to plan for their future careers. Exposure to new experiences and chance events may impact their career development and planning. Krumboltz’s learning theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), also known as Happenstance Learning Theory, can be used as a framework to understand how the experiences of dual enrolled students may influence their college admission decision.

Through this qualitative study, I explored the experiences of dual enrolled students and the factors that influence their decision on where they choose to continue their postsecondary education. High-achieving students typically perform well academically when participating in dual enrollment and are prepared for the academic rigor of college courses during their freshman year. However, postsecondary institutions struggle to retain these students after high school with less than half matriculating at their institution following high school (Kinnick, 2012). Their stories regarding their transition from high school to college and how they made their college decision provided additional insight into dual enrollment.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature as it relates to dual enrollment and the factors that contribute to student participation in dual credit programs. The chapter will address accelerated learning opportunities for students with an emphasis on dual enrollment, including the history, environments, benefits, and criticisms. For the purpose of this study, I will also address Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) and how it provides a theoretical framework for how dual enrollment may influence a student’s college admission decision.

Accelerated Learning

The goal of accelerated learning is to promote the intellectually challenging engagement of high school students. In addition to academic ability, accelerated learners need to have self-discipline, motivation, and independence (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013). Accelerated learning comes in many forms including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, dual enrollment, middle and early college, tech prep, and college access programs (Rhodes, 2007). However, the overarching goal of each these programs is to provide high school students the opportunities to advance their high school education with college-level curriculum (Rhodes, 2007). The educational goals of accelerated learning fall into three categories: students will be better prepared for college and will require less remediation, they will spend less time in college, thus reducing costs, and they will be more competitive in the
global economy (Rhodes, 2007). As the progression of accelerated learning continues to increase, policymakers and practitioners will need to continue improving pathways between secondary and postsecondary education through credit-based transition programs.

Credit-based Transition Programs

There are many initiatives and programs that have been designed and implemented to facilitate the transition to college by allowing high school students to earn college credit while still in high school. These programs are often referred to as credit-based transition programs and include advanced placement, international baccalaureate, and dual enrollment (Plucker, Chien, & Zaman, 2006). These programs serve a wide variety of students with benefits including preparing students for the academic rigors of college, providing realistic information about the skills that students will need to succeed in college, increasing students’ motivation, and building relationships between high schools and colleges (Bailey & Karp, 2003). The programs vary based on course content, course location, the type of instructor, how the credit will be awarded, and the characteristics of the students that the different programs are targeting. The types of credit-based transition programs can be divided into three categories: singleton programs, comprehensive programs, and enhanced comprehensive programs (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009; Plucker, Chien, & Zaman, 2006). The primary goal of singleton programs is to enrich the high school curriculum by exposing students to college-level academics (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009). Comprehensive credit-based transition programs require students to take most, if not all, of their last two years of high school courses as part of an articulated series of
courses in their curriculum (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009). The primary goal of comprehensive programs is the social and psychological preparation for college (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009). The international baccalaureate program is an example of a comprehensive credit-based transition program. The most intensive and fastest growing credit-based transition programs are the enhanced comprehensive programs. Enhanced comprehensive programs prepare students for college and the secondary to postsecondary transition through rigorous academics and introduction to other campus resources such as counseling and mentoring (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

Enhanced comprehensive programs include dual enrollment programs and middle college high school programs (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009). Middle college high school programs were created to help students who were at risk of not completing high school to graduate and transition into postsecondary education (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Enhanced comprehensive programs not only prepare students for the academic rigors of college coursework but also address other elements of the postsecondary transition including counseling, assistance with applications, mentoring, and personal support (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Fowler & Luna, 2009). Credit-based transition programs give students an insight into what college will be like and address the motivational and psychological factors to be prepared and successful in college. The benefits of credit-based transition programs include cost effectiveness, retention, and graduation (Fowler & Luna, 2009). The type of program the student decides to participate in depends, at least in part, on their postsecondary educational plans and the types of dual credit programs available to them at their high school.
Advanced Placement. The Advanced Placement (AP) program was created in 1952 by the College Board to provide accelerated students with the opportunity to earn college credit if they passed exams in the corresponding courses (Warne, Larsen, Anderson, & Odasso, 2015). AP courses are taught by high school teachers and allow students to earn college credit for the courses by taking a standardized test at the end of the course and earning a required score determined by the postsecondary institution. Currently, the College Board offers 38 courses and exams in fields ranging from biology to English literature to mathematics (CollegeBoard, 2017). To pass the exam, a student must score a 3, 4, or 5 but the decision to award credit and the required score to do so is made by the postsecondary institution (Warne, Larsen Anderson, & Odasso, 2015).

Many believe that students who pass AP tests will be more successful in college and earn higher first semester GPAs (Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; Warne, Larsen, Anderson, & Odasso, 2015). However, there are still some criticisms regarding AP and the awarding of dual credit. Some of these include the program’s effectiveness, the course content being determined by the high schools, college administrators’ skepticism regarding the rigor of the courses, and the fact that instructors for AP courses are all high school teachers (Warne, Larsen, Anderson, & Odasso, 2015). The College Board does not have a defined selection criteria for who can serve as an AP teacher (College Board, 2017). Taking AP courses in high school is one of several credit-based transition programs allowing students to earn college credit. Other programs include international baccalaureate and dual enrollment.

International Baccalaureate. The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a nonprofit educational foundation offering a comprehensive diploma program in high schools
The IB diploma program requires students to complete their studies in six subjects: literature, foreign language, experimental sciences, the arts, mathematics, and computer sciences (Cubberley, 2009). In addition to the courses, students must submit a 4,000 word essay and complete 150 hours of extracurricular activities and community service (Cubberley, 2009). Students are then examined in the core courses on a 7-point scale (Cubberley, 2009). To earn the IB diploma, students need a minimum score of 24 and are then eligible to receive college credit for introductory-level college courses (Cubberley, 2009). Both AP and IB programs have grown over the years; however, many students take the AP and IB courses but do not take the exams needed to earn the college credit (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

**Dual Enrollment.** In contrast to AP and IB programs, dual enrollment students are taking college courses rather than college-level or college-preparatory courses (Cubberley, 2009). Dual enrollment courses are often more accessible at community colleges in rural areas where AP and IB courses may not be offered (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009; Young, Slate, Moore, & Barnes, 2014). Dual enrollment courses are more flexible (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012) and can be taken at the high school or college campus. As a result, students have more options of courses from which to choose (Young, Slate, Moore, & Barnes, 2014). Earning college credit with AP is based on standardized exams, whereas; dual enrollment credit is based on a course grade. Passing the course with a C or better would earn the student the college credit they desire (Klopfenstein, & Lively, 2012). The concept of dual enrollment has evolved nationally over time with programs differing among states’ systems.
History of Dual Enrollment

Dual credit programs such as advanced placement and international baccalaureate originated in the 1950s, but the origin of dual enrollment is often debated. Some believe dual enrollment was established with Syracuse University’s Project Advance (SUPA) in 1972 (Fowler & Luna, 2009; Kim, 2008). SUPA was created to resolve senioritis and was targeted to high academic achievers (Boswell, 2001). Shortly after, other states began to implement dual enrollment programs. La Guardia Community College in New York City began the Middle College High School program in 1974 to focus on high school students at risk of dropping out (Fowler & Luna, 2009; Kim, 2008). In 1984, the College Now Program at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York focused on average achievers with the students taking competency exams in math, reading, and writing before they could participate (Fowler & Luna, 2009; Hofmann, 2012; Kim, 2008). With demand from students and parents across the nation, other states began establishing state-level policies and programs. Established in 1985, Minnesota’s Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) program was the first state-level dual credit program (Boswell, 2001; Kim, 2008). Washington state followed in 1990 with the Running Start legislation providing dual credit opportunities at the state’s expense (Boswell, 2001; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Kim, 2008). Other states have followed and state-level funding now provides students across the nation with dual enrollment opportunities.

Types of Dual Enrollment Programs

Several different types of dual enrollment programs are available for today’s high school students, including dual or concurrent enrollment, joint enrollment, and early
college high schools. All of these programs expose students to college-level coursework and allow students to gain college credit. However, the comprehensiveness, standards, and minimum academic requirements may vary for the different types of programs (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). The course content, location, instructors, student mix, and credits earned differ as well among the various programs (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002).

**Concurrent Enrollment.** Concurrent enrollment is also referred to as dual enrollment and is the most common form of dual enrollment programs for high school students (Hofmann, 2012; Pretlaw & Wathington, 2016). The design of dual enrollment programs often varies by state including what courses and how many courses students can take, eligibility requirements including grade levels at which the students can participate, course delivery, and the use of high school teachers serving as adjunct college instructors (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013). With dual enrollment programs, students are earning both high school and college credit simultaneously (Hofman, 2012; Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013).

**Joint Enrollment.** While they are still referred to as dual credit, joint enrollment programs do not have the requirement of issuing credit for both high school and college work. In joint enrollment, students continue to pursue their high school diploma but are taking additional courses at the postsecondary institution for college credit only and no high school credit is awarded (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). I found very little literature on joint enrollment programs and do not believe they are popular for students today since they only provide college credit and not dual credit for the courses taken.
**Early College.** Early college programs were designed to give underrepresented populations of low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students the opportunity to earn high school and college credit at the same time at no cost (Barnett, Maclutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015; Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009; Leonard, 2013). In early college programs, some institutions allow students to begin taking college courses as early as ninth grade (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009; Leonard, 2013) which allows students to earn both a high school diploma and an associate’s degree concurrently (Leonard, 2013; Mansell & Justice, 2014; Uribe, 2010). For students who are economically disadvantaged, the opportunity to earn an associate’s degree is seen as a privilege that is not taken lightly (Saenz & Combs, 2015). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation established the Early College High School Initiative to promote student academic achievement by creating or redesigning early college high schools (Barnett, Maclutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015; Leonard, 2013). This new opportunity for access and equity is allowing students to earn a college degree and laying a new foundation for the students and their families (Saenz & Combs, 2015) while allowing a smooth transition to college after high school graduation (Barnett, Maclutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015; Uribe, 2010).

**Dual Enrollment Opportunities**

By being admitted early and having an experience of what college life is like, dual enrollment can give students the skills and confidence they need to raise their educational aspirations (Hughes, 2010). Participating in dual enrollment puts students one step ahead in their pursuit of higher education. Dual enrollment programs create pathways for
students to continue their studies at the postsecondary institution or transfer the credits they have earned to other institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The original intent of accelerated programs such as AP, IB, and dual enrollment was to prepare students for college by strengthening the high-school curriculum; however, these programs have become more about comparing students to one another to decide who gets accepted into the institution (Kretchmar & Farmer, 2013). Former participation in dual enrollment can be an asset for students when they apply for college admission (Kretchmar & Farmer, 2013). The college admission process and minimum academic requirements for dual enrolled students vary by state and institution.

**Dual Enrollment Environments**

In addition to courses taught on the post-secondary campus, many high schools offer college courses taught at their setting, some offer an early college program option (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and some students choose to take online courses. The learning styles of students vary, and students need to select a program and an environment that best meets their needs and learning style. The location of where the student takes the college course may have an impact on the student’s success as well as influence their experiences and perceptions about college (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). “Where and by whom the courses are taught can impact the extent to which a dual enrollment program is perceived as an authentic college experience” (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011, p. 7). However, some believe the location of the courses is a minor consideration and the admission criteria, faculty selection, and the assessment of the students’ performance and competency are better indicators of the students’ perception of the program. (Fontenot, 2003).
Courses at the Postsecondary Institution. Being on a college campus provides an authentic experience and gives students access to college support services (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). When dual enrolled students take classes on college campuses, they are interacting with older students and often will take their academics more seriously (Young, Slate, Moore, & Barnes, 2014). Interacting with current college students allows dual enrollees to learn the norms and behaviors associated with being a successful college student (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). It is possible, theoretically, that the opposite could happen if college students did not take their courses seriously with high school students being in the same classes. In addition to enhancing academic performance, dual enrollment programs can be used to bridge the gap in race relations as students are exposed to a diverse classroom setting (Burns & Lewis, 2000). Research shows that students taking courses on college campuses are more likely to continue for a second semester, be enrolled two years after high school, and have a higher grade point average (GPA) than their classmates who do not have dual enrollment experience (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Students taking courses on college campuses appear more satisfied than students taking college courses only at the high school (Burns & Lewis, 2000). The students on campus have an increased sense of independence and a stronger desire to continue their college education (Burns & Lewis, 2000). These students feel more mature in the college environment and take the courses more seriously (Burns & Lewis, 2000). They display a greater level of maturity and feel like they are having an authentic college experience (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011).
Courses Taught at the High School. While college courses taught at the high school are significantly different than courses taught on a college campus, they can still be beneficial to students. It is often easier for the high school to integrate the courses into its schedule where the students are in a familiar and comfortable setting (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). Dual enrolled students may feel intimidated by the college environment and not seek out assistance on the college campus like they would on the high school campus (Edwards, Hughes, Weisberg, 2011). Further, transportation issues can be challenging for students (and the school district), and for this reason, courses are often integrated at the high school level (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011).

Online Courses. Taking online courses as a dual enrolled student can have many advantages. By taking the courses online, dual enrolled students do not have to worry about time conflicts with their high school schedule (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). For postsecondary institutions, when dual enrolled students take courses online, they are not taking away from traditional, tuition paying students, and so this is a way to expand course offerings in a cost-effective way (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). For students with transportation issues, distance learning is an advantageous way to still participate in dual enrollment (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). Finally, for students in a rural area that does not have a postsecondary institution, online courses provide another outlet to earn the college credit they desire (Khazem & Khazem, 2012).

Course Instructors

Whether college courses are taught on the college campus or at the high school, the faculty member should hold the same credentials as a college faculty member and be certified as an adjunct instructor (Karp & Hughes, 2008). The instructor’s experience and
pedagogical methods can affect the perception of the college course (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). When college courses are taught at the high school, they are most often taught by a high school teacher who has been hired as adjunct faculty by the post-secondary institution. Often, high school instructors will need to alter their teaching methodology to excel as the instructor of a college-level course (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011) and will need to work with college instructors for course logistics and expectations (Hughes, 2010). College faculty generally give students more freedom and responsibility to focus on their own coursework (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011), which can be a departure from traditional high school pedagogy.

