Tensions Impacting Student Success in a Rural Community College

Karen R. Hlinka
West Kentucky Community and Technical College
Deronda C. Mobelini
Hazard Community and Technical College
Terri Giltner
Kentucky Community and Technical College System

This article describes a qualitative study examining factors influencing the decision-making processes of traditional-age students living in rural, southeastern Kentucky as they progress toward acquiring a bachelor's degree using the community college as a steppingstone. Specifically, this study explored students' perspectives of the factors that serve as barriers and as sources of encouragement, impacting decision making at critical steps of students' academic pathways. Our research team divided this project into three key transition points: (a) high school seniors' decisions to attend a community college as a means to acquire a bachelor's degree, (b) community college students' decisions that promote persistence to the transfer point, and (c) community college students' decisions in choosing a specific transfer university. Three areas of conflicting demands that impact students' decision making about academics and place them at risk for long-term success emerged: (a) a need for one-on-one attention and support vs. a need for self-reliance, (b) the push of family encouragement vs. a pull of family responsibilities, and (c) a desire to stay in the region vs. a desire to leave. Recognition of these tensions can guide efforts of community college leaders to help students, shaped by their Appalachian culture and other defining traits, to build the skills necessary to complete this leg of their educational journeys.

While the northern and southern regions of Appalachia have succeeded in acquiring quality of life and economic standards typically used by the government to measure "success," the central Appalachian area continues to trail behind (Eller, 2008). In fact, five of the poorest 25 counties in the United States can be found in eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia, counties in which one in three residents lives below the poverty level. This high rate of poverty has been linked to low education attainment rates. Between 2007 and 2011, for example, the 72.6% high school completion rates in Kentucky's Appalachian high schools (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2013a) were far below the national average of 85.4% (ARC, 2013b). Even more disturbing was the difference in college completion rates. Only 12.7% of eastern Kentucky's high school graduates completed college between 2007 and 2011 (ARC, 2013a), compared to a national rate of 28.2% (ARC, 2013c). Future economic growth of Kentucky, and particularly of this specific region, has been tied to goals of increasing the number of college degree holders within its population (Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010). Strategies to increase the number of bachelor's degree recipients in Kentucky, with their impact on future economic growth, have become a major focus of Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE). With nearly half of all college students beginning their postsecondary education

at a community college, improving the pipeline from high school to community college to four-year institutions is of increasing importance (CPE, 2004).

Purpose

Understanding the role of the community college in rural areas is critical in helping students to successfully negotiate the academic pipeline from high school to acquisition of a bachelor's degree. Our three-member research team conducted a qualitative study to address this research question: From students' perspectives, what phenomena serve as barriers and as sources of encouragement, impacting decision making at critical transition steps in their academic pathways from high school, through the community college and to the point of transfer to a four-year university in pursuit of a bachelor's degree? Our research question was divided into three subparts, each assigned as the primary focus for one member of our collaborative research team. One researcher focused on high school students' decision-making processes about attending the local community college as a steppingstone to a four-year degree. A second researcher focused on currently enrolled community college students, in their second and fourth semesters of continuous enrollment following their high school graduation, in an investigation of decision-making processes impacting students' abilities to remain continuously enrolled at the community college in pursuit of their goal to transfer. The third researcher focused on current community college students in their fourth semester of continuous enrollment since high school to determine factors influencing their decisions about transfer.

Of the various phenomena that emerged in our study (Giltner, Hlinka, & Mobelini, 2012a, 2012b), three themes surfaced as pervasive and powerful tensions that impact students' abilities to successfully traverse this defined academic pathway: (a) the need to be "coddled" to increase retention vs. the need to "cut the apron strings" to build self-reliance, (b) the "push" of encouragement vs. the "pull" of family responsibilities, and (c) the decision to stay vs. the decision to leave the area. Recognition of these conflicting pressures can guide efforts of community college leaders to help transfer-bound students build the skills necessary to complete this leg of their educational journeys.

Methods and Data

Only students can truly reveal their decision-making processes at these defined stages of their educational progression. Especially in Appalachia, students' voices have historically been largely ignored; the absence of an Appalachian voice in earlier studies of the region is highlighted by Appalachian journalists, historians, and novelists such as Carney (2000), Eller (2000), and Norman (2000). In addition, Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell (2005) identify the tendency to stereotype certain groups of students when that group's experiences are viewed from an outsider's perspective. Therefore, our research team implemented a transformative, qualitative research method (Creswell, 2009) rather than a more traditional quantitative study. We wanted to listen and learn from the participants themselves, to draw out unconscious assumptions about the complexities of decision making, in order to learn more about the factors influencing student decision making at various stages of the educational journey.

As researchers, we adopted a social-constructivist worldview (Creswell, 2009) to understand and interpret the meaning that students have construed about themselves, their environment, and their future aspirations. This philosophical foundation relies on individuals' perceptions in keeping with adult transition theory and decision theory, both of which recognize the influence of individual perception on choice (Batha & Carroll, 2007; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, Lassale, & Golec, 1990). In addition, we incorporated modern student development theory's student-centered approach, which focuses on nurturing students' individual talents to move them to a higher and more independent level of thinking (Astin, 1993; Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005; Kegan, 1994; Perry, 1970). We approached this study from a student-centered viewpoint, advocating that students matter (Schlossberg et al., 1990), as we identified and defined phenomena that serve to promote student advancement as well as those that erect barriers to student progress.

Research Context

The site of our case study was Hazard Community and Technical College (HCTC), a rural two-year college situated in the central Appalachian region of Kentucky as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). HCTC is a regionally accredited institution and a member of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). This open-admission, publicly supported institution has five campuses in four of its eight assigned service area counties, a 2,850 square-mile service region with a population of 120,656 (HCTC, 2010; Kentucky River Area Development District, 2010). In fall 2009, full-time student enrollment (FTE = 15 total credit hours) was 2,175. Approximately 94% of these students required financial support in order to attend college (KCTCS, 2010).