**Benefits of Dual Enrollment**

There are many positive benefits associated with students participating in dual enrollment including students being more prepared for the academic pressures of college, the cost-effectiveness, and the reduced time to graduation. Taking introductory courses through dual enrollment will prepare students for the more advanced courses they will face when entering college (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). Dual enrollment can reduce college costs to students with tuition-free enrollment while also shortening the time required to complete a degree (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015).

**College Readiness**

Preparing students to be college ready is just one facet of dual enrollment programs. Ganzert (2014) conducted a study to determine if participating in dual enrollment offered an academic advantage to students and if it had a positive effect in their success. Again, his study supported An’s (2015) research, indicating there is positive significance relating first-year GPA and participation in dual enrollment
programs (Ganzert, 2014). The dual enrollment experience promotes students’ self-efficacy related to college level work (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011).

Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds benefit greatly from dual enrollment programs (An, 2013). For disadvantaged students, the opportunity to earn an associate’s degree at little to no cost is an economic benefit for those who otherwise might not be able to obtain a college education (Saenz & Combs, 2015). The educational background of parents is also a contributing factor to academic performance and college readiness (An, 2013). First-generation students who participated in dual enrollment perform better in college than those that did not (An, 2013). Learning the different facets of becoming college-ready helps students achieve their educational goals (Karp, 2012).

**Persistence.** Students who are prepared academically are more likely to persist and attain their degree than less-prepared students (An, 2015). D’Amico, Morgan, Robertson, and Rivers (2013) conducted a study on the persistence of first-to-second year dual enrolled students using demographic and policy variables. Their results indicated that ethnic backgrounds, course setting, and course type were significant indicators of student persistence; however, gender and county of residence were not significant indicators (D’Amico, Morgan, Robertson, & Rivers, 2013). Taking courses on the college campus is associated with persistence upon entering college (D’Amico, Morgan, Robertson, & Rivers, 2013).

**Academic Motivation**

Academic motivation and engagement can “account for the relationship between dual enrollment and academic performance” (An, 2015, p. 98). Students who are dual enrolled and taking challenging courses are more academically motivated and engaged
than other high school students (An, 2015 & Tinsberg & Nadeau, 2011). Academic preparation in high school can predict college success with positive impacts on college grade point average (GPA), persistence, and degree attainment (An, 2015; Hughes, 2010; & Jones, 2014). They also develop better study habits and organizational skills necessary to succeed in college (Burns & Lewis, 2000). Several variables determine a student’s academic motivation and persistence; a student’s willingness to work hard to learn the material, their motivation to read more than is required for the course, and simply the inclination to learn new material (An, 2015). Being exposed to college early provides opportunities for students to develop their engagement behaviors through peer interactions, including study-groups and interpersonal relationships with other students (An, 2015).

**Retention.** With the increased number of students being exposed to and participating in dual enrollment, we should expect to see an increase of dual enrolled students matriculate into postsecondary institutions. “Dual enrollment incentivizes students to complete high school and enroll in a four-year college, and leads to higher retention, college GPAs, and credits earned among participants” (Cortes, 2013, p. 65). Postsecondary institutions need to look for ways to collaborate with K-12 systems for promoting dual enrollment programs to enhance retention and degree completion (Cortes, 2013).

**Financial Benefits.** The rise of college costs is contributing to the spread of dual enrollment programs (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). In many states, legislatures have provided funding for dual enrollment programs including exemption from tuition and fees. For many low-income students, the financial benefit is an opportunity to earn
college credit they may not have had otherwise (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013). Dual enrollment programs support President Obama’s efforts to make higher education more affordable while ensuring community colleges provide economic prosperity and educational opportunities for American families (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Dual enrollment programs have gained political support due to the fact they are accomplishing the goal of increasing student achievement while giving students more opportunities to complete college courses early (McCarthy, 1999).

**Time to Graduation.** Earning college credits through participation in dual enrollment reduces the average time it takes for students to earn a degree and increases their likelihood of graduation (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). In some instances, students may earn a year’s worth or more of college credit while still in high school, significantly decreasing the amount of time it takes to earn their degree and reducing their overall college cost (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002).

**Criticisms of Dual Enrollment**

Although there are many advantages to dual enrollment, there are some criticisms as well. These include transportation issues, transferability of courses, registration offerings, and course rigor (Burns & Lewis, 2000; Khazem & Khazem, 2012). When scheduling courses at the college campus, students sometimes are working around class times that do not conflict with the courses they are taking at the high school. If they are taking courses on the college campus, they may have to consider additional commuting time between the high school and college campuses. In some instances, dual enrolled students may not be allowed to register until late in the process giving them a disadvantage if the courses are already closed (Khazem & Khazem, 2012). Critics are
concerned the courses taught at the high school and by high school instructors do not provide the same academic rigor as the courses on the college campus being taught by college faculty and may be inconsistent in course quality (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013).

There is also worry regarding dual enrollment impacting the institution’s revenue because these students often only pay nominal fees (Kinnick, 2012). State officials and legislators view dual enrollment positively but the funding may only be partially subsidized, with the postsecondary institution waiving the difference in mandatory fees (Kinnick, 2012; Zinth, 2015). For states that use enrollment headcount for state formula funding, additional losses could be incurred for institutions. Others worry that dual enrollment programs are not readily accessible for underserved student populations such as low-income or minority students (Krueger, 2006; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014). The admissions standards required to participate in dual enrollment, including college placement tests, may be a barrier to many low-income and minority students (Barnett, Maclutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015). Finally, some worry about the maturity level of students being admitted to dual enrollment programs at an early age. They may not be able to handle college-level material and coursework and the college environment (Kim, 2008). Some critics are afraid that participating in college early forces students to grow up too quickly and miss many of the opportunities and activities at their high schools (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013).

**Transitioning from High School to College**

Being ready for college encompasses more than just academic skill (Karp, 2012). The transition from high school to college can be quite difficult for many students;
however, the experience can be made smoother by participating in a dual enrollment program (O’Connor & Justice, 2008). When students begin college, they have to learn new study skills, time-management approaches, how to navigate new systems and requirements, and how to engage in new social relationships (Karp, 2012). Experiencing the college setting early gives students the skills and confidence to enhance their educational aspirations (Hughes, 2010) and provides realistic expectations of what college will be like (An, 2013). Dual enrollment provides challenging coursework and allows students to maintain a high level of motivation and commitment (An, 2013). As college students, dual enrolled students take responsibility for their own learning (Karp, 2012) and create a sense of self-accountability to manage their academic course load differently than being in a high school setting (An, 2013).

In addition to the academic transition, dual enrollment can also prepare students psychologically (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Taking courses on the college campus exposes students to other aspects of the campus outside of the classroom, allowing them the opportunity to become acclimated to the college environment (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Many institutions allow dual enrolled students to be involved in on-campus activities and access services offered at the institution. Karp (2012) believes social interactions allow students to learn the norms, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions needed to become successful college students. Additionally, students gain the experience of being immersed in the college culture and create new peer groups (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011).

Dual enrolled students have many different opportunities to earn college credits while still in high school. Through courses taught at the postsecondary institution,
college courses taught at the high school, or online college courses, dual enrollment students are academically prepared for college-level work. Dual enrollment can also provide a financial incentive for students to reduce future college costs while decreasing the amount of time it takes to earn their degree. In addition to earning college credit, dual enrollment prepares students for the transition into postsecondary education.

**Theoretical Framework**

Deciding on where to attend college may be one of the hardest decisions for a high school student to make. With participation in dual enrollment, high school students can be more confident and better prepared when making the transition into higher education. “Dual enrollment embodies the college transition agenda from its unique position in the middle space, or gap, between high school achievement and college readiness” (Hofmann, 2012, p. 3). This transitional period addresses the rules and behaviors of what it means to be a college student academically and socially (An, 2015). High school students may have a plan or goal in mind of where they would like to attend college and what they want to major in, but participating in dual enrollment could impact those decisions. Career decision making involves both occupational and educational decisions (Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005). An individual’s career decision is influenced to a certain degree by chance events (Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005). Krumbolt’s Happenstance Learning Theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) can be used as a framework for exploring how dual enrollment may influence a student’s college admission decision and career goals. Happenstance, or coincidence, can play an important role in a person’s career development (Kim, Jang, Jung, Lee, Puig, & Lee, 2014: Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). According to Sears (1982), career
development is defined as “the total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one’s career” (p. 137). Happenstance events can provide opportunities for exposure to new experiences in the career development process (Kim et al., 2014). Unpredictable social factors, environmental conditions, and chance events may contribute to a student’s college admission and career decision.

There are various factors involved in the college search and admission process including what type of institution students are looking for, the size of the institution, and location. Other influential factors may include finances, academics, teachers, family, and peers. Through participation in dual enrollment, students can be exposed to happenstance events that may influence their college admission decision. During college, students explore their interests and decide on future careers (Kim et al., 2014). Dual enrollment provides students the opportunity to explore their interests early.

**Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory**

Krumboltz’s (1998) Happenstance Learning Theory is a career development theory based on social learning. Career development theory is used to explain why individuals follow a particular career path (Krumboltz, 1996). The Happenstance Learning Theory is an expansion of his social learning theory of career decision making (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). He purports that career decisions are based on numerous learning experiences created by interactions with the people, institutions, and events in a person’s environment (Krumboltz, 2009; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). These learning experiences are made from both planned and unplanned situations in individuals’ lives (Hirschi, 2009; Krumboltz, 2009). Each situation can present new
opportunities when individuals recognize and them and capitalize on them (Krumboltz, 2009; Krumboltz, 2011). When a new opportunity emerges, it can change an individual’s course of action and initial plan and significantly affect career decisions (Hirschi, 2009). Chance plays an important role in one’s career and these unplanned events can become opportunities for learning (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999).

Learning is taking place all the time, but the circumstances in which individuals may find themselves can play a role in what is learned (Krumboltz, 2009). The Happenstance Learning Theory attempts to explain how and why individuals will follow different paths through life (Krumboltz, 2009). It suggests people behave the way they do based on instrumental and associative learning experiences and environmental conditions (Peila-Shuster, 2016). Happenstance Learning Theory proposes that individuals develop five skills to recognize, create, and use chance as career opportunities: curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Capitalizing on these skills will help one to control chance to their advantage (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). In addition, unplanned events are inevitable but can lead to new discoveries (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). The Happenstance Learning Theory implies that we should acknowledge and take advantage of these unplanned events (Krumboltz, 2009; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). For dual enrolled students, being exposed to happenstance events such as interactions with college professors or finding interest in academic areas of study could play a significant role in their career development process (Kim et al., 2014).
Chapter Summary

Dual enrollment is one form of accelerated learning, aimed at allowing high school students the opportunity to earn college credit. The existing literature provides extensive information about the types of dual credit programs as well as the benefits and criticisms of dual enrollment. The bulk of the literature focuses on academic rigor and how well-prepared students are for college-level coursework. However, the research is limited on the experiences of dual enrolled students and their transition to college in terms of where they choose to enroll following high school.

Dual credit programs were first established in the 1950s and have grown substantially over the years as state policymakers provide funding for these programs. Dual enrollment programs have many variations including where the courses are taught, the academic admission requirements for participation, who teaches the courses, and how the postsecondary credit is awarded. However, all dual enrollment programs support accelerated learning and can assist students in their transition from high school to postsecondary education and their career development. As students think about their career goals and begin to select their college destination, Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory can be used to understand why they make those choices.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of former dual enrolled students and the factors that influenced their decision-making regarding where they chose to continue their postsecondary education. Interviews were conducted with first-year college students who 1) earned dual enrollment credit at the research site and remained there, 2) earned credit at the research site but matriculated at other institutions following high school, and 3) are currently enrolled at the research site but who earned dual enrollment credit at other institutions. To understand and make sense of the lived experiences of dual enrolled students, I used a qualitative constructivist design using phenomenology as a methodology. Data for the study were collected at a small institution in the southeastern United States. This chapter focuses on the design, research site, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and researcher positionality.

Methodological Design

Phenomenology is the study of an individual’s lived experience from that person’s point of view (Smith, 2016). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology allows the researcher to “focus on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts” (p. 21). Two important techniques in phenomenological research assist the researcher in being aware of their role in the process: epoche and bracketing. Moustakas (1994) described epoche as follows: “the everyday understandings,
judgements, and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited, visually, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (p. 33). With epoche, the researcher attempts to set aside or bracket their personal viewpoints and assumptions in order to be open to the experience. As a student affairs professional and dual enrollment coordinator, I have an obligation to bracket my personal experience and history working with these students in order to focus on the experiences of the participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated “to get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 27). The goal of my study was to learn about the experiences of first-year college students who were dual enrolled at post-secondary institutions during high school and to use the data to inform practice. By interviewing college freshmen who participated in dual enrollment during high school, I was able to gain an understanding of their perceptions of dual enrollment and their collegiate experience during that time and learn if these experiences contributed to their career-decision making and college admission decision.

A constructivist paradigm aligned best with my study of dual enrolled students because I wanted to learn about the experiences they had participating in a dual enrollment program. Scholars using a constructivist paradigm view reality as socially constructed through the lens of human experiences (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). Using a constructivist paradigm, I examined the experiences of research participants by studying their lives and experiences (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). The axiology, or ethics, of the constructivist paradigm is to understand participants in the context of their own lives and not try to remove the social constraints. Researchers using this paradigm
have to be trustworthy and authentic (Mertens, 2010). Looking at the ontology, or the nature of reality, of the constructivist paradigm, Mertens (2010) stated “reality is socially constructed” (p. 18). The researcher must acknowledge that “perceptions of reality may change throughout the process of the study” (Mertens, 2010, p. 18). Ontology refers to the relationship between the knower and the nature of knowledge and explains a greater understanding of the participants’ perspectives and how their perspective is influenced by their worldview (Mertens, 2010). Finally, the epistemology behind the constructivist paradigm involves the researcher having a more personal interaction with the participants during the data collection process (Mertens, 2010) where the view of knowledge is co-created with the participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

**Research Site**

The data for this qualitative study was collected at a small, public, four-year university in a rural area of the southeastern United States. To protect the participants’ and the institution’s identity, the site location was given the pseudonym of Southeastern University. Southeastern University had a Fall 2017 enrollment of 3,052 students with a beginning freshmen enrollment of 433 students (institutional website). The demographic breakdown of the institution by ethnicity includes 63.8% White, 25.7% African American, 5.2% Hispanic, 2.7% Asian, 1.9% Multiracial, 0.4% Unknown or Not Declared, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% American Indian; 66.3% identify as female and 33.7% identify as male (institutional website). The average high school grade point average (GPA) for entering freshmen is 3.26, average ACT composite score of 22, and average SAT total score of 1,000 (institutional website).
I have been employed at Southeastern University for 17 years and have witnessed increasing enrollment of first-year students who were previously dual enrolled. In Fall 2015, 28.7% of first-year students at Southeastern University had previous college credit earned through dual enrollment compared to only 11.7% in Fall 2009 (institutional website). The name of the dual enrollment program at Southeastern University has also been given a pseudonym, Get Started. The Get Started program has experienced rapid growth over the past several semesters with a 71% increase from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017 and a 90% increase from Spring 2017 to Spring 2018. Approximately 30% of the Fall 2016 freshman class had already earned college credit, either from this institution or elsewhere.