Two local feeder high schools served as secondary sites. A large county high school and a small city high school were selected. Due to their geographical proximity to the community college campus, a significant number of these high school students opt to attend HCTC. Our

selection process was influenced by the research of Cynthia Duncan, described in *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America* (1999). While Duncan's primary focus was on how historically embedded relationships shape current social structures, including patterns of social capital and social exclusion, the first chapter's description of the community of Blackwell is filled with references to political patronage and its overflow into the corruption of the county schools.[1] With Duncan's findings in mind, these two schools were selected for potential differences in cultures and organizational habitus (Giltner, Hlinka, & Mobelini, 2012a, 2012b).

HCTC's service region has a rich history in cultural diversity, but massive out-migrations in the 1940s and 1970s diminished ethnic diversity. In 2010, 96.8% of residents in the region were White, 18.4% higher than the national percentage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Based on fall 2009 enrollment information, 98.3% of HCTC students were White (HCTC, 2010). Therefore, racial/ethnic diversity issues were not a focus of this study.

We began our study with a review of existing quantitative data sources to develop a background understanding of HCTC's historical patterns of enrollment, persistence, and transfer as well as its relationship with two primary feeder high schools. Quantitative data were purposely selected (Creswell, 2009) from national and state database sources as well as reports supplied by KCTCS's and HCTC's institutional research offices. This background information was imperative to establishing a preliminary understanding of the context of our study site and was essential to the design of participant selection and interview protocols.

Participant Selection and Interview Protocols

Qualitative information collected through group and individual interviews conducted at the research sites added depth to the research team's understanding of the environmental settings that impact student decisions about education, including campus culture and student culture. Each researcher developed semi-structured, open-ended interview protocols to address their portion of the overall research question, while allowing for common threads to be explored that transcend the three transition points . Certain limitations were avoided through the advantages of a team approach, which allowed the researchers to review and modify these three interview protocols to avoid unnecessary duplication and to ensure consistency, clarity, and deeper coverage of various avenues of exploration within the scope of the study than would be possible with a single researcher. Each interview was designed to be conducted in one hour or less.

Group interviews have the advantages of allowing for the capturing of multiple voices in a limited amount of time, enhancing data quality through the interaction of participants, and allowing shared and/or opposing views to be assessed (Corbetta, 2003; Wheeler, 2008). Individual interviews allow flexibility to personalize questions within a semi-structured interview protocol to draw out, in their own words, the interviewees' experiences and insights (Mertins, 1998). Group and individual interviews with administrators, staff members, and faculty members from the two feeder high schools and from HCTC provided an awareness and understanding of the services provided to students and the overall degree of student-centeredness at each campus. High school and HCTC students also participated in individual and group interviews. Group student interviews allowed the researchers to gather a general overview of student-specific perceptions toward the college culture and college experience as it pertained to our research topic. Individual student interviews provided an opportunity for students to openly share their life stories, including experiences and perceptions impacting their personal academic decisions. Interviews with high school students were conducted at their respective high schools; interviews with HCTC students were held at multiple HCTC campuses to ensure representation from the college's various service counties. All initial interviews were conducted in the spring 2011 academic semester, with follow-up interviews continuing into the summer of 2011.

Participant selection for this study was based on each participant's ability to inform the researchers as to (a) high school seniors' decisions to attend a community college as a step towards acquisition of a bachelor's degree, (b) community college students' decisions that promote persistence to the transfer point, and (c) community college students' decisions in choosing a specific transfer university. As described below, students were purposely selected to meet the criteria of the study and to fairly represent the demographics of the high school feeder schools and HCTC. (See Table 1.)

---

[1] Duncan (1999) found that, traditionally, county schools were often managed by a powerful, close-knit patronage network that gave control of county jobs to local political operatives. As a result, hiring and firing decisions over school administrators, teachers, and staff members tended to be based more on political connections than skills. In contrast, public city schools were attended by the children of local elites and corporate managers who moved to the area from outside regions; here, quality academics were emphasized. City schools tended to lack the influential, corrupt politics found in the county school systems and served as an "educational oasis in a county and region infamous for corrupt, patronage-driven school boards and high school graduates who cannot read or write" (p. 5). In the 1990s, over 85% of the city high school graduates went on to attend college.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

I. Community College Attendance Decision-Making Piece		
Large County High School (Perry County Central)		
Administrators Individual Interviews (n=2)		
Guidance Counselors Individual Interviews (n=1)		
Students Individual Interviews (n=14)	Male = 4	Female = 10
Small City High School (Hazard High School)		
Administrators Individual Interviews (n=1)		
Guidance Counselors Individual Interviews (n=1)		
Students Individual Interviews (n=5)	Male = 1	Female = 4
II. HCTC Persistence Decision-Making Piece		
3 Administrators and Staff Group Interviews (n=10)		
3 Faculty Group Interviews (n= 10)		
Faculty Individual Interview (n=1)		
Student Individual Interviews (n=13)		
2010 high school graduates (n=8)	Male = 3	Female = 5
2009 high school graduates (n=5)	Male = 3	Female = 2
III. HCTC Transfer Decision-Making Piece		
6 Student Group Interviews (n=18)	Male = 5	Female = 13
Student Individual Interviews (n=14*)	Male = 9	Female = 5

*Of these 14 students, 7 also participated in group interviews; the other 7 were interviewed for the first time in an individual interview.

High school recruitment data collection. Two high schools were selected based on their similar proximity to HCTC's main campus and, on the basis of Duncan's (1999) research in rural Appalachia, for their potential differences in academic climate and organizational habitus. Each high school's guidance counselors identified those high school seniors who were committed to attending HCTC as a path to acquiring a bachelor's degree. From this pool of potential participants, a total of 19 high school students agreed to participate and were interviewed. Fourteen students, 4 male and 10 female, were interviewed at a relatively large, county high school, Perry County Central (PCC); 1 male and 4 female students were interviewed at the smaller, city school, Hazard High School (HHS). The difference in the total number of students interviewed at each of the schools was directly correlated to the number of total students in the senior class. PCC had 226 students in the senior class, and HHS had 70 students in the senior class. High school guidance counselors and administrators directly responsible for determining and executing the high school's college-going activities were also interviewed.

Community college persistence data collection. Administrators, staff members, and faculty members at HCTC were initially interviewed to gain insights into the campus climate and services that pertain to persistence and transfer at the two main HCTC campuses. College personnel were purposefully selected on the basis of their involvement and influence over persistence of traditional-age students seeking transfer opportunities to four-year degree programs.

Three group interviews, with a total of 10 participants, were conducted with personnel holding key administration or staff positions, including those who oversee academic initiatives and those responsible for student support services such as tutoring, financial aid, and advising. Although all three group interviews were held on the main HCTC Hazard campus, administrators and staff members tend to supervise activities on multiple campuses, so their insights were able to scan characteristics over the various campuses. Group sizes varied from two to five participants.

Three group interviews, with a total of 10 participants, were conducted with teaching faculty members who were selected for their roles as instructors of traditional-age, transfer-bound students in courses ranging from developmental to honors level. Two faculty focus groups were held on the main HCTC Hazard campus in Perry County; one was conducted on the Breathitt County Lees College campus. One faculty member was unable to attend the scheduled group interviews and was, therefore, interviewed separately at the Hazard campus. Several of

the faculty members who participated in these interviews commute between multiple campuses to teach their classes. Interviews with faculty members varied in size from one to five participants.

A total of 13 HCTC students were interviewed individually concerning decisions related to college persistence. All student participants were traditional-age students who had been continuously enrolled at HCTC since their high school graduation and planned to complete an associate's degree prior to transferring to a four-year institution. A pool of potential student participants meeting this assigned criteria was initially identified by the HCTC institutional research officer using enrollment databases. From this initial pool, individual HCTC academic records were examined to identify and invite for participation those students whose records provided evidence of academic success as well as those demonstrating academic challenges. Student participants had composite ACT scores ranging from 14 to 26 and HCTC GPAs ranging from 1.57 to 3.94. Students were also selected in a manner that would provide insights into possible gender-related issues. "Fresh" personal reflections hold a greater level of validity concerning students' decision-making processes. Consideration was, therefore, given to selecting participants who could describe issues related to persistence that arose during the first year and in the second year of community college attendance. Three male and five female students were 2010 high school graduates currently enrolled in their second semester at HCTC, while three male and two female students were 2009 high school graduates currently enrolled in their fourth semester at HCTC. To capture experiences at the various campus locations, eight interviews were conducted with students attending classes primarily on the main Hazard campus; five interviews were with students taking classes on the Lees College campus.

Community college transfer data collection. A series of small group interviews with students was conducted, followed by individual student interviews, with second-semester sophomore students preparing for transfer. All participants were traditional-age college students who graduated from high school in spring 2009, entered HCTC fall 2009, and maintained full-time (minimum 12 credit hours) continuous enrollment each fall/spring semester since admission to HCTC. A pool of potential student participants who met the design criteria was initially identified by the HCTC institutional research officer using enrollment databases. Students were contacted and invited to join the study if they had entered HCTC with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution. Nineteen HCTC students consented to participate in this study.

Six group interviews, composed of two to three participants per group, were conducted—one in Knott County, two in Breathitt County, and three in Perry County.

Study results were also based upon 14 individual in-depth interviews. Of the 14 individual participants, seven also participated in the small group interviews, and seven were interviewed for the first time. The original participant pool (n = 19) consisted of 13 young women and 6 young men. However, findings from one participant were removed following her individual interview because during the course of this project, she moved from the transfer path because she was accepted into an associate in applied science (AAS) degree program. Therefore, findings for the transfer portion of this study were drawn from 18 HCTC student participants.

Processing the qualitative data. Audio recordings were transcribed and, supplemented with the researchers' field notes, first read to obtain a general sense of the information and its overall meaning. Common themes emerged and guided the development of coded categories into which the data was assembled. Interview data collection ceased when new coding themes were no longer emerging. The three researchers served as auditors and evaluators for each other in evaluating the accuracy of transcriptions, analyzing the relationships between research questions and the data, and achieving consensus of interpretations (Creswell, 2009). The research team also worked collaboratively to identify common themes across the three threads of this project.

Ethical Issues

It is a researcher's duty to protect research participants while promoting the integrity of the project (Creswell, 2009). Each participant reviewed and signed an informed consent form that outlined the research problem, purpose, and potential benefit to the participants of the study. An assent form for high school minors was also prepared for this study, but all the high school participants were 18 years of age, so the consent form was sufficient. Prior to beginning each interview, the researcher communicated the importance of individual voices to the research process. Interviewees were also informed that they did not have to answer any questions with which they were not comfortable, their information would be treated in a confidential manner, and they could end the interview at any time. Interviews were conducted on the high school and HCTC campuses, locations that allowed the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease, but which added the responsibility of minimally impacting the study sites (Creswell, 2009). Visits were, therefore, timed so as not to interfere with participants' class schedules, work responsibilities, and other campus activities. Before final conclusions were drawn, available participants were invited to read a draft of the final analysis and comment on the findings.

Findings and Analysis

Our interviews revealed that students' academic decisions are strongly influenced by the value they place on belonging, on family/place, and on education as a means of acquiring gainful employment (Giltner, Hlinka, & Mobelini, 2012a, 2012b). Interwoven with these fundamental values, we discovered complex and often conflicting emotions that serve as sources of encouragement and discouragement as students weigh their academic options, thereby impacting their abilities to remain in the pipeline from high school, through the community college steppingstone, to the point of transfer.