I chose this site because dual enrollment is a vital part of my responsibility where I work daily with dual enrolled students through advisement and registration. Whereas some of the participants in the study earned their dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University, many earned their dual enrollment credit elsewhere prior to entering as first-year students at Southeastern University. From the Fall 2015 freshmen cohort, 28.7% of the entering first-year students earned college credit through dual enrollment. From the first-year students with dual enrollment credit, 25% of those students earned the credit at Southeast University (L. Cooper, Personal Communication, August 17, 2017). In addition, from the same freshmen 2015 cohort, 43% received additional college credit through AP or IB courses (L. Cooper, Personal Communication, August 17, 2017). Many new challenges have been created for the institution as a result of students having earned credit hours prior to matriculating as new freshmen. For example, our Fall semester course offerings are decided on in early Spring by the different academic
departments. The Academic Affairs division then creates block schedules for the incoming freshmen based on the courses that will be offered and the number of freshmen that are predicted to matriculate. With dual enrollment, students are bringing in many of the credits for the same courses in the block schedules. This process is creating a new challenge of adjusting the blocks to meet the students’ needs in addition to meeting the demand for what courses need to be offered. We are also being challenged by new freshmen who already have college credit and do not want to participate in new student orientation feeling they are already college students and do not need to be oriented to the institution.

**Participants**

For this study, I selected and interviewed 13 participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to gain a varying amount of information about the phenomenon being studied (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Some of the participants provided more detailed information about their experiences than others. The participants were all traditional-aged college students in their first-year of college following high school. The population included first-year students who earned college credit through dual enrollment at Southeastern University and continued their postsecondary education at Southeastern University; first-year students at Southeastern University who earned college credit through dual enrollment at different institutions other than Southeastern University including public, private, and technical institutions, and students who earned dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University but did not matriculate at Southeastern University as a first-year student after high school. I selected a diverse group of participants based on gender, ethnicity, and number of credit hours.
earned through dual enrollment. The selection of participants was also based on where their college credit through dual enrollment was earned including Southeastern University and other institutions. Only participants who earned a minimum of 6 credit hours through dual enrollment were considered for the study in order to capture more from the participants regarding their experiences.

**Procedures**

To begin the recruitment process, I contacted the Director of Institutional Research to gather data on first-year students with dual enrollment credit. The Director of Institutional Research was able to provide institutional facts and figures about the institution and students with dual enrollment credit for the research study. I contacted the Registrar to identify first-year freshmen students who earned college credit through dual enrollment and to send an email inviting the students to participate in the study. This included students who earned dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University but did not matriculate at Southeastern University following high school. The Registrar identified eligible students using the Banner Student Information System at Southeastern University. First-year students who had not reached the age of 18 were excluded from participating in the study. After identifying eligible participants, the Registrar sent an email to potential participants inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix A). The email included a link to a Qualtrics survey (Appendix B) for the interested students to volunteer to participate and provide demographic information. After receiving initial responses showing interest in the study, I screened and selected potential participants. I emailed the potential participants and scheduled a time to conduct the interviews.
Data Collection Methods

Using a constructivist paradigm, data were collected through personal interviews; listening to the participants’ experiences. This method allowed participants to share their thoughts and perceptions regarding their dual enrollment experience. Through a constructivist paradigm, it was important that I understood the lives and experiences of the research participants (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). Thirteen participants were selected for personal interviews: four who earned dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University and enrolled as first-year students at Southeastern University following high school, four who earned dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University but did not enroll as a first-year student after high school, and five first-year students who enrolled at Southeastern University but earned dual enrollment credit by being enrolled at different institutions. Before participating in interviews, the participants were asked to complete an informed consent form (Appendix C) that described the purpose and procedures of the study, listed any potential risks, and provided contact information for the researcher.

Moustakas (1994) stated, “phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry” (p. 59). The interviews were in a semi-structured format with open-ended questions to allow for the participants’ to share as much as they wanted about their experiences. The same open-ended questions were asked in the personal interviews with each participant (Appendix D). The questions were grounded in literature and written to determine the important aspects of the participants’ experiences and to ensure the participants provided a rich description on the phenomenon in order to address the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Using the Happenstance Learning Theory as a framework, the responses to the
questions helped me understand the participants’ decision-making choices regarding their college and career selection.

The participants taking part in personal interviews were allowed to select an interview location convenient to them and where they felt most comfortable. The locations they could choose from included the student center, the Office of Admissions, the library, and the coffee shop. I selected a space in each of these locations that provided privacy and confidentiality. Due to location and proximity, the participants not enrolled at the research site were interviewed by phone. The participants were given an option of being interviewed by phone or Skype. They each selected phone and the interviews were scheduled and conducted at a time convenient for the participants. I developed rapport with the participants at the beginning of the interviews by engaging in general conversation before asking the interview questions. During the personal interviews, I engaged the participants in dialogue and asked them to describe their dual enrollment experience. The personal interviews each lasted approximately 45 minutes. A digital audio recorder was used to record the interviews. At the end of each interview, I informed the participants that they would receive an email from me with the transcription of the interview and my analysis of their experiences. Upon completion of the interviews, the data were transcribed. As an incentive for participating in the study, each participant was given a $10.00 gift card after completing the interview.

Data Analysis

Phenomenology is concerned with the wholeness of the participants’ experiences and examines the phenomenon from different angles and perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). The data were collected from the participants’ stories through interviews. During the
interviews, I listened for commonalities between the participants. I began analyzing the data by transcribing the interviews. I used transcription software to transcribe the audio recordings. I then reviewed the transcripts multiple times to begin understanding the students’ experiences from their participation in dual enrollment. I highlighted quotes that expressed the students’ experiences that related to the interview questions. As I read the transcripts, I looked for codes line-by-line to promote a more trustworthy analysis (Saldana, 2016). During the coding process, I created a framework of codes to be used for comparing the material from the different transcripts. Next, I organized and coded the data into categories based on words and phrases using open coding. Open coding, also referred to as initial coding, breaks qualitative data down into parts and then examines the data, looking for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). Categories were determined based on information collected from the participants’ experiences. The categories included: advantages, advice, effects on major, affordability, balance, challenges, characteristics, college search, expectations, preparation, reasons to leave, reasons to stay, and why dual enrollment. After initial coding of the data, I looked for recurring words in order to identify emerging themes using analytical coding. My initial themes were: personal growth and development, financial benefits, academic impacts, barriers to student participation, and college admission and institution selection. Analytic coding is also referred to as concept coding and assigns “meso or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress” (Saldana, 2016, p. 119).

Qualitative studies use inductive and deductive analysis to build and support themes and to determine if additional information is needed (Creswell, 2014). In inductive analysis, the researcher collects data to build concepts or theories and then
groups the data into categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In deductive analysis, the researcher looks for additional data or evidence to support their categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used an inductive data analysis process to establish a comprehensive set of themes. I created tables in Microsoft Word for the different categories to be used for organizing the data and codes. I then used deductive analysis to determine if the themes discovered could be used to support Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) and be used to answer the research questions. The framework was initially used to help form the interview questions and was subsequently used to help analyze the participants’ responses.

The final five themes identified included: 1) college preparedness, 2) financial incentives, 3) college readiness, 4) challenges encountered, and 5) college selection. Framing the questions around the theory helped to identify if the participants’ experiences either supported or did not support the existing literature. The themes I developed from the data indicated chance events did influence the students’ college admission and career decisions and supported the Happenstance Learning Theory.

**Protection of Subjects**

I anticipated minimal risks in the research study; however, participants were able to withdraw themselves from the study at any time. Throughout the study, confidentiality was maintained by keeping the participants’ identities anonymous. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym during the data collection process and only the researcher had access to the pseudonyms. The audio recordings were labeled using the pseudonyms as well. The participants’ information and the digital recordings were stored on a password
protected computer. These safety precautions were outlined in the consent form (Appendix C) that each participant signed before participating in the interviews.

**Trustworthiness and Positionality**

To ensure validity and reliability in my data collection and analysis process, I practiced triangulation. Triangulation is a strategy to increase credibility and validity by using more than one method, more than one source of data, multiple theories, or using multiple investigators (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the data collection process, I kept detailed field notes and a reflexive journal of the details and process of the study. I also incorporated member checking to ensure the data was reliable and credible. The participants were emailed the transcripts and data analysis and were asked to review my analysis and confirm that I had interpreted their experiences accurately. All of the participants responded positively that the transcripts and my interpretation of their analysis was accurate. I used the same interview protocol for all of the participants by asking each of them the same interview questions. By checking one method against another, it provided consistency in my data collection method.

Researcher reflexivity is the awareness that a researcher has on how their personal influences including race, gender, social class, background, and sexual orientation may play a part in their study and research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Part of my responsibility at my current institution is to serve as the dual enrollment coordinator. My daily involvement in this area has driven me to want to know more about students’ dual enrollment experiences and what impact it has on their college admissions decision. Before beginning my research, it was important that I understood not only my investment in my topic but also the reasons why I wanted to study this area and how my identities
impacted my research process. Jones, Torres, and Armino (2006) stated, “how one responds to those involved in the study and the topic itself is probably the most elusive but important criterion of goodness or worthy research” (p. 112). As a researcher, I needed to recognize my own identities and perspectives before working with research participants.

Luttrell (2010) stated, “The way we describe ourselves and others involves theoretical as well as rhetorical consideration” (p. 470). Our identities are constructed by influences from sociocultural conditions, family backgrounds, and everyday experiences (Jones & McEwen, 2000). My social and professional identities influence my role as a researcher in a number of ways including my ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college student status.

Even though my parents were not college educated, they were hard-working individuals and I was very privileged and blessed to be in the middle class. For me, going to college was not an option. It was grounded in me from childhood that I would attend college after high school. I believe this firm foundation of the importance of education only helped to strengthen my ties to my research topic. As a first generation college student myself, I understand the many challenges that students face including academic and social experiences, as well as financial and emotional difficulties (Lightweis, 2014). This includes knowing what to expect from the college experience, learning how to navigate the different processes and campus procedures, learning how to study, and becoming engaged on campus through co-curricular opportunities. The transition of becoming a college student can be stressful and overwhelming for students who come from families that lack the knowledge about navigating the admissions and
financial aid process. Recognizing these moments from my own experience helps me relate to the students from similar backgrounds that I work with each day. Being a first-generation college student, now working on my third degree, is a major part of my identity. Some of my research participants may also be first-generation college students and understanding and relating to their struggles enhances my connection to the research.

Professionally, I believe that I am in a position to not only give the students an opportunity to pursue their dreams but also the encouragement and support that is so desperately needed during a transitional time in their lives. As a student affairs professional in enrollment management, I am committed to growing the University but I am also committed to student learning. My presumption is that if a student makes a connection to the University or to a certain faculty member, they will choose to stay at the institution to further their education. Based on conversations with students that I have advised and taught during the freshmen orientation course, my assumption is that students who do not make a connection are not retained and will earn their dual enrollment credit while in high school and then move on to another institution to complete their degree. However, there may be other reasons that students choose not to matriculate at the same institution where they earned their dual enrollment credit.

Deaux (1993) stated “social and personal identity are fundamentally interrelated. Personal identity is defined, at least in part, by group memberships, and social categories are infused with personal meaning” (p. 5). Not only advising, but witnessing the impact that dual enrollment has on a student’s life and seeing them succeed has made me passionate about my research topic. However, it was important that I bracketed my
experiences working with dual enrolled students so I could be open to the participants’ experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Chapter Summary

To address the research questions proposed in this study, a qualitative research design using phenomenology was used for understanding the experiences of dual enrolled students. This research study gathered data through personal interviews at a small, public, four-year university in a rural area of the Southeastern United States. To collect the data, 13 participants were interviewed in a semi-structured format using open-ended questions. The transcripts and data analysis were shared with each participant to confirm their experiences had been interpreted accurately. The data collected provided descriptive and detailed information that was used to identify emerging themes among the participants’ experiences.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The number of high school students taking advantage of the opportunity to earn college credits through dual enrollment continues to increase each year. This qualitative research study was designed to examine the dual enrollment experiences of first-year students and the influence it may have had on their college admission decision. A lot of research has been conducted on dual enrollment but almost none exists on how it may affect a student’s decision on where they choose to attend college following high school. I began with a phenomenological study but after spending time with the participants and listening to their stories; my interests became more aligned with representing the participants’ issues and their experiences. After listening to the participants’ stories and analyzing the data, I have changed my methodology from a phenomenological study to a basic exploratory qualitative study in order to stay true to the participants rather than the constructs of a phenomenological study. In a basic exploratory qualitative study, a researcher is interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of a basic exploratory or interpretive research study is to “understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) was used as a framework to understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of former dual enrolled students. The theory was used to determine if a chance event may have influenced the student’s
decision on where to attend college following high school. Using the constructivist paradigm, I sought to understand the lives and experiences of former dual enrolled students during their time taking college courses as high school students. To gain insight into the participants’ experiences, the researcher used personal interviews for data collection to determine how the students described their dual enrollment experience.

The research findings are presented in two sections: participant profiles and experiences, followed by themes. The first section presents the participant profiles with descriptions about each participant, why they chose to participate in dual enrollment, the challenges they encountered, and what influence, if any, dual enrollment had on their college selection following high school. Participant demographic profiles are listed in Table 1 with a list of the participant’s age, race, gender, the number of credit hours earned through dual enrollment, the location of where they took their dual enrollment courses, the type of institution they attended for dual enrollment, and if they are currently enrolled at the same institution where they participated in dual enrollment. The participant profiles are categorized by groups based on where they earned their dual credit and where they chose to continue their postsecondary education following high school. Group A consists of the participants who took dual enrollment courses at Southeastern University and continued there as a first-year student following high school. Group B consists of the participants who took dual enrollment courses at Southeastern University but matriculated at other institutions after high school. The participants in Group C are first-year students at Southeastern University but earned their dual enrollment credit at other institutions. The second section describes emergent themes and includes narratives from interview data. The themes identified include college
preparedness, financial incentives, college readiness, challenges encountered, and college selection.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of credit hours earned in dual enrollment</th>
<th>Location of courses</th>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Enrolled at same institution as dual enrollment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>college campus, high school, online</td>
<td>4-year public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>College campus, online</td>
<td>4-year public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>College campus</td>
<td>4-year public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cody</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>College campus, online</td>
<td>4-year public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group B</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>college campus, high school, online</td>
<td>private and 4-year public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>4-year public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
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<td>4-year public</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group C</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>technical</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>college campus, high school, online</td>
<td>technical</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
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<td>private</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shay</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>online</td>
<td>2-year public</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>College campus</td>
<td>2-year public</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Profiles and Experiences

To conduct the study, thirteen participants were selected through purposeful sampling and each volunteered to share their experience. Each participant participated in dual enrollment as a high school student and earned a minimum of six credit hours. Each participant was given a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality. The participants included five males and eight females. All of the participants are currently in their first year of college as a full-time, first-year student after completing high school. The sample included first-year students who took dual enrollment courses at Southeastern University and chose to continue their education there following high school, first-year students at Southeastern University who did not take their dual enrollment courses there, and first-year students who participated in dual enrollment at Southeastern University but chose to attend a different institution following high school. The number of college credit hours earned by the participants during their participation in dual enrollment ranged from 10 to 37 credit hours.

Susan

Susan and her twin brother both participated in dual enrollment at Southeastern University, taking the same courses and earning 21 credit hours each. They had a blend of course delivery through college classes taught at the high school, courses on the college campus, and some courses online. During their junior year in high school, Susan and her brother took courses both at the high school and on the college campus. They found it difficult to juggle their schedules and commute the thirty minutes to the college. They decided to take only the college courses offered at the high school for their senior year. When applying to colleges, Susan did not get accepted into her first-choice school
and decided to stay at Southeastern University following high school. She stated that it was easier being familiar with her current institution already, it was affordable, and she was offered an academic scholarship. She also chose to live on campus instead of commuting. Her brother chose to attend a different institution. Susan believes that dual enrollment had an influence on her major. She originally wanted to major in English, but after taking the English courses, she realized that was not what she wanted to study.

**Sam**

Sam is an 18-year old, Hispanic male who earned 9 college credit hours through AP courses during his junior year of high school but wanted to earn as much as he could by being a full-time college student his senior year. He earned 24 credit hours through dual enrollment. For his interview, Sam and I met in the library on campus. When I asked Sam what institutions could do to encourage more students to participate in dual enrollment, the idea he shared was to provide transportation. I was taken back a little and realized this contributed to the scheduling issues I often had when advising Sam. Serving as his dual enrollment advisor at Southeastern University, I often found Sam to be a challenging advisee when it came to scheduling his courses. Transportation had been a problem for Sam and he was not able to take courses on the college campus unless he could take the same courses as his friend who was willing to give him a ride to campus. After finishing high school, Sam decided to stay at Southeastern University because he believes it is a good school, he wants to finish up his core, and he is already familiar with the campus. He had a great dual enrollment experience and found the institution to have an environment that he enjoyed. Like several other participants, Sam believes dual enrollment did impact his choice of major. He originally wanted to major
in mathematics but found the math courses he took during dual enrollment to be extremely difficult. Sam shared, “When I took my college classes I realized how hard math was and that I would have to take calculus. That’s a nightmare and I didn’t want to do that.” During that time, he also took a computer course that he enjoyed and has since declared his major to be information technology. I asked Sam about the most challenging part of dual enrollment and he stated, “the most challenging part was the shift in the skill level. When you’re in high school you just pay attention, that’s it. I had to actually study for college. I got my first C and I realized, oh boy, I have to study.”

**Allison**

For her interview, I also met with Allison in the library on the Southeastern University campus. Allison is an 18-year old White female who had to commute thirty minutes to the college campus to participate in dual enrollment. Immediately, I recognized that she was no longer the quiet, shy advisee I had met last year. Allison was homeschooled most of her life and it was during her dual enrollment experience that she was awakened socially. Having been homeschooled provided the biggest challenge for her as she learned how to maneuver not only being in college but being in a classroom setting and having someone other than her mother as her teacher. Her mother had suggested that she try dual enrollment during her senior year and at first, she was reluctant but gave it a try and earned 10 college credit hours, all on campus at Southeastern University. Allison felt that dual enrollment prepared her well for her first year in college. She did not apply to any other colleges or universities because she was already enrolled, had made friends on campus, and had made connections with several of her instructors. Again, Allison believed that dual enrollment did influence her choice of
major. She stated that she had always wanted to be a veterinarian, but it was during her
dual enrollment biology course that she changed her mind. She was also taking a
computer course as well and enjoyed the class. She had some past experience with
computers but taking the college course gave her a better appreciation for it, and she
changed her major to information technology with a concentration in multimedia.

Cody

I interviewed Cody one afternoon in my office and he still had that easy, laid back
personality he has always had since I met him two years ago when he first began the dual
enrollment program at Southeastern University. Cody began taking the college classes
after he first tried AP courses. He stated that he had taken two AP courses in high school
but only earned the passing score to receive college credit for one of the courses. It was
after that when he decided to take only college courses through dual enrollment. Cody is
a 19-year old White male who earned 19 credit hours by taking classes on the college
campus and online. Like Sam, Cody also found transportation and balancing his
schedule to be a challenging part of being a dual enrolled student. When going through
the college admissions search and application process, Cody was accepted to his first-
choice school, an institution much larger than Southeastern University, after being
defered initially. However, he decided to continue his studies where he was already
enrolled. Leaving home would have cost significantly more, and Cody felt that he could
still receive a great education at a lower cost by staying where he was and commuting
from home. He stated,

Dual enrollment gets you in the hang of things. I already knew where everything
was by the time I graduated high school and came here. Honestly, going from
high school to college, once you get the first semester or two of dual enrollment out of the way, you feel comfortable and you don’t get hit with that freshman feel of going to college. You’re already used to the campus, where everything is at, and the people.

However, when Cody talks to his friends who went away college, he believes he is missing part of the college experience. He received enough scholarship money to cover his tuition and fees but is considering moving into the campus residence halls if he can secure the funds to do so. Along with many others who were interviewed, Cody felt dual enrollment had an impact on his academic major. He changed his major from computer science to pre-management with a minor in information technology after struggling to pass his dual enrollment calculus class.

Anna

Anna had a unique dual enrollment experience taking courses from two different institutions while she was still in high school. During her junior year in high school, Anna took college courses offered at her high school through high school teachers that had been hired as adjunct instructors. The high school had partnered with a small, private institution to offer the courses at the high school. However, during her senior year, Anna wanted to be challenged and took all of her courses at Southeastern University, a 4-year public institution. She found learning how to study for a college class was the hardest part of being a dual enrollment student. She earned a total of 29 credit hours during dual enrollment, 22 of those at the University. When considering where to continue her education, Anna thought about staying at the University because she was already comfortable with the institution. However, she wanted to be further
away from home. She did not get accepted into her first-choice school but chose to matriculate at another 4-year university in the same town as her desired school with intentions of transferring after her first year. Since Anna is not currently enrolled at Southeastern University, I gave her the option of a Skype or phone interview and she chose to be interviewed over the phone. It seemed like she was apologetic for not attending Southeastern University after high school and I had to assure her that we support students in what is best for their individual journeys.

Joey

Joey is an 18-year old African-American male who participated in dual enrollment at Southeastern University but desired to attend a much larger institution following high school. His father was a teacher at the local high school and served as an adjunct instructor for the university. Joey’s younger brother has also been participating in dual enrollment. Joey took college courses offered at the high school and a few courses on the college campus and earned 28 credit hours through dual enrollment. Joey found the difficulty level of the college course content to be the most challenging part of his experience. He shared that he had to spend more time and attention focusing on his dual enrollment courses. During his college search, Joey knew he wanted to be in Atlanta and chose to apply only to schools in that area. He shared, “I was looking at schools in Georgia where I would have the HOPE scholarship but also places with large populations.” His decision on where to attend was a financial one and he chose the least expensive one to attend. Joey felt strongly that his participation in dual enrollment helped prepare him for the transition of being at a smaller institution to now being at a very large university. However, one concern he shared with me during the interview was
that he is still waiting to see if some of his credits earned during dual enrollment are going to be accepted at his current institution.

Sally

When she was in high school, Sally had to move to a new town when her mother accepted a faculty position at Southeastern University. Sally was very unhappy with the local high school and chose to participate in dual enrollment as a way to avoid being on the high school campus. Sally stated, “I am just very grateful that I had the opportunity to do something like dual enrollment because it really made a difference in my overall happiness of where I was. Being able to have that option was just really, really great.” She shared that what she enjoyed most about her dual enrollment experience was learning from the college professors and witnessing the passion they had for their respective disciplines. It was from one of her professors that she decided what she wanted her academic major to be in college. When asked how dual enrollment challenged her, Sally recalled that she had to become more self-disciplined, prepare earlier for assignments, and manage her time better. Looking forward to high school graduation, she knew she did not want to stay at her current institution. She wanted something much larger and possibly out of state. During her senior year in high school, Sally applied and was accepted to 10 different institutions, two in Georgia and eight out-of-state. She stated that she believed participating in dual enrollment helped her to get accepted to the institutions. Due to the financial benefits of staying in Georgia, she narrowed her search down to the two where she had applied and been accepted. She was intimidated by the larger university but realized that dual enrollment had prepared her for the challenge. She is happy with her decision, all of her credits transferred, and she feels that by taking
college courses in high school she now has the flexibility and time to explore other interests.

**Dylan**

Dylan was another former advisee of mine during his time at Southeastern University. Dylan is a 19-year old White male who was very involved in co-curricular activities in high school. He participated in dual enrollment because he knew he wanted to leave home after high school and wanted to offset some of the future costs and he also wanted to have an idea of what college was going to be like. However, Dylan shared that he felt he still received a genuine college experience through dual enrollment. Dylan was very involved in co-curricular activities in high school, and with dual enrollment his time management skills had to be improved so he could balance and participate in other things. He believes dual enrollment also prepared him for the college classroom setting and prepared him to engage in intelligent conversations with his classmates and peers. Dylan shared,

Some students may underestimate their capabilities, and they need something like dual enrollment to show them that they can succeed in the college setting, or they need dual enrollment to see that maybe they need to put a little more effort into their studies if they want to pursue a college career.

There were incentives for Dylan to stay at his current institution after high school, such as the financial benefits and being close to home. However, he wanted to get out of his comfort zone and see how ready he was for a larger university. He wanted a larger university but not larger classroom sizes. During the college admissions process, Dylan spent time making sure the college courses he had already taken would transfer to his
new institution. Finally, Dylan talked about the advantages of having taken dual
enrollment courses like being able to register before many of his peers because of the
hours he had already earned. Dylan earned 15 credit hours through dual enrollment and
took all of his courses on the college campus.

Sarah

Sarah is an 18 year old African-American female who participated in dual
enrollment through her local technical college while she was in high school. The
interview took place in the coffee shop on campus where I realized quickly the location
was very loud and distracting. However, the environment did not deter Sarah. She was
very friendly and open to sharing her experiences about dual enrollment. Sarah chose to
participate in dual enrollment because of the freedom and flexibility that it provided her.
Her family relied on her a lot during high school and with dual enrollment, she had more
flexibility in her schedule that allowed her to drive her dad to and from work. She talked
a lot about finances and considered staying at the technical college after high school but
ultimately wanted to leave home to finish her college education. During her college
search, Sarah was considering two different 4-year universities and it was during the
college visit that she decided on where to attend. She wanted a university where she
could live on campus but still be close to home and one that was affordable for her
family. Sarah stated,

I wanted to be at a university because at the local technical college you have to
stay at home and they don’t have dorms. You don’t really get to mingle with
other people. Coming here I have more freedom and responsibility and I’m not
depending on my parents for every little thing. I’m learning to be on my own.
As a dual enrolled student, Sarah found it difficult to find the time to talk to her college instructors because of juggling her schedule. She stated that she earned 37 credit hours during dual enrollment but only 19 of those hours transferred and were accepted by her chosen institution.

Emma

Emma was encouraged to participate in dual enrollment by her mother. Like Sarah, she also attended a technical college while in high school but is now enrolled as a first-year student at Southeastern University. She liked the freedom that being dual enrolled provided; however, she found it challenging to still be able to participate in co-curricular activities at the high school. She took courses on the college campus, courses offered at the high school, and online courses. In addition to her high school and college courses, she also held a part-time job while in high school and volunteered locally in her community. While earning credit for academic core courses, Emma became a certified nursing assistant through dual enrollment at the technical college. Taking these courses solidified her desire to be a nursing major. During her college admissions search, Emma desired to go to college out-of-state but ultimately chose Southeastern because of its affordability and nursing program. She felt that dual enrollment had a strong impact on her major which influenced what school she chose to attend after high school. Being able to experience courses related to her major field got her excited to be in college courses with other students who share the same career interests.