"Coddling" vs. "Cutting the Apron Strings"

Are community colleges too obliging in addressing students' needs, or is a high level of accommodation necessary to promote retention? In our interviews with high school students and personnel, we found that many high school students lack the confidence to go directly to a four-year university. For these students, the local community college serves as an important steppingstone in their journey to a baccalaureate degree. Every high school administrator interviewed stressed that this lack of confidence was one of the primary barriers for their students in attending and graduating from college. Both the high school Career Options (a class devoted to college planning for seniors) teacher and the guidance counselor of the large county high school felt many students were extremely dependent on their families and not ready to move away.

> Mr. Cox[2] (high school Career Options teacher): [High school students] are bottle-fed maybe too much, spoon-fed too much. They fear that change of going out on their own. Some of my kids who are a little spoon-fed, who are not ready to go off, I think it's best for them to attend the community college.

> Ms. Best (high school guidance counselor): We've got kids that are in for a rude awakening if they go away to school. [The community college] is convenient, it's close to home.… They can see their parents. They still have the parents that can kind of see to them, and they can get adjusted to college life and scheduling classes.

The majority of high school students voiced doubts about their readiness to move away from home to attend a four-year college. They tended to view the local community college as a resource to ease this transition. Rick felt that the

community college would provide more personal support and attention:

> But even at [Eastern Kentucky University] you are not going to get the warm, hands-on experience you are going to get at HCTC. Cause I know that if I am struggling at all there is going to be so many people right there at HCTC that like, "Hey, do you want to come in after class and we'll see what you are struggling with and help you?" At HCTC, I will be able to go after class and actually talk to a professor.

Gina believed that her friends' choices to attend HCTC were impacted by a desire to have continued guidance from home:

> I think college is a whole lot different [than high school]. I think they decided to stay here and realize what college is, what it is about. I mean, here we have to go to class every day. Mom and Dad pushes us. But at college we don't have to, so I think it's better when it's closer to home and stuff.

Since high school students often possessed limited confidence in their ability to transition to college, their counselors tended to direct them toward HCTC because they believed the community college would provide an easier adjustment to the postsecondary arena. Counselors felt these students would be more comfortable in the smaller, friendlier community college setting which also allows students to remain close to home. As one high school principal stated:

> The students that best fit HCTC are those that are extremely dependent on their families. They lack a sense of self-confidence and independence. They are afraid to let go of that lifeline or safety net. And they can go to college but still have that safety net if they go to community college.

All high school staff members were highly complimentary of the community college's recruitment efforts at the high school. The local HCTC recruiter was described as friendly, unintimidating, and readily available to provide advice on financial aid and college enrollment issues. High school student Katy summed up this strength:

> [The HCTC recruiter] is more friendly and down-to-earth than most of the other colleges. Cause she comes in and she had her Levi's on.… She wasn't all dressed up like the rest of them and that makes the difference. We felt more comfortable when we talked to her. We actually asked her questions.

Guidance counselor Mr. Kramer added, "All of the kids know who the [HCTC college recruiter] is…. It is a great

---

[2]The names of faculty members, staff members, and students referenced throughout this article are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants in this study.

advantage for us." Every student interviewed mentioned the recruiter by name and was grateful for the support she had provided them. This sentiment confirms prior research findings that, especially in rural communities, a positive and supportive school climate is a strong predictor of college enrollment (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010). Also of note, high school students viewed the community college as a place "to get their basics" until they are ready to make the next decision about their educational journey.

Responsive relationships and institutional flexibility are qualities linked to student retention in rural community college settings (Howley, Chavis, & Kester, 2013). At HCTC, to promote high retention levels, faculty members recognized the importance of helping students feel comfortable, nurtured, and as though they matter to the college. Faculty members used the term "coddle" to emphasize the need to give special attention to students during their first two semesters to increase retention. However, HCTC personnel also recognized the need for a concerted, conscious effort to begin "cutting the apron strings" by developing students' knowledge base and self-confidence as they prepare for the transition to a four-year institution. For example, students need to possess an understanding of academia's "rules of the game" so they are able to maneuver through the academic maze (Bourdieu, 1986; Kuh, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, it is important to guide students' cognitive development, nurture students' critical thinking skills, and build appropriate study skills to enhance students' sense of comfort and confidence in their ability to succeed at the four-year college (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

For example, Daniel, a 2009 high school graduate currently in his fourth semester at HCTC, acknowledged that it took him a year to make the transition from a high school mentality, relying on memorization, to a college mentality, relying on a thorough understanding of concepts demonstrated by his ability to explain and apply those concepts to other situations, even after the exam is over. In high school he could memorize quickly and succeed.

> [In high school] you think you're so smart because you can look at this paper for 10 minutes and pass the test. But you didn't learn it. You couldn't talk about it two weeks from then. You couldn't explain anything about that process. Here you have to learn it. Oh, it's in every class. Every class. You know, you have to do, like in history for example. You do enough studying in preparation for a test that it stays with you. You remember studying over about it and you don't forget because you have to put in so much time on a test.

In college, Daniel struggled his first year, especially with the remedial math course into which he tested.

> My first year here was a rough, rough year. It was running without knowing how to crawl.... It took me a very long time to get out of high school mode into college mode. At least, I would say my first year up here. That was me moving from, transitioning from, one phase to the next. Because, I mean, your whole life, that's what you get use to over time. Memorization, memorization, pass, pass, pass, memorization. You have to learn that new process. You can't expect to just memorize it and go on. Because that process that you might learn, may be what the rest of that class is built upon. So if you do not learn that ground level… you cannot move on.

Daniel was very much aware of this maturation process he went through at HCTC. Based on advice given in his GE 101—Strategies for Academic Success course and by his developmental math (MT 55 and MT 65) instructors, he sought help from the college's tutoring center. Note that Daniel had a cumulative ACT score of 18; at the time of his interview he held a 3.4 GPA. He felt confident in his ability to adapt to the challenges that he realized he would soon encounter at the four-year university: "I think it's been a great learning experience coming here. I mean, making that change inside me to thinking more maturely, even though I have a lot more to learn." The question becomes, therefore, not if, but how and when community college personnel should begin to transition from coddling students to cutting the apron strings to build self-confidence, self-reliance, and stronger analytical thinking skills.

The "Push" of Encouragement vs. the "Pull" of Family Responsibilities

What motivates students to earn a college degree? Every student interviewed stressed the importance of acquiring a college education in order to get a "good job." For example, Daniel also voiced respect for education because of the opportunity it presents for a career that will provide material necessities as well as leisure time. He related how his father's example led him to this belief:

> Me and my dad have a good relationship but we have a distant one. Because, when I was younger, he worked. He drives gas. He drives a gas truck. He worked all the time. He was always working. Always. On the weekends he would be so tired. And his hours were so long. And I wouldn't get to see him much…. And he would give me advice, and he would tell me to go to college. Now, me myself, I would like to get an education to where I wouldn't have to, to where I could have a good

job and I could raise my family and I could be with my family.... And so that's really, really pushed me and they have always pushed me to go to college.

While several students commented on the positive influence of a specific, former teacher on their desire to pursue a postsecondary degree, every student interviewed referred to this "push" of encouragement by their families as a key influence in their decisions to earn a baccalaureate degree. Typically, the term *push* holds a negative connotation, as in "to nag" or "to control." However, our participants uniformly used "push" to relate a positive and necessary source of encouragement. Most of the students interviewed were first-generation college students; without that college-going experience in their parents' background, we wondered from where this appreciation for a college degree arose.

Morgan was asked to describe the core source of this "push" to obtain a college education:

A lot of teachers in high school now, they push…. [Even down in the elementary school,] they push. That's where, that's where you start. They just push, push, push. Elementary school, they push you to go on to high school. High school, they push you to go to college. At the community college, they push you even to go to the four-year.

Harmony stated that "college is a have-to." She was able to identify the root of this sentiment:

A few years ago I remember when they were pushing, "Without a high school degree you can't get a job." I've just always heard that like everywhere. I've heard it on TV. I've heard it in school. I've heard it everywhere my entire life. You have to get a high school diploma to get a job. Then it changed to, "You need an associate's degree." And then I always heard the bachelor's degree is what you need, "You'll be better qualified." So I have always heard that college is a kind of a have-to to get a job because people have more confidence [in you].

While students spoke of the positive "push," or encouragement, received from family, students also voiced concerns with balancing that encouragement with the "pull" of family expectations to be present when a member of their large, extended family was in need of support. Unfortunately, while families encourage their children to attend college, they often lack the insight to help their children establish school attendance and studying as a priority. Thus, while the community and the local schools have instilled the value of a college education, many of the families in this study find it difficult to transcend a working-class ideology and fall short in their ability to cultivate the predominately middle-class habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986)—that is, a deep-rooted, second-nature perspective, that establishes academics as a priority at this stage of the young adult's life. As a result, while students and their families may vocalize the importance of a college education, they often offer only superficial support for behaviors conducive to maintaining a solid GPA, persisting in continuous enrollment, and completing a college degree.

HCTC faculty members recognize this struggle to prioritize class attendance and schoolwork above the pull of family and friends. Mr. Woods spoke on this theme:

We have successfully put out the message that they do need to get an education. Somewhere in their minds they know that it is true. Somewhere they also know that, "Okay, I want to go to college. Here is Hazard. It's close by. Relatively inexpensive compared to others. So I know that I am supposed to do that." But at some point past that then there is a greater draw of, "Family needs this and I have to be a part of that." Um, it may well be that, um, grandma, parents, um, didn't go to college, might not have graduated from high school, and therefore, don't have any sort of realization of the power of education, but the students have some sense of that. But it's not a sense that can override the powerful pull of families and family needs. And I throw boyfriends and girlfriends in there as well.

Ms. Lewis discussed students' abilities to deal with personal issues:

This is what my personal opinion is, that students who are unsuccessful are not unsuccessful near as often because of anything at college. It is because of their personal life…. Any little thing can throw them off. And we laugh and joke amongst ourselves about things like, well, "So-and-so wasn't in class today because his aunt's boyfriend's daughter's husband's dog had to be put down." And it's about the truth. We may be exaggerating slightly, but….

While faculty may use humor in voicing their frustrations with students torn between academic and personal responsibilities, it can be a real threat to student success. Harmony's story illustrates this concern:

You know, my mom dropped out of college because her mom had cancer. Yeah, families. We kind of

have this attitude down here: We take care of our own. When my uncle became disabled he went numb from the legs down when he was at work one day. He couldn't feel anything. They took him to [Regional Hospital] and there was a full, like the artery coming through here, was completely blocked. No blood. So they thought he was going to lose his legs. They flew him up to Lexington and the wonderful doctors at St. Joseph's actually saved both his legs. And I had to miss like a week of school because of that. And I take care of him now.

Morgan is a second semester HCTC student who, like others interviewed, feels a strong connection to her neighbors and community. However, this has its downside as well:

> Morgan: Just if someone got sick in the family it would all depend on all of us. There could be no one…. Everyone has their certain job they have to do and if something else gets in the way of that, well, it'll just have to. One or the other has to be chosen. There's no way to go here and go there at the same time. You can't do both. It's just a kind of pull.

> Interviewer: And if it came down to studying for your math final vs. visiting someone?

> Morgan: Yeah. You're going to visit. Yeah.

It has been proposed that students faced with addressing such tensions are, in many aspects, more "adult" than their more privileged, less family-oriented and less community-connected urban counterparts. The voices of HCTC students such as Reese, Harmony, and Morgan are consistent with the findings of Burnell (2003), whose research suggests ways in which rural students tend to value both financial self-responsibility and the stability of a supportive family unit, values that strongly influence decision making about career choices and college attendance. How can we help students balance their dual roles of supportive, responsible, reliable family members with that of dedicated, college students? How can students learn to juggle the immediate responsibilities of family and friends with the academic dedication necessary to reap the long-term benefits of a bachelor's degree, not just to improve their own lives, but to improve conditions for their families and communities?