Chris

For his dual enrollment experience, Chris only took courses offered on his high school campus. Chris attended a small, private high school, and the school partnered
with a small, private institution to offer the college courses. The college hired high school teachers as adjunct instructors to teach the courses. Chris participated in dual enrollment because the courses were easily available but still offered a new academic challenge that he liked. His initial thought was to get ahead and earn some college credits before he graduated. However, he also liked the academic benefits offered by taking dual enrollment courses. His high school weighted the college courses giving him a higher grade point average (GPA). He stated that his high school teachers were harder in the college courses but he felt that his classmates became closer as a group. Like Anna, Chris also found it challenging to learn new ways of studying for his college classes. Dual enrollment did not have an impact on where he chose to attend college. Since he never attended the courses on the college campus, there was no familiarity or attachment to the institution. There was also very little interaction with anyone from the college. Having always been at a small, private school, Chris knew he wanted something larger for his college experience. One of the courses he took through dual enrollment was biology. He fell in love with the field and looked for institutions with good biology and science programs. Chris shared,

Dual enrollment influenced what I was looking for because I took dual enrollment math, English, and then also biology. After I took the dual enrollment biology I became interested in the field of science and nursing. It kind of pushed me towards colleges that were nursing as well as science oriented.

Chris chose to attend Southeastern University as a first-year student entering with 20 credit hours previously earned.
Shay

Shay is an 18-year old African-American female who chose to attend a small, public 2-year institution for dual enrollment. However, she took all her college courses online and earned 18 credit hours. Shay expressed that she chose dual enrollment over taking advanced placement (AP) courses because she wanted to be guaranteed to earn the college credit. She believed that it was to her advantage to take the college courses because with the AP courses, she would have needed to take the AP exam and meet the required score to earn the credit. Shay enjoyed her dual enrollment experience but found it challenging to take all online courses. She stated that she tried to stay ahead in the coursework but would often lose focus and motivation of keeping up with the work on her own. I asked Shay if she could do it over again would she still take all of her courses online. She stated yes, even though it was challenging it was still better for her to take them online and be able to participate in other activities at the high school as well as have a job. Shay believed participating in dual enrollment did influence her college search process in some ways. She was participating in dual enrollment at a small, public institution and wanted to continue at a similar institution. However, she did not want to stay at her current institution because they did not offer her major and she wanted to attend a 4-year university. During her college search, she looked for schools that were small, had chemistry programs, and were affordable. Several of Shay’s teachers had attended Southeastern University and encouraged her to visit the campus. She chose Southeastern University because of its size, affordability, and the fact that she was awarded an academic scholarship.
Dana

Dana is a 19-year old White female who earned 23 credit hours at a 2-year public institution located approximately 30 miles from Southeastern University. I had not met Dana prior to our interview and was surprised at how open and honest she was in sharing her experiences about her former institution. As the interview progressed, Dana became bitter as she reflected on her high school and former postsecondary institution. She chose to participate in dual enrollment because her older brother had done so, and she wanted to get ahead in her college career because of the financial benefits. Dana found the most challenging part of dual enrollment to be working with her high school guidance counselor. She stated that she received more help through the process from the dual enrollment coordinator at the college than she did her counselor. She felt that the process of becoming a dual enrolled student was hard for her getting started but once she began taking the college courses, she had much praise for her college instructors. Dana attended a public high school with a student population that was 80% African-American; however, Dana is white. She liked the freedom of being able to express her opinions more openly in the college classroom environment and felt more respected by her peers. Whereas, she had much praise for her instructors and enjoyed the classroom setting, Dana was not happy with the campus in general and found the administrative processes to be challenging. She considered matriculating at her current institution after high school, but the institution had begun going through consolidation and she did not like the changes that were occurring. Dana applied for admission to several institutions in the state but selected Southeastern University because of its proximity being close to home. During our conversation, Dana made comments about new student orientation. She believes that
former dual enrolled students, wherever they choose to attend, are already acclimated to the college environment and need to spend more time at orientation focusing on their academic paths.

**Participant Experiences by Group**

It is important to examine the experiences of the participants by looking at the three different groups of participants: those who took dual enrollment courses at Southeastern University and chose to continue their education there following high school (Group A), the students who participated in dual enrollment at Southeastern University but chose to attend a different institution after high school (Group B), and the participants who did not earn their dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University (Group C). Susan, Sam, Allison, and Cody earned their dual enrollment credit at Southeastern University and continued their education there following high school making up Group A. The participants in Group A all stated being familiar and comfortable with the institution played a role in their decision to continue their postsecondary education at Southeastern University. All four of the students changed their academic major during their dual enrollment experience. When looking at where the participants in Group A took their courses, they all took dual enrollment courses on the college campus. We can infer that this supports the idea that they were comfortable with their surroundings and made connections with faculty, staff, and other students on campus.

Group B consisted of the four students who took their dual enrollment courses at Southeastern University but did not matriculate at the same institution after high school. Due to proximity to my institution, all of the participants in Group B chose to be
interviewed by phone. However, I was familiar with each participant from having served as their academic advisor during their participation in the dual enrollment program at Southeastern University. Anna, Joey, Sally, and Dylan all took dual enrollment courses on campus at Southeastern University and earned a minimum of 15 credit hours each. Currently, they are first-year students at institutions much larger than Southeastern University. During their interviews, they indicated they were happy with their dual enrollment experience but ultimately wanted to attend a larger university as well as gain the experience of going away to college.

Group C consisted of Sarah, Emma, Chris, Shay, and Dana. Each of these students attended different institutions for dual enrollment prior to matriculating at Southeastern University as first-year students. When looking at where this group of participants earned their dual enrollment credit, they all attended institutions smaller than Southeastern University. Sara and Emma attended technical colleges, Shay and Dana attended 2-year institutions, and Chris earned his dual enrollment credit at a small, private college. The location of where the five participants in Group C took their courses was not consistent among the group with some taking courses at the high school, some at the college campus, and some online. Therefore, it cannot be inferred that location influenced their college selection. Shay and Chris did not take any courses on the college campus possibly supporting the notion that they did not make a connection to the postsecondary institution. However, each of the participants in Group C expressed the same sentiment of wanting to leave home for college. Even though these participants did not attend Southeastern University for dual enrollment, they still described their experiences similar to the students in the other two groups. They expressed how they
believed dual enrollment better prepared them for college, what to expect, and helped to build their self-confidence while improving their time-management. In addition, they shared similar challenges in regards to transportation, family obligations, and finances. They chose to participate in dual enrollment for many of the same reasons as the participants in the other two groups including to get an early start to earning college credits while saving on future costs.

The three groups of participants had different reasons for choosing their postsecondary institutions after high school but still shared similar dual enrollment experiences. Dual enrollment helped the participants to learn how to become college students, earn college credits early, improve their time management and study skills, and influenced their academic majors. All of the students stated they had positive dual enrollment experiences and would recommend that other high school students participate in dual enrollment.

**Themes**

After careful review of the data, five themes emerged that express the lived experiences of the thirteen students who participated in the study. Through the use of open coding followed by analytic coding to interpret and make meaning of the participants’ experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), common themes were determined and developed using the data collected. These themes are 1) college preparedness, 2) financial incentives, 3) college readiness, 4) challenges encountered and 5) college selection.
College Preparedness

The theme of college preparedness emerged during the interviews as participants described building their confidence, improving their time management skills, learning to adjust, and becoming prepared for college-level work while taking dual enrollment courses. During his interview, Dylan stated, “I like the fact that I got a genuine college experience while I was in high school. Dual enrollment let me try out college while I was in high school and get an idea of what was going to happen after I graduate.” Sally shared,

Getting the experience of being in a college class and dealing with college professors, I really felt like that really prepared me to get an idea of what it was going to be like once I actually got to college. I wasn’t as passionate about school when I was in high school until I started dual enrollment and took classes. That became really meaningful to me. It re-sparked that interest in getting an education and wanting to do more.

Like Dylan and Sally, other participants had those same feelings of being more prepared for college after they participated in dual enrollment. Anna expressed that for her it was about preparing to leave home. She had already adjusted to the college classroom environment and could focus on adjusting to living away from home. Sally also believed dual enrollment helped her to grow as a student. She stated, “I realized that I really enjoy getting an education when I have passionate professors and it didn’t become so much of a chore as it did become something that was more interesting and fascinating in some ways.”
Experiencing college early as a high school student gave the participants confidence to handle college-level coursework. For Chris, it was about easing his fear of college and the academic environment. He shared, “I was so nervous initially about going into college, but I felt a little bit more confident in my ability because I did know that I had done well in the college classes I had taken in high school. I wasn’t as worried or scared as some people who may not have experienced the classes early.” Chris, Sally, Sam, and Cody expressed how their confidence grew and how they matured during their dual enrollment experience. They believed their experiences in dual enrollment matured them academically. Cody stated, “If you’re taking a college course, you should be on the same level mentally, at least, as the other college students.”

The importance of time management was mentioned by many of the students interviewed. They feel their time management skills were enhanced by their participation in dual enrollment and learning how to balance their time between high school classes, college classes, and co-curricular activities was important. For Joey it was the commuting time, “driving back and forth between the campuses and trying to get to places on time was difficult.” Dana and Allison discussed how they learned to plan ahead and balance their time more effectively. For some of the other students, managing their time was more about self-discipline and finding time to study. Dylan stated, “Time management has never been that big of an issue for me, but with taking the college classes, I had to see just how far I could push my time management capabilities.” Sally shared,

Self-discipline was hard because I had to learn that early with assignments, with professors, with managing different class times. It wasn’t an initial seven or
eight-hour day. Time management was probably the hardest part. When it comes to study skills, time management was helpful with structuring out when I needed to study for exams and how long it was going to take. I had to learn to pick studying over doing something fun. It definitely helped me with self-discipline.

Participating in dual enrollment can provide students with more independence and freedom. Many of the students interviewed expressed how that independence promoted their development as a student. Sarah stated, “With dual enrollment, I got to be more independent and learn college before I actually went to college. It was like a transition before a transition.”

**Financial Incentives**

The cost of attending college was a concern shared by many of the participants. The expense of attending college can be a financial burden for many students and families. Dual enrollment can be a way to offset many of those future expenses. The majority of the participants talked about finances during their interviews. For Sarah, it was about taking the financial burden off her parents. Like several other participants, Dylan knew he would be leaving home to attend college. He shared, “I knew I wanted to go away to college and it was going to be considerably more expensive. I decided to take a few dual enrollment classes so it would offset some of the costs.”

Dana spoke openly about her financial situation and recalled how participation in dual enrollment gave her an opportunity to begin her college career without the financial pressures of paying for it. She stated,

I’m broke. I’ve always been broke so it was a way for me to get a jump start in college. With dual enrollment you don’t have to worry about getting
scholarships. You don’t have to worry about grants. You don’t have to worry about paying for school. You just have to worry about maintaining the participation requirements. It means a lot for students that they are now given the opportunity. It’s an opportunity for a student who might not be able to afford college or might not think they will ever get into a secondary institution. That’s one thing I think a lot of students struggle with after high school. They’ve been going to college but now they are having to think about how they are going to pay for college.

With dual enrollment tuition costs, fees, and books covered by state appropriations at no expense to the students, the researcher wanted to know the students’ thoughts on this. Overwhelmingly, the participants were thankful to the state legislators for providing them the opportunity to earn college credits at no cost. Anna shared, “I think it’s awesome the state pays for your tuition and books, so it gives you an opportunity to get ahead in college.” Dana expressed a more personal opinion, “they don’t know what a difference it can make to a kid who has no idea if they can afford college one day, who doesn’t know what they are going to do with their life.” The data collected from the interviews reflects that many students chose to participate in dual enrollment because of the financial incentives provided through the program. The financial incentives have positive impacts and may provide short and long-term assistance to many students and families that have difficulty paying for postsecondary education.
Regarding their academic experiences during their participation in dual enrollment, the participants shared very positive reflections. Most of the students interviewed reported they performed well academically, and dual enrollment helped to improve their study skills while preparing them for the academic challenges of being a full-time college student. Dual enrollment promotes college readiness and can help students transition seamlessly from high school to college (An & Taylor, 2015). Chris shared, “having to transition from not really studying much to having to learn how to study was one of the more difficult things.” Along with Chris, participating in dual enrollment helped Anna, Emma, and Sam also become more college-ready by improving their study skills. Sam stated,

I think it helped me realize how much I actually did not know about my topics. I thought I knew math and science and everything, but then I took a college course and I realized I haven’t been paying attention this whole time. Now I know and I can study and learn it the way it should be learned.

Anna, Chris, and Emma shared similar views as Sam and discussed how they were able to get by in high school using memorization. Anna shared, “It was different adjusting how to study from high school to college. In high school I could just read over it the night before but in college I need to prepare a couple of days before the test.” For Chris, it was the surprise of the difficulty level of his first college exam that motivated him to change his study habits. Dylan had a similar opinion when he stated, “some students need dual enrollment to see that maybe they need to put a little more effort into their studies if they want to pursue a college career.” After learning how to study, many of the
participants felt more confident about being ready for college. Allison shared, “at first I thought it was going to be scary but after getting good grades my first semester, I’m like okay, I can do this.” Susan expressed how accountability made her more prepared,

   I wasn’t as anxious coming in as a freshman because I already knew what it was like. I was more prepared and better at studying. It helped me to be more accountable for myself. There were a few classes I took that were really hard, some online, but I’m better at studying now.

The academic impact of being in a college classroom environment not only contributed to the students’ ability to learn new study skills but to have further exposure to the college setting and academic expectations. When asked about the differences between the high school classroom environment and the college classroom environment, the participants shared many positive reviews about their college experiences. Joey stated, “The environment in the college classroom is more focused whereas high school can have other distractions. Sometimes you get distracted by high school students that are more immature.” Dana and Dylan reflected on being able to express their opinions differently in the college classroom. Dylan shared,

   The shift in tone from a high school classroom to a college classroom was different. In a high school classroom you know everyone, and you can talk openly, but in a college classroom you may not know everyone and you don’t know what their reaction may be to something you say.

Dana expressed a slightly different view. She stated, “I felt like I had more freedom in the college classroom. You don’t have to worry as much about what you are saying and whether you are hurting someone’s feelings.” The feeling of freedom in the college
classroom was reported in Shay and Susan’s interviews as well. Shay believed the high school classroom was a stricter environment and she liked the freedom the college classes provided. Sally did not have a good experience at her high school and chose to participate in dual enrollment as a way to complete her secondary education somewhere other than the high school setting. She shared,

The public school wasn’t any good and dual enrollment was a better option for me. In the college class, there was a much bigger sense of you behave yourself and listen and have self-discipline. It made it easier to focus and learn.