"Should I Stay" vs. "Should I Leave"?

"Should I stay or should I leave?" is a crucial question for the young people in this study. Many were adamant in their desire to remain, or at least return, to the region. The love of family and feelings of responsibility for loved ones were high on the list of reasons to stay. Students recognized and appreciated their personal connection to the land of their ancestors and the natural beauty and solace of the mountains. Several young people voiced their hopes of being able to improve the quality of life in the region. Others worried about the pains of homesickness that they feared would hinder their ability to perform if they moved away. Finally, the pull of family and place was countered by the realities of limited career opportunities and social amenities. Complicated emotions, meshed with a powerful sense of "place," impact decisions about whether to attend college, where to attend college, when to transfer, and the career path to pursue.

Our findings contribute to Corbett's (2009) assertions that formal education need not be equivalent to a ticket to leave and support his arguments for creating conditions that promote vibrant rural communities that encourage educated people to return. Our findings also validate the findings of Wright's (2012) study conducted in southeastern Kentucky; she found that while many students do associate advanced degrees with transfer out of the area, others plan to use their college degrees for local transformation. Our work corroborates the findings of Petrin, Schafft, and Meece (2014), whose research found economic considerations to be the primary influence over young people's decisions to leave their rural communities, and stressed the important role of rural schools in promoting strong community ties that foster desires to reconnect or return to their home communities.

Reasons to stay. HCTC students expressed many reasons for wanting to stay in, or return to, the area they call home:

> Belinda: I thought about it [leaving the area], but I don't wanna because I have a three-year-old little brother, and I'm so close to him and I don't want to miss out on stuff because my siblings did when I was younger and I just feel like if I miss something that it will break my heart because I love him to death. He's like my own. I pretty much raised him.

> Mary: But it's because of my family…. [I feel] obligated to stay…. I'll think of it, but then I decide to stay because of family. It's like, I don't know, I just want to be around them in case something bad happens. I want to be near them.… If something happens I want to be here.

> Hank: There's no way I'm leaving this place. I love it!

> John: I don't want to be too far from home.

> Carl: Being around these mountains and family,

and that's about it. Being away from that would be different.

Jason, a fourth semester HCTC student nearing the point of transfer, recognized the long-term dangers of yielding to the threat of homesickness:

> I don't want to be blindsided by it. You know, if I get homesick I don't want to be so homesick that I just throw everything away and run back home, you know? If I get homesick, in the event that I do, and I probably won't, at least I can go two hours down the road. I can get my fill of home and then I can go back…. Family's only two hours away and if I get homesick, it's a two-hour drive. Big whoop, so that kind of protective web, that protective net, like a tightrope walker. If I fall, at least I've got that to catch me…. Yeah, I've seen that happen to very many people. They throw their dreams away and they run back home and then they regret it later.

Several of the young adults in our study are in the throes of making very grown-up decisions. Marriage and starting a new family were major forces convincing two women, Kelly and Sandy, to continue their four-year degrees as commuter students through the University Center of the Mountains (UCM)[3] instead of leaving the area. Both Kelly and Sandy had considered leaving the area by transferring to a four-year campus such as the University of Kentucky (UK),[4] but marriage and a continuing desire to be close to home changed their decisions.

Academic decisions impacted by regional career opportunities. Occupations available in rural communities are often of lower status with lower wages and benefits than those available in urban and suburban regions (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). This group of students was strongly aware of career opportunities, or lack of opportunities, in the region and the resulting need to earn a four-year degree to increase their options to stay vs. leave. For example, during

a small group interview, Kelly described her career decision to focus on special education as influenced by her sense of regional jobs which may be available to her once she graduates:

> Kelly: And like in a small town, you know, it's hard to find a job [other two participants chimed in to agree with Kelly's comment], especially in the teaching, you know cause, you have to wait like 25 years to retire, so there's not that many openings.
>
> Interviewer: How will having that degree help?
>
> Kelly: Well, like for example, if you was to, if I was to go into special education, there's always a demand for that…. It's easier to get a job in special education than just a regular curriculum.

The two other young women in the group expressed similar views and shared their plans to go into the nursing program because of greater career opportunities in the healthcare field that allow them to stay in the region.

Another participant, Hank, is married and supporting his wife, a UK student. Hank is working, so he plans to complete his two-year degree at the community college before transferring to join his wife in Lexington. He also recognizes that moving to an urban area will provide greater opportunities to gain valuable job experience in the healthcare field in which he is interested, enabling his eventual return to the area. "I can go up there, get my experience, get my college done, and then I can come back and move to where I want to live."

A desire to stay because of civic duty. This region of eastern Kentucky has ongoing economic, political, and social problems (Eller, 2008) which will be best overcome by actions of its own citizens (Hindsdale, Lewis, & Waller, 1995). Harmony possesses an extremely strong sense of civic duty. Her future dreams include not only working as a professional in the local region, but also continuing her already active role as a community organizer. She expressed her desire to improve the area:

> I feel like that in order to live in an area as small as this is, you have to work to improve it. You can't just say, "There is nothing here," and move off. But if you want the area to be improved, you have to do it. So there are a lot of opportunities in this town…. Like maybe there's not a lot to do here, but a lot to do with it. It's kind of like a block of clay. You can just kind of mold it and do a lot with it.

A strong desire to improve the area was shared by several other students. When asked to identify an important

---

[3]The UCM is a concurrent use postsecondary education partnership between HCTC and six regional four-year colleges and universities which provides access to select four-year degree programs on the community college campus. HCTC students may transfer to one of the UCM's four-year partnering institutions and continue work toward their bachelor's degree without leaving the area. Because of the UCM's location on the HCTC campus, students may also be concurrently enrolled—taking freshman/sophomore classes at HCTC while also taking their junior/senior college coursework on the same campus through one of the four-year partners.