In a small setting, a college classroom environment can provide a different learning component in the dual enrollment experience. Chris expressed how he liked the closeness of the students in his college classroom and how they became a more “close-knit group” that helped and supported each other through the course.

In addition to the classroom environment, the participants also expressed positive feedback regarding their dual enrollment instructors. They had encouraging experiences communicating with faculty and enjoyed the new learning styles of college pedagogy. During the interviews, the participants were asked to describe the differences between their high school teachers and their college instructors. Joey stated, “college professors are more professional and do their job. It’s understood that though they will teach and lecture, you have to take that and make it your own and study and stuff.” Sam had a similar view when she said, “I would say college is much more higher quality. I had to actually think about what I was doing. The professors made you think outside the box. It was much more challenging than high school.” Shay believed her college instructors were more lenient than her high school teachers; whereas, Emma said, “my college
instructors were a lot more blunt, but they made class a little bit more fun.” Being homeschooled, Allison had a different experience than the other participants. She recalled that her mother had always been her teacher until she began taking college courses, and she liked having a teacher in front of her where she could ask questions. However, she stated, “I really didn’t want to ask my professors anything because they are like scary people being college teachers, but when I finally got up the courage to talk to them, I found out that most of them are pretty nice.” Dylan and Sally both reiterated the fact that their college professors were more focused on academics but still wanted to help students succeed. Dylan stated,

One thing I want to point out is the fact that in high school there is the common belief that professors never care about their students; whereas, high school teachers will help their students along the way. I think that’s a false belief because especially in my dual enrollment experience, all my professors were willing to offer help to those students who sought it out. While they wouldn’t hold your hand like a high school teacher might, a college professor is willing to help you succeed.

In regards to academic major, taking college courses early through dual enrollment had an influence on many of the students’ academic interests. Some of the students interviewed shared they started dual enrollment with an intended academic major but when they began taking the college courses, their interests changed, either from the difficulty of a class, lack of interest in the topic, or from the impression made upon them by a professor. Allison wanted to be a veterinarian but after taking a biology course through dual enrollment, her interest changed. She replied, “I took a biology course and
did pretty well, but I started thinking is this really what I want to do? I started thinking about what a vet had to actually do and realized I could never do that in my life.” After taking a biology course, Chris became more interested in the subject. Cody and Sam struggled in their dual enrollment calculus courses and Cody has since declared a different major that would require less math courses. He stated, “Dual enrollment helped me go ahead and figure out what I needed to do, because when I took calculus, it was not what had imagined I would be doing for a computer science degree.” Susan shared that after taking dual enrollment English courses, she no longer wanted to be an English major. For others taking the dual enrollment courses solidified their interests. Emma had always known she wanted to be a nurse and the opportunity to take the certified nursing assistant courses as a dual enrollment student at her local technical college allowed her to experience nursing courses early. When asked if dual enrollment had an influence on her major, she replied, “it definitely impacted my major. That was when I officially decided that I was going to major in nursing, it was my junior year after I finished my CNA courses.”

Several participants reported they chose to participate in dual enrollment over AP courses because they wanted to be guaranteed to receive the credit earned. Emma shared, "I would rather do dual enrollment and automatically get college credit as opposed to taking AP courses and taking the chance of not getting the college credit. I took two AP courses my sophomore year and did not score high enough on the exams for the college credit. My junior year, I took five college courses through dual enrollment and received credit for all of them."
Taking college courses through dual enrollment may also contribute positively to a student’s GPA. Allison said, “With my college work, I realized that it goes on a transcript and that it actually means something.” Chris liked the benefit of receiving weighted credit in his high school GPA for his dual enrollment courses. He stated, 

My initial thought was to try and get ahead and get some credits before I go to college, but then once I started taking the courses, there were academic benefits to them as well. The grades were weighted, and I ended up with a GPA higher than a 4.0.

Sally has enjoyed the flexibility that earning college credits early has given her, “all of my credits transferred so I have a lot more flexibility to explore other courses and find out what I’m really interested in.” The exposure to the college courses through dual enrollment provided many positive benefits to the participants’ academic success and prepared them to be ready for college.

**Challenges Encountered**

During their interviews, the participants expressed many challenges that were created by being a dual enrollment student. Some of the issues raised by the participants included transportation, time management, being able to be involved, and the role of family and family obligations. Many of these issues created barriers to the students’ engagement and success. In regards to transportation, several of the participants expressed that transportation or lack thereof created a barrier to their participation in dual enrollment. Sam, Cody, and Sarah both expressed how difficult it was for them to get transportation to the college for their dual enrollment courses. When asked how institutions can encourage more students to participate in dual enrollment Sam stated,
I would say one way would be to provide transportation. That was one thing that kind of set me back when I was first doing it because I didn’t have a ride. But then my friend was also taking dual enrollment classes so he drove me here and there. I was very grateful for that so I think transportation would be one thing that would help a lot.

Another issue expressed by many of the students was time management. The participants found it challenging to manage their time for high school classes, college classes, co-curricular activities, and social time. Susan stated, “Trying to juggle my college classes and the things I wanted to do at the high school was stressful.” Joey shared a similar view when he replied, “driving back and forth between the college and the high school and trying to get to everything I needed to be at on time was hard.” Other students expressed this same feeling of not being able to be involved outside of class as well. Emma stated, “I think the most challenging part was wanting to do things at the high school after school but I had class a lot, so that was a struggle.” Dylan shared a similar sentiment about being involved in other activities when he replied,

During my last semester of my senior year I was taking two classes at the college. I would go to the high school in the morning, then to my colleges classes, and then back to the high school for my last class of the day and whatever extracurricular activities I had going on that day. I was really pushing myself.

In regards to family, Sarah and Dana both expressed how dual enrollment impacted their family obligations. Sarah shared that she had her license but did not have her own car and how her family had to overcome this obstacle in order for her to still participate in dual enrollment. She stated,
I had to get up at four in the morning and take my dad to work. Then I would go home and go back to sleep until seven then get up and go to the college. After class, I had to drive all the way back across town to get my dad from work and then drive back to the high school.

Dana was very open in discussing her family life and how it was a part of her dual enrollment experience. She talked about the difficulty of getting started with the program and how her high school guidance counselor needed to meet with her parent and fill out the paperwork. She shared how difficult it was for her mother to take off of work. She stated, “I got really frustrated. It was like all the information I needed they wanted to give to my parents. They were not the ones going to school, I was.”

The participants interviewed were able to overcome these issues and barriers in order to participate in dual enrollment. From catching rides with friends, sharing vehicles with parents, and prioritizing classes and co-curricular activities, the students were able participate in dual enrollment and earn college credits early.

**College Selection**

With this study, I was interested in learning more about the students’ college admission, search, and selection process. When describing their college admission search, the participants expressed how dual enrollment helped them to identify what they were looking for in a college. Sarah said, “It helped me to see what I really wanted in a college, not just academically but socially, everything throughout the school, what events they have, what clubs they have, just different things like that.” Chris also expressed that dual enrollment helped him with what he was looking for in a college. After taking some of the courses and deciding on his major, he began looking for schools that offered the
academic program that he was interested in. Some believed that dual enrollment helped them during the application and acceptance process. Sally stated, “Dual enrollment definitely helped me get into more schools.” Dylan was more focused on the credits transferring and how dual enrollment could help him. He shared,

I took a lot of time trying to see what courses would transfer to the school I was applying to. I had spent so much time in dual enrollment that I did not want to have to back track or repeat any of the classes over again. I was also looking for schools that would accept dual enrollment credits.

Dylan also expressed how he believed participating in dual enrollment made him a more “remarkable student” and that it gave him an advantage over other freshmen during registration.

When asked how much impact the students’ dual enrollment experience had on their decision to attend a particular college, most of the participants responded “none” or “very little.” All of the participants who did not attend Southeastern University as a dual enrollment student, participated in dual enrollment at a technical college, 2-year public institution, or private college. All four of the participants that were dual enrolled at Southeastern University but did not matriculate after high school are now enrolled at larger, 4-year universities.

During many of the interviews, students mentioned wanting to be in a larger city or a bigger school with more students and more opportunities. Joey said, “I was looking at schools in-state, but I wanted to be in a bigger place with a larger population and more opportunities.” Anna and Emma both felt that it was time to leave home after high school. Anna stated, “I wanted to be farther away from home. A bunch of people from
my high school stayed and I felt like it would be the same as high school being with the same people.” There were several reasons that Dana chose not to continue at the same institution as her dual enrollment courses. She replied, “I just wanted to get away from home and I didn’t necessarily like the college I was going to. I also was not keen on a lot of my professors, I didn’t feel like they helped me.” Sally wanted the opportunity to be exposed to more resources both on campus and in the community. She also wanted to attend an institution where the students were “more driven.” Dylan shared a similar opinion,

At the end of the day I just wanted to challenge myself at a larger university and a larger town. I grew up 10 minutes from my last school and it was just the school that was always there so I kind of wanted to get out of my comfort zone and just see how ready I was for the real world.

For Shay, the decision to consider other schools was through encouragement of her high school teachers. She replied, “A lot of my high school teachers went here, and they would tell me about the programs and how nice the people were. That played a big role in my decision to visit and apply here.”

The participants who chose to remain at their current institution where they had earned dual enrollment credit did so for several different reasons including the cost savings, being familiar with the institution already, the proximity of being close to home, or because they did not get accepted into their first-choice or larger university. Susan was one of those students that did not get accepted into the school she really wanted to attend after high school. She also chose to stay at her current institution because she received a scholarship. Susan said, “To be honest, I didn’t get into the college I wanted
to go to, so I decided to stay here and save money and be close to home. It was easier to go here, and I already had the credits.” Emma stayed due to finances but she also liked the fact that she already knew many of the professors. Anna, Allison, and Sam also chose to matriculate at the institution since they were already familiar and comfortable with the campus. Sam said he wanted to complete his core classes and may consider transferring later. Anna stated, “Since I had participated in dual enrollment, I already knew the campus and the online systems. I knew certain professors and was comfortable here.” Allison shared that she did not apply to any other colleges because she was already accepted here and did not want to “go through the torture of anticipating your rejection or acceptance” at another institution. For Cody, several things influenced his decision to continue his college education at this current institution. He replied,

The majority of my decision was based on the fact I had credit here, and it was very close to home, so I would not have to live on campus; only a 10-minute drive. I applied to another school but was deferred admission. I also realized it would take a lot of money to be able to afford it. There’s no reason just to go off somewhere else if you’ve got a good university right here in town, right near home.

Many factors were considered as the participants decided on where they wanted to continue their postsecondary education following high school. Dual enrollment had an influence on those factors including academic preparation, familiarity with the college setting, choice of major, and size of institutions.
Chapter Summary

This chapter provided demographic information on the thirteen participants interviewed and their dual enrollment experiences. The profile information for each participant provided a description of why students chose to participate in dual enrollment, how many credit hours they earned, the challenges they faced during their experience, and where they chose to attend college following high school. Understanding the three different groups of participants was examined for similarities and differences in their experiences. The data collected from the interviews with the participants was used to develop common themes through data analysis and open coding. The themes included college preparedness, financial incentives, college readiness, challenges encountered, and college selection. The participants expressed that a variety of factors in their dual enrollment experience contributed to their improved self-confidence, college readiness, and academic success. Even though not all of the participants persisted at their same institutions following high school, they all had a positive dual enrollment experience.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of former dual enrolled students and to determine if participating in dual enrollment had an influence on the students’ decision of where to continue their postsecondary education following high school. In the previous chapter, I presented the findings regarding the dual enrollment experiences of first-year students, including why they chose to participate in dual enrollment, what challenges they faced, and how dual enrollment influenced their college selection. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1) How did students who were in a dual enrollment program experience the process of transitioning to college after having been dual enrolled?

2) How did dual enrollment influence students’ decision-making regarding where to continue their postsecondary education?

In-depth, personal interviews were conducted with first-year students to better understand their perceptions and lived experiences during their time as a dual enrollment student. This chapter includes a summary and discussion of the findings outlined by themes and includes implications and recommendations for future practice and research for each. The conclusions and recommendations for future study were developed from the research findings.
Summary and Discussion of Findings

This basic exploratory qualitative research study used a constructivist perspective to examine the perceptions, beliefs, and lived experiences of first-year students who participated in dual enrollment during high school and to determine if their learning experiences and environmental conditions contributed to their decision on where to continue their postsecondary education. As is common in qualitative research studies, interviews were conducted with first-year students using open-ended questions. Through these interviews, detailed descriptions were collected regarding the students’ lived experiences. Through the analytic process, an understanding of the experiences was reached and themes were formed.

Thirteen students were interviewed using semi-structured, open-ended questions. Previous research and literature on dual enrollment exists on access, benefits, and academic motivation. This study focused on understanding the experiences of former dual enrolled students and if participation in dual enrollment has an influence on their college selection process. Five themes were determined through open-coding. The themes identified were college preparedness, financial incentives, college readiness, challenges encountered, and college selection.

College Preparedness

Dual enrollment is a way for students to begin earning college credit while still enrolled in high school. Previous research has shown that dual enrollment contributes to students’ self-confidence, improves their time management skills, and prepares them for college academically, socially, and mentally (Karp, 2012). The comments made by the students support Bailey and Karp’s (2013) arguments that credit-based transition
programs prepare students for the academic rigors of college, providing realistic evidence about the skills students need to succeed and to increase students’ motivation.

Participating in dual enrollment builds students’ self-confidence by being exposed to the college class setting early, being taught by college professors, and adjusting to the demands of college-level coursework. Students were unsure of their academic abilities prior to participating in dual enrollment. Several of the participants expressed fear or concern in regards to the coursework or the college instructors before taking the college classes. However, they overcame these fears after being in the college classroom, further supporting the notion that dual enrollment can provide students with the skills and confidence they need to raise their educational aspirations (Hughes, 2010). Dylan, Sally, and Anna shared they felt more prepared after being in the college classroom. Susan stated, “I wasn’t as anxious coming to college because I already knew pretty much what it was like. I was more prepared and I was better at studying on my own and doing things on my own.” Chris talked about having more confidence in his ability to perform well academically because he earned good grades in his dual enrollment courses. Shay felt more prepared for the coursework her first-year in college but had a different view from the other participants when discussing the instructors. She took all of her courses online and did not have the direct interaction with the college instructors. She stressed that she was nervous about interacting with her professors and was unsure of what to expect.

In addition to building self-confidence, students are able to practice and improve their time management skills through participation in dual enrollment. The participants discussed how they had to adjust their time to allow for more preparation and studying for their college courses. They also talked about having to commute between the high
school and college campuses. Emma and Shay both held part-time jobs while in high school. This added another level of needing to manage and balance their time. Emma stated, “I was pretty busy. I had a job and had to work on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It was difficult but I was able to make it work.” Some of the other participants who did not have part-time jobs still had to learn to manage their time between the high school, the college, and participating in co-curricular activities. These sentiments expressed by the participants are consistent with Karp’s (2012) view that when students begin their college journey, they have to learn how to study, how to manage their time, how to navigate new systems and policies, and how to engage in social relationships.

According to Krumboltz (1998), unpredictable social events, educational opportunities and occupational conditions can influence people’s lives and career planning. Dual enrollment promotes social and psychological changes in students such as the confidence to perform in college and the socialization of becoming a college student (An, 2015). The participants interviewed lived extremely busy lives managing their obligations to both the high school and college. They were able to grow and develop into well-rounded students through their time in dual enrollment. Through participation in dual enrollment, students gain confidence in their abilities and are able to build upon their skills to become successful and prepared for college. Completing the college courses successfully contributes positively to the students’ level of confidence. When recruiting students to participate in dual enrollment programs, institutions could use current dual enrolled students to help recruit. College admission and recruitment personnel could invite current and former dual enrolled students to speak about their own experiences at recruitment events. This would allow high school students to imagine
themselves taking college courses and being successful. This practice could also be used
to facilitate interest and increase enrollment in dual enrollment programs. The new
experiences dual enrolled students are being exposed as they become prepared for
postsecondary education can provide chance events that support Krumboltz’s
Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) with influence on their college admission and
career decisions. The students are learning to approach their future decisions with
optimism and positive self-efficacy.

Financial Incentives

Dual enrollment can reduce future costs associated with attending college. While
enrolled as a dual enrollment student, the tuition, fees, and books are generally covered
by state appropriations at little to no cost to the students. This advantage provides an
incentive for many students to participate in the program. Often, students are unsure if
they will be able to afford college. Dana expressed this concern in her interview. She
shared that her family had always struggled financially and she saw that through dual
enrollment she would be able to lift some of the financial burden from her parents. She
discussed how impoverished her hometown is and how dual enrollment can be an
opportunity for many students who may not believe they can afford college. Dana’s story
supports Saenz and Comb’s (2015) notion that dual enrollment can provide an economic
benefit for disadvantaged students that might not be able to obtain a college education.
Dual enrollment can be a gateway to postsecondary education for low-income students,
providing access to higher education for students who otherwise would not attend a
sentiment that dual enrollment can provide low-income students the financial benefit of earning college credits at little to no cost.

In order to increase participation in dual enrollment, it is important for institutions to recognize and promote the financial benefits and incentives of dual enrollment. For low-income students, dual enrollment can provide a significant opportunity to earn college credit at low to no cost as well as reduce future costs of attending college. By observing other low-income students participating in dual enrollment, students may become aware of the opportunity to afford college and perhaps earn a technical or associate’s degree before completing high school. This finding supports the view that dual enrollment provides low-income students a financial opportunity they may not have had otherwise (Howley et. al, 2013). The lack of funds that a student may have for tuition may be a barrier for low-income students trying to go to college. Receiving funding and financial support for dual enrollment could be seen as an unplanned event in a student’s pathway. This new opportunity could change a low-income student’s plan and may significantly affect their future college and career decisions (Hirschi, 2009). Many states are committed to removing tuition burdens for dual enrolled students by providing funding for tuition, fees, and textbooks (Zinth, 2015).

In addition, dual enrollment guarantees the student will earn college credit after completing the course; whereas, taking an AP course does not guarantee the college credit. The student must pay for the AP exam and pass the exam with a required minimum score to earn the credit. Taking dual enrollment courses saves the students money and guarantees they will be awarded the college credit. Postsecondary institutions should be proactive in informing all dual enrollment eligible students and parents of the
financial assistance provided by state legislatures and the financial benefits that participating in dual enrollment can provide.

**College Readiness**

Existing literature on dual enrollment purports that dual enrollment can have many positive impacts on a student academically including college readiness and academic motivation. Dual enrollment helps to improve students’ study skills, prepares them for the college setting, how to learn from college instructors, and makes positive contributions to their grade point average (GPA). These findings are consistent with the literature that dual enrollment helps students develop better study habits, be prepared academically, and impacts GPA (An, 2015; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Hughes, 2010; & Jones, 2014). During the interviews, the participants overwhelmingly expressed that participating in dual enrollment did have an impact on their postsecondary education. Almost all of the participants discussed how dual enrollment influenced their choice of academic major.

Dual enrollment helps students transition academically from high school to college. Dual enrollment is a transitional period where students can learn the norms and behaviors of what it means to be a college student (An, 2015). Entering their first-year, the students already know what to expect and how to study. Chris and Dylan shared how they were surprised by the difficulty of the college courses and how they needed to adjust their study habits. Allison discussed how she became more confident in her academic abilities after earning good grades in her dual enrollment courses. For Susan, it was accountability that led to her being better prepared and better at studying. The experiences shared by the participants are consistent with the literature that dual
enrollment provides realistic expectations of what college will be like and creates a sense of self-accountability for the students to balance the pressure and demands of college (An, 2013).

Taking college courses through dual enrollment helps students acclimate to the college environment. The classroom setting and the environment of being in a college classroom can affect the students academically. Whether it was online or at the college campus, both settings provided a change to the students’ learning environment. This finding supports the statement made by Edwards, Hughes, and Weisberg (2011) that the location of where students take their college courses can impact students’ success and influence their college experience. All eight of the participants who participated in dual enrollment at Southeastern University took courses on the college campus. From the group of students that did not participate in dual enrollment at Southeastern University, only two of the students took courses on their college campus. The other three participants took courses either online or at their high schools. The participants, who took courses on the college campus, shared many positive experiences in reference to their college classrooms. Joey discussed the college providing a more focused environment. The students interviewed discussed the freedom they were afforded in the college classes. Dana and Dylan talked about having more opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions in their college courses.

The instructor teaching the college course can also impact the extent to which a student perceives whether or not they have had an authentic college experience (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). In regards to instructors, the interviewees shared how they enjoyed learning from the college instructors and professors. Joey and Sam discussed the
instructors being more challenging yet more professional than their high school teachers. Allison and Dylan discussed how their college instructors were willing to offer assistance and help students in need. Chris’ dual enrollment courses were taught at his high school by teachers hired by the college as adjunct instructors. However, he stated the instructors tailored the courses to the college expectations and he still found the courses challenging and believed he was still well-prepared for his first-year in college. When teaching a college course, high school teachers have to adjust their pedagogical methods which can affect the perception of the college courses (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011).

Hiring qualified high school teachers to serve as adjunct faculty to teach the college courses is way to provide dual enrollment opportunities to students who may not have the transportation to commute to the postsecondary institution. This can also benefit students and high schools in rural areas that may not be conveniently located near a postsecondary institution. However, some critics argue that college courses taught at the high school by high school instructors are inconsistent in course quality and do not provide the same academic rigor (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013). The adjunct faculty members should be provided with a training session at the institution to learn the policies and procedures of the institution and to understand the vision and values of the postsecondary institution. In addition to learning the policies of the institution, a one-day training session or workshop would provide an opportunity to allow for interactions with new adjunct instructors and academic departments. Members of the institution who would need to be involved in the session might include human resources, academic affairs, department chairs, admissions, and registrar. However, if faculty from the college campus are available and the opportunity exists, the institution
should send faculty from the college to the high school to teach the courses. This practice would provide students with the opportunity to interact with full-time college instructors. At my institution, the academic departments would prefer to send faculty members from the institution to the high schools to teach the dual enrollment courses as opposed to hiring high school teachers as adjunct faculty. Recently, my institution has hired new faculty members with the understanding that they will be required to teach dual enrollment courses in a local area high school. We have also hired retired faculty members to teach at the high schools. The faculty from the college are more knowledgeable of the institution and should be encouraged to help recruit and retain students to the institution after high school. However, there are challenges associated with sending faculty from the college campus to the high school to teach the courses. Some issues include course scheduling and travel time between the two locations, costs associated with paying faculty travel expenses, and seat limits for the courses.

Dual enrollment impacts a student’s choice of academic major. When asked if dual enrollment had an influence on their academic major, many shared they had a major in mind when they began taking courses but during their dual enrollment experience they changed to a different field. For some of the participants, the difficulty level of the subject affected their thoughts on the major and for others it was a connection made with a professor. Allison, Cody, and Susan became less interested in their fields after taking a college course. After a chance encounter with a course they took through dual enrollment, they decided to pursue a different career path. However, dual enrollment confirmed Emma’s love of nursing and further motivated her to pursue a nursing degree. The finding of college readiness supports the Happenstance Learning Theory that the
opportunities to be exposed to academic fields early can represent an unexpected event towards their career decision. According to Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory, a student’s career decision may be based on experiences created by interactions with people, institutions, and events in their environment (Krumboltz, 2009; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). If a student takes a course in an area they have never been exposed to and realize it is something they enjoy and want to pursue, a happenstance event has occurred and influenced the student’s path. Taking the nursing courses through dual enrollment reaffirmed Emma’s career path. A happenstance encounter can be viewed as positive and encouraging (Krumboltz, 2011). Allison experienced this when she started taking dual enrollment courses after having been homeschooled. She was taking a college computer course when she discovered how much she liked computers and had a desire to change her major to computers. It is during their time in college when students explore their interests and aptitudes and decide on their future careers (Kim et. al, 2014).

It is important to recognize the influence that dual enrollment has on the students’ academic major and identify ways to support the students in their career choice. Student affairs professionals in the career services area should promote their services to dual enrolled students by offering workshops and programs designed specifically to address the needs of students as they explore the fields of study in which they are interested. With the influence that dual enrollment is having on the student’s academic major, it is also important for institutions to connect dual enrolled students to academic departments early. This would further support recruiting and retaining students to the institution after high school. Perhaps planning an admissions and recruitment event for current dual enrolled students with a focus on academics would be a way to connect the students to
academic departments and faculty and serve as a way to increase retention of these
students.

**Challenges Encountered**

High school students taking dual enrollment courses are faced with many challenges that have to be overcome in order to participate and be successful in the program. The issues identified for the students who took their courses on the college campus included transportation, time management, involvement in co-curricular activities, and family obligations. The students interviewed were able to overcome these obstacles, but these challenges may be preventing other students from participating in dual enrollment.

Transportation is one issue that can be difficult for dual enrollment students. Cody, Sam and Sarah each discussed how it was difficult to obtain transportation from the high school to the college campus in order to take their courses. Some students, like Allison and Susan, had to commute nearly an hour each day to the college campus. This challenge also affected their time and availability to be involved in co-curricular activities. Emma and Dylan were both involved in activities outside of class and struggled to balance their time for everything. The lack of transportation is a reason why some of the participants chose to take their courses solely at their high school or online.

The role of family and family obligations can be a barrier for students to participate in dual enrollment. In order to have the transportation she needed to get to the college campus, Sarah was obligated to take her father to work each morning and pick him up in the afternoons. However, throughout the day she had to travel back and forth between the high school and college for her classes. Dana also shared how family played
a role in her dual enrollment participation. She discussed how challenging it was for her mother to miss work in order to meet with the high school guidance counselor and complete the paperwork for Dana to participate in the program. The role of family or lack of assistance from high school personnel may be preventing other students from participating in dual enrollment programs. Postsecondary institutions should identify a dual enrollment coordinator or college professional who could be regularly available on the high school campus to assist students through the admissions, advising, registration, and orientation processes of dual enrollment. The postsecondary institution should also incorporate the use of technology by placing required forms online making it easier for the students and parents to complete the necessary materials needed to participate as well as providing access technologically to someone from the institution to assist students and parents through the dual enrollment process.

The students interviewed were able to overcome the obstacles they faced but these issues may be preventing other qualified and talented students from participating in dual enrollment. Student affairs practitioners and college admissions officers need to identify these challenges to better support students and to encourage more participation in dual enrollment programs. Transportation was identified as a major obstacle for many of the students interviewed. College administrators could possibly create a collaboration between the postsecondary institution and the local area high schools to provide transportation for dual enrolled students. Utilizing the institution’s buses or shuttles or the school’s buses may be a way to provide transportation to assist the students with getting to the college campus to take classes. Institutions may also pursue additional funds through possible grants to fund transportation between the high school and college.
Helping to provide transportation is an incentive to get the students on the college campus to take their courses.

The participants interviewed discussed how challenging it was to be involved or not having the time to be involved in extracurricular activities at their high school. However, the study did not address the social aspects of being involved on the college campus. Student affairs practitioners should look for ways to engage dual enrolled students in co-curricular activities on the college campus. This recommendation would support the notion that students need the experience of being immersed in the college culture and create new peer groups (Edwards, Hughes, & Weisberg, 2011). This practice would connect the students to the campus and help to address the students’ issue of not being able to be involved in extracurricular activities. It would also give the students a feeling of inclusion by participating with student affairs in areas such as student activities and intramural sports. However, a committee or task force would need to be formed to determine what activities dual enrolled students could participate in. The age and development differences of dual enrolled students compared to traditional, legal-aged college students would have to be addressed. The minors on campus policy as well as other institutional policies would need to be considered. The committee or task force would need to include professionals from student affairs, including residence life, dean of students, counseling services, dean of students, and campus recreation; as well as campus safety, admissions, and other departments or individuals that may have direct affiliation with dual enrolled students. Encouraging student engagement on campus would also align with An’s (2015) recommendation of exposing students early to opportunities at the college would develop their engagement behaviors through peer interactions and
interpersonal relationships with other students. By integrating the theory of happenstance into practice, student affairs professionals may be able to help students recognize and capitalize on unplanned events occurring in their lives during their time as dual enrollment students (Krumboltz, 1998). Being exposed to and participating in unplanned events on campus may introduce students to new opportunities and discoveries and lead to their decision to continue at their current institution.