[4]UK is located in Lexington, Kentucky, about a two-hour drive from HCTC's Hazard campus.

value to her family, Jillian replied, "Help others." Jillian was disappointed in the quality of her K-12 educational experience and believed that her lack of preparedness for college was a hurdle she had to struggle to overcome. These factors have influenced her plans to return to the area as an elementary school teacher to improve the region's educational offerings.

Justin is a young pre-med student. He recognizes the area's need for better medical care and envisions himself as part of the improvement:

> I see myself in Kentucky. Whether in this area, I'm not for sure. I would like to be eventually, because there is only one heart doctor here and he's for the whole region. So he's not always here. I would like to open up a practice here, eventually.

Reasons to leave—limited amenities. Alice is a fourth-semester HCTC student anxious to leave the area. She shared her reasons for wanting to "get out" of the region:

> This, it's not the place I want to spend most of my life. Because there really isn't very much here at all, and there's, I don't perceive much growth in the area…. I just don't want to be in a dead place.

Morgan is a second-semester student who is also anxious to leave Hazard. Although she has felt this way since she was a little girl, her feelings were not shared by her family members and, growing up, she felt disconcerted by this difference. At HCTC, she finds comfort in knowing that others share her desire to leave the region for personal and professional growth opportunities. She relates the tension that she and many other students feel when faced with the pull of family and place with the yearning to move on:

> I always, when I was younger, I felt like kind of the black sheep because I wanted to go away. I wanted to, not really go away, but go and travel and go experience the universe and everything and not stay here. And just because everybody is so close and everybody stayed here, I felt like it was just, I felt the odd person out…. [Here at HCTC] I think it is like half and half. Some of them want to get degrees so they can just stay here, so they can get a job and stay here. But there is the other half who will say, "Well, I can always go on. I can go further. I can go on." It's kind of like they are thinking this is a steppingstone…. I feel more comfortable now…. I'm not the one odd person out in the county.

Alice and Morgan were not the only students who recognized the limited options available to those who remained in this region. This region has historically been impacted by the boom-bust nature of the coal mining industry (Eller, 2008). More recently, in the year prior to our study, evidence of regional economic decline was present. Sykes, an important employer in the area, began a gradual layoff of approximately 130 employees from October 2011 to January 2012 (Quiggins, 2011). Woodmart, an additional business located in the Perry County Industrial Park, had layoffs planned for 2012 (WKYT, 2011). The region's already stressed economy continues to suffer, and students are aware of the challenge to do more with less.

Many of the high school students, particularly those from the large county high school, who choose to attend HCTC as a steppingstone to transfer view the local community college as a place to "get their basics" while they make a final career choice and prepare to move forward. First-year college students are beginning to realize the limitations placed on their career aspirations due to the regional job market. Transfer students in their fourth semester at HCTC value education as a means to a good life, and some are increasingly aware of the limited job and career opportunities in their region. Armed with this knowledge, how can community college personnel guide students to make the best decisions about transfer based on their personal desires, dreams, ambitions, and responsibilities?

Limitations

Our study was limited to gathering insights of traditional-age (ages 18 to 24) students living in rural, central Appalachia who elected to move directly from high school to the community college en route to a four-year university. While allowing us to focus on a distinct group of undergraduates, these design parameters may limit the findings' applications to other populations. Further research is needed to discover whether these findings are more generally applicable.

The perspective of this project was on the role of community college personnel in guiding students from the local high school, through the community college, and through the transfer process. Expansion of this study to include interviews of university recruiters and counselors, as well as post-transfer students, would greatly enhance insights into practices that contribute best to guiding students beyond the realm of the community college to attainment of the four-year degree.

Implications for Practice

Community college educators need to understand factors that influence their students' decision-making processes

as they take the journey from high school to the community college in preparation for transfer. Our research uncovered three profound areas in which conflicting pressures produce stress in students' lives, impacting their abilities to achieve their academic and career goals. Equipped with an understanding of those tensions, what can community college leaders do to guide students along their path? Our findings support the efficacy of several current practices that have been implemented in recent years. However, there needs to be ongoing discussion of, and reflection on, best practices to address the conflicting values that impact students' decisions about academic issues.

When to "Coddle" and When to "Cut"

The students in this study value a sense of belonging. Our research emphasizes the importance of projecting that sense of belonging at all three stages of the student's academic journey.

Build social networks. Leaders of community colleges can adopt practices to ensure that students know someone by name at the community college upon which personal, mentoring relationships can be built. Peer mentoring programs can also be effective sources of the "push" of encouragement students need. Such programs, and the formation of personal relationships with college faculty members, personnel, and student peers, arm students with an "I can do this" confidence as they move into the community college (Bourdieu, 1987; Culp, 2005; Tinto, 1987).

Guide students' development. It is not enough to recruit and retain students. Community college students must leave with the academic knowledge and skills necessary to succeed at the next level, whether that is immediate employment, passage of national board exams, or transfer to a four-year university. To guide students in their ability to "fit" academically, as well as socially, faculty and staff members must guide students in their cognitive development, making the transition from rote memorization to the ability to apply concepts in problem-solving situations (Kegan, 1994). Implementation of the more rigorous national Common Core Standards in Kentucky's public schools is moving students away from rote memorization practices to meet new college and career readiness standards. Dual-credit and middle college programs, and the purposeful construction of cognitive bridges in the community college curricula, offer means to guide students' transition to higher-level thinking skills necessary for college-degree attainment.

Prepare students for integration into the university campus. Community colleges can foster the construction of supportive social networks in the new setting of the transfer university by providing opportunities for students to construct relationships with faculty and staff, especially within their discipline, to boost confidence in making the next step. Open house events and college visits to four-year university campuses will help students become familiar and comfortable with the transfer institution. Kentucky's statewide "Transfer Madness" online transfer fair (KCTCS, 2015) helps students become familiar and comfortable with the transfer institution. Student participants who had visited four-year colleges during high school were more decided on their transfer institution and major.