**College Selection**

Dual enrollment can influence the college admission process and where students choose to attend college after high school. It can also be an asset for students when they begin applying to colleges (Kretchmar & Farmer, 2012). Several of the participants interviewed expressed how their participation in dual enrollment provided a positive influence on their college admissions process. Sally and Dylan felt their admissions profiles looked better when applying to colleges after having been dual enrolled students. However, a couple of the other interviewees, discussed how being on the college campus early helped them to discover what they were looking for in a postsecondary institution such as academic programs and the social atmosphere. Their comments align with An’s (2013) statement of dual enrollment providing realistic expectations of what college is going to be like. Chris and Sarah both shared this sentiment of identifying what type of college they were looking for as they went through the college search. For the students who did not matriculate at Southeastern University following high school, taking dual enrollment courses led them to the conclusion of wanting to be in a larger setting to continue their postsecondary education. Joey wanted to be in a more urban area. Anna, Sally, and Dylan all wanted to leave home and attend college away from home. Whether
through coincidence, happenstance, or chance events, these students recognized their environment conditions and knew where they wanted to be after high school.

The students who chose to remain and continue their postsecondary studies at the same institution where they were dual enrolled did so for many reasons. Susan stayed because she was not accepted at her first choice institution and for her it was easier to continue where she was already taking classes. In addition to costs, Allison remained because of the connection she had made with many of her professors. Cody was comfortable where he was; he would have a short commute to the campus, and the costs would be significantly lower by choosing to continue at his current institution. Susan, Allison, and Sam shared similar comments and views and chose to matriculate at their current institution following high school due to the familiarity with the campus and professors. The sentiments shared by the students who matriculated at the same institution where they were dual enrolled support Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) in a couple of ways. The theory acknowledges that unplanned events can lead to new discoveries (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). The events expressed by the participants that support Krumboltz’s theory include connections made with professors and exposure to their academic fields of study. With the rapid growth of participation in dual enrollment programs by high school students, college admissions offices are in a position to recruit and matriculate a population of their students that already exist.

**Limitations of the Study**

The students interviewed for the study represent diverse backgrounds and attended different types of institutions for dual enrollment. However, all of the
institutions attended by the participants were small institutions including small public, private, and technical institutions and all were located in the state of Georgia. The sample size is small and all of the participants have an affiliation with the researcher’s institution. The study does not include participants who took dual enrollment courses at larger postsecondary institutions or institutions located outside of Georgia. It is also important to understand the experiences of former dual enrolled students who attended or are currently enrolled at other institutions other than where the research was conducted.

The students responded differently to the questions with varying levels of feedback. The views expressed by the interviewees are relevant to the study and provide a view of their lived experiences as dual enrollment students. However, due to location and proximity, many of the interviews had to be conducted by phone. This prevented me from being able to observe the reactions of the participants during the interviews. In addition, the study includes only students who had a successful dual enrollment experience and does not include students who did not have a successful experience from either not completing a dual enrollment program or not performing well academically during their participation in dual enrollment.

The data for the study was collected late in the fall semester from first-year students. Perhaps collecting the data earlier in the semester would have allowed the participants to recall their admissions search and institution selection process in more detail. The findings from the study are limited to the participants interviewed and should not be generalized to the larger population of first-year students who participated in dual enrollment during high school.
Recommendations for Further Study

This study focused on first-year students who were in a dual enrollment program and how they experienced the process of transitioning to high school after having been dual enrolled. The study also sought to determine if participation in dual enrollment influences students’ decision-making regarding where to continue their postsecondary education. While the study contributes in a meaningful way to understanding the experiences of former dual enrolled students, it does not fully assist in identifying a direct correlation to college admission and selection.

Qualitative research on students’ postsecondary educational plans on where they intended to matriculate following high school is recommended. It is important to consider where students intended on pursuing their postsecondary education versus where they enrolled and to understand what led to that decision. Factors to be considered would include institutional size of where they took dual enrollment courses and size of institution on where they matriculated after high school.

Additional qualitative research utilizing former dual enrolled students who did not have successful experiences perhaps would provide differing views on the subject. Further, interviews with college admissions personnel who work with dual enrolled students, high school guidance counselors and administrators, faculty, adjunct instructors, and parents of dual enrolled students would provide unique and different perspectives and provide more in-depth data. High school guidance counselors and dual enrollment liaisons may provide interesting views on the transition from high school to college.

In addition, addressing questions regarding involvement on the college campus while the students were dual enrolled would allow researchers to identify if a relationship
exists between the students’ engagement on campus to retention and matriculation at their same institution where they completed their dual enrollment studies. Including more in-depth interview questions pertaining to campus involvement may provide insight on whether the increased familiarity with the college campus has influence on the students’ decision on where to continue their postsecondary education.

As dual enrollment participation increases as well as the funding from state appropriations to fund the programs, research using the data collected by the state should be considered. Another recommendation would be to conduct further research on student outcomes for future funding as well as on the progression and completion of dual enrolled students. It would be interesting to learn if former dual enrolled students are completing their degrees early and if they are saving money on future college costs. It would also be useful to understand how the funding for dual enrollment is impacting allocation dollars for public institutions.

Finally, quantitative research to investigate dual enrollment participation, college admission, and institution selection would be beneficial to postsecondary institutions. The data collected may be used to inform college administrators, student affairs practitioners, and admissions personnel on best practices to recruit, service, and retain dual enrolled students.

**Conclusion**

Dual enrollment provides high school students with an opportunity to experience college early. Participating in dual enrollment helps students build their confidence, prepare academically for college-level coursework, and become acclimated to the college setting. This study examined the experiences of first-year students who participated in
dual enrollment programs during high school. The researcher used a qualitative approach conducting interviews to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of dual enrolled students. During analysis of the data, five themes were determined; 1) college preparedness, 2) financial incentives, 3) college readiness, 4) challenges encountered, and 5) college selection. Taking college courses early developed the students’ confidence as they were succeeding academically and learning to manage their time. The participants also expressed how participating in dual enrollment provided financial assistance by allowing them to take college courses at little to no cost as well as reducing future college costs. Furthermore, dual enrollment impacted the students academically by improving their study skills, acclimating to the college setting, learning from college professors, and influencing their fields of study. In addition, the participants discussed the challenges they had to overcome in order to participate in dual enrollment. These issues included transportation, family obligations, and the opportunities to be involved in co-curricular activities. Finally, the students interviewed shared how dual enrollment may have influenced their college admission process and deciding on what institution they would attend following high school.

Through their stories, the students in this study provided information to understand how their experiences during dual enrollment affected their college readiness and influenced their college admissions process. Using Krumboltz’s Happenstance Learning Theory (2009) as a framework, I was able to examine if chance events played a role in the students’ decision on where to continue their postsecondary education. It was determined the learning experiences and environmental conditions that dual enrolled students are exposed to can influence where students will matriculate following high
school. Student affairs and admissions professionals can use the data gathered to inform practices on how to better serve dual enrolled students and to retain the students following high school graduation. Both of these endeavors are important to institutions and for enrollment growth. Dual enrollment is included in an institution’s total enrollment and as the program continues to increase, colleges cannot afford to lose these students. However, the findings of this study indicate that future qualitative and quantitative research is needed for a better understanding of how a students’ participation in dual enrollment contributes to their decision on where to continue their postsecondary education.

This study examined two research questions: 1) how did students who were in a dual enrollment program experience the process of transitioning to college after having been dual enrolled; and 2) how did dual enrollment influence students’ decision-making regarding where to continue their postsecondary education. Dual enrollment helps students transition from high school to postsecondary education by preparing them to be college-ready both academically and socially; inside and outside the classroom. Through building self-confidence, learning time management and study skills, and overcoming obstacles, dual enrollment prepares students to have a successful transition into postsecondary education. Participating in dual enrollment can influence a student’s decision on where to continue their education by realizing what they are looking for in an institution, including size and location, and by helping them to select or affirm their academic interests. Dual enrollment is a positive credit-based transition program allowing high school students to earn college credits early while helping students becoming prepared and ready for the academic rigors of postsecondary education.
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Appendix A

Initial Email to Potential Participants

Dear XXXX,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia; I am conducting a research study to understand the experiences of former dual enrolled students and how the impact of dual enrollment participation affects college admissions and career decisions. Having been a dual enrolled student and earning college credit previously while you were in high school, you would be a great asset in this study.

If you are willing, you would meet with me for a one-on-one interview lasting about 45 minutes. During the interview, I’ll ask you about your experience as a dual enrolled student and how it may have affected your subsequent decisions about college. Participation in the study is on an entirely voluntary basis, with no consequences for choosing not to participate. Even should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your identity and participation in the study will also remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about the study, please visit the link below to sign up as a potential participant.

https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bIKV3pvwBPFPoBL

As an incentive for participating in the study, each participant will receive a $10 gift card after completing the interview.

Sincerely,

David Jenkins
Ed.D. Candidate at University of Georgia
dcj72710@uga.edu
(229) 854-1887
Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey

https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_blKV3pvwBPFpOBL

Dual Enrollment Study - Survey

I am a staff member at Georgia Southwestern State University and a graduate student in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled Understanding the Experiences of Dual Enrolled Students and the Impact on the College Admissions Decision that is being conducted. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of dual enrolled students and the factors that influence the decision-making of dual enrolled students regarding where to continue their postsecondary education.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and earned college credit prior to matriculating at a postsecondary institution after high school graduation. Participants must be willing to answer questions about their experiences of participating in a dual enrollment program.

Your participation will involve an interview and should only take about 45-60 minutes to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to not participate will have no bearing on your grades or class standing. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. If you are unable to interview in person, you may schedule an interview by Skype. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

To respect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of the participants, all data collected will be stored on a password protected computer. Any personal or identifiable data including email addresses will be deleted after the data has been collected. The data will be collected over a one-month period. The audio recording will be deleted within thirty days following the interviews. If you are not selected for the study, your data will be deleted at the time of dismissal.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying
information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only.

The findings from this project may provide information on the impact of dual enrollment participation. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me (229) 854-1887 or send an e-mail to dcj72710@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 609 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Name
Phone Number
Email Address
Age
Please select your gender (optional)
    Female
    Male
    Transgender
    Other
To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify with? Select all that apply. (optional)
    African-American (Non-Hispanic)
    Asian/Pacific Islander
    Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)
    Latino/a or Hispanic
    Other
How did you earn dual credit? Select all that apply.
    AP courses
    IB courses
    College courses
If you earned dual enrollment credit by attending an institution to take college courses, what type of institution was it? Select all that apply.

- Public
- Private
- Technical
- 2-year
- 4-year

Where did you earn your dual credit? Select all that apply.

- At the college campus
- At the high school
- Online
Appendix C

Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Understanding the Experiences of Dual Enrolled Students and the Influence on the College Admissions Decision

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION:  
David Jenkins  Dr. Diane Cooper  
dcj72710@uga.edu, 229(854-1887  dlcooper@uga.edu, (706) 542-1812

PURPOSE:  
I have been asked to participate in a research study about dual enrollment. The person in charge of this study is David Jenkins, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of dual enrolled students and the factors that influence the decision-making of dual enrolled students regarding where to continue their postsecondary education.

DURATION AND LOCATION:  
My participation will last about 45-60 minutes. The study will take place in a location of my choosing including the student center, Office of Admissions, the library, or the coffee shop at Georgia Southwestern State University.

PROCEDURES:  
During the study, the following will happen:  
• I will be asked questions about my previous experience in dual enrollment.  
• I will be asked questions about my admissions process as I decided where to continue my postsecondary education.

EXCLUSIONS:  
I should not participate in this study if:  
• I am under 18 years old.  
• I have already participated in this research.  
• I did not participate in dual enrollment.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:  
I may feel a little uncomfortable answering some of the questions. This is not expected to cause any major problems. If I feel like I need information about counseling services, I can ask for that and it will be given to me.

BENEFITS:  
I will not directly benefit from participating in this study. My answers may provide useful information about dual enrollment and the influence it may have on the college admissions decision.

_______ Subject Initials
INCENTIVES:
I understand I will receive a $10 gift card for participating in an interview but I will not be paid or receive a good grade or anything else for participating.

NEW FINDINGS:
If the researchers learn about other research studies that might affect my willingness to participate, they will give me this information.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The researchers will keep my information confidential. All data collected will be stored in file cabinets in a locked office or on a password protected computer. Data from the study may be published, but I will not be identified. My identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law. If I am unable to interview in person, I may schedule an interview by Skype. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. Any personal or identifiable data including email addresses will be deleted after the data has been collected. The data will be collected over a one-month period. The audio recordings will be deleted within thirty days following the interviews. If I am not selected for the study, my data will be deleted at the time of dismissal.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW:
I can refuse to participate. My refusal will not cause any penalty or loss of rights. I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. I also understand that the researcher can withdraw me at any time. This withdrawal could happen for reasons that have nothing to do with me, such as Mr. Jenkins ending the study.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:
If I have questions, I can call Mr. David Jenkins at 229-854-1887. I can also contact Dr. Anish Dave, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at 229-931-2192. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at (706) 542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

SIGNATURES:
I understand my rights as a research subject and I consent to participate. I understand what the study is about, why it is being done, and what my participation will involve. I will receive a copy of this form.

Signature of Research Subject     Date

Signature of Investigator     Date

I confirm that I was present as a witness for the consent process for this study. I confirm that the participant above has agreed to take part in the research study.

Signature of Witness     Date
Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to participate in dual enrollment while still in high school?
2. What did you like most about dual enrollment?
3. What was the most challenging part of participating in a dual enrollment program?
4. Describe what a typical day/week was for you as both a high school student and a college student.
5. Describe the difference between your high school teachers and your college instructors.
6. Describe the differences, if any, between the high school classroom environment and your college classroom environment. (compare and contrast the quality of the courses)
7. How did taking college courses early prepare you for your first year in college?
   a. How did dual enrollment shape or impact your expectations of college?
8. What led you to enroll at ABC University?
   a. What incentive would have gotten you to stay?
9. Describe your college admissions search and process.
10. How much impact did your dual enrollment experience have on your college admissions decision?
11. Did dual enrollment factor in how you thought about where you were going to go to college?
    a. What did it mean to your academic journey and what you wanted to major in?
12. What advice would you offer students who are considering participating in a dual enrollment program?
a. How can we influence more students to participate?

13. If you had the opportunity to speak to lawmakers and policymakers about dual enrollment, what would you say to them?