Balancing the "Push" of Encouragement with the "Pull' of Family Obligations

Strikingly, every student interviewed commented on the essential "push" of support and encouragement they received from their families. Unfortunately, every college student also recognized the "pull" of family responsibilities that was often a real threat to their ability to succeed academically. The struggle of families to provide practical emotional and financial support to acquire a bachelor's degree is a common and crucial hurdle for these students.

Educate students and families on realities of earning an education. When does college coursework assume priority over family or social obligations and vice versa? There are no easy answers to guide students on such personal decisions. However, it is important for community college leaders to recognize opportunities to helps students and their families confront and develop strategies to balance these responsibilities before crises strike. Class exercises designed toward building a repertoire of effective coping skills, reinforced through student support services, will help students make this paradigm shift. Students should be guided in acknowledging that it is possible to be a good son or daughter even when it is necessary to prioritize the meeting of long-term career goals over the daily responsibilities generated by the close family ties that they honor.

Setting priorities. Stories are often more convincing than data, elevating the abstract to real-life applications (Deal & Peterson, 2007; Goodman, 2010). Celebrating the success stories of local academic heroes and heroines can serve as a means to develop a repertoire of real-life strategies to guide student navigation of conflicting responsibilities of home vs. school. Recognition of the strong work ethic and spirit of perseverance of students such as Daniel and Reese should become the inspirational norm, the "way we do things around here" (Batha & Carroll, 2007, p. 159). The goal is to encourage students to think ahead to ways to successfully navigate conflicting responsibilities of home vs. school.

Wrestling with Desires to "Stay" and Urges to "Leave"

Close family and community ties are strong forces in this region. While some young people were determined to

leave the area, many students were determined to remain. As students approached transfer to a four-year university, this reluctance to leave the familiarity and responsibilities of home caused many of our student participants to delay transfer. How can educators help ease this transfer-step in order to broaden students' choices and promote successful integration into the four-year college?

Improve career counseling. Community college educators need to accept a more active role in career counseling. Clearly defined career options, early on, will guide students in establishing practical, realistic mini-goals in order to make these long-term aspirations attainable. Regional job availability is, and should be, a factor in the career-goal decision (Burnell, 2003). Students who are place-bound need to be given practical advice on entering careers that will enable them to be successful and prosperous within the context of southeastern Kentucky.

Not every young person is willing or able to leave the area, even for the two or three years required to complete a bachelor's degree. The UCM is a powerful option because it allows students to stay in the region and earn a bachelor's degree. In fact, HCTC's UCM was cited as a model of four-year/two-year partnerships in the *June 2013 Final Recommendations of the Rural Access Work Group* report (CPE, 2013) as a means for providing improved access to higher education by overcoming financial, geographic, and personal barriers.

Promote a sense of civic duty. Whether students stay or leave for college, the future growth of southeastern Kentucky depends on college-educated individuals establishing a home in the mountains, individuals who are dedicated to advancing the political and economic growth of this region (Hinsdale, Lewis, & Waller, 1995). Promoting a sense of civic duty through in-class discussions, extracurricular activities, and celebrations of alumni successes should be an essential element of the college's strategic plan.

Expected Utility

Throughout this research project, we sought to understand how traditional-age students make sense of their lives in the context of the community college and how their understandings influence their behavior. We listened to their stories told in their own words. Armed with a better understanding of these students' experiences, high school and college personnel, along with academic policy makers, can facilitate students' educational journeys from high school through the community college and, finally, to attainment of a four-year degree. Community colleges with similar demographics can use the lessons learned at HCTC to make informed decisions on how best to use their limited resources to effectively recruit, retain, and provide assistance during the transfer process.

Some scholars link education with social reproduction (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960; Dougherty, 2001). Others argue that education serves as a democratizing agent capable of igniting personal and community social advancement (Hellmich, 1993). Education can play a crucial role in social progress, not just of individuals, but of this region of Appalachia. Education should enable young people to recognize their potential to succeed, whether on a local level or in the broader scope of society. Educators are key players in helping young people expand their expectations for themselves and for their community and in helping students build the confidence and practical skill sets necessary to fulfill their dreams. An important first step is to understand the cultural field that has shaped the lens through which these students view the world. We must recognize the positive characteristics of that culture and mirror those aspects that promote feelings of belonging and mattering so students do enroll and persist as community college students. By guiding students successfully to the point of transfer, we will have done much to advance students toward acquisition of a bachelor's degree. Yet our goal should be broader than this. We must also build the confidence and skill sets necessary for our students to succeed in the broader world represented by the four-year university and beyond.

References

Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appalachian Regional Commission. (2013a). *Education - High school completion rates in Appalachia, 2007-2011.* Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/reports/custom_report.asp?REPORT_ID=51

Appalachian Regional Commission. (2013b). *High school completion rates in Appalachia, 2007-2011.* Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=78

Appalachian Regional Commission. (2013c). *College completion rates in Appalachia, 2007-2011.* Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=80

Batha, K., & Carroll, M. (2007). Metacognitive training aids decision making. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *59*, 64-69. doi:10.1080/00049530601148371

Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1999). Engaging students in active learning. In G. S. Blimling & E. J. Whitt (Eds.), *Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning* (pp. 21-44). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Helsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology of education* (pp. 487-511). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research in the sociology of education* (pp. 241-228). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, *32*, 1-17.

Brint, S., & Karabel, J. (1989). *The diverted dream: Community college and the promise of educational opportunity in America 1900-1985.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Burnell, B. A. (2003). The "real world" aspirations of work-bound rural students. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *18*(2), 104-113. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/18-2_5.pdf

Carney, G. (2000). I used to be a hillbilly now I'm Appalachian. In B. Best (Ed.), *100 years of Appalachian visions 1897-1996: A second and expanded edition* (pp. 109-111). Berea, KY: Appalachian Imprints.

Clark, B. R. (1960). The "cooling out" function in higher education. *American Journal of Sociology*, *65*, 569-576. doi:10.1086/222787

Corbett, M. (2009). Rural schooling in mobile modernity: Returning to the places I've been. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *24*(7). Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/24-7.pdf

Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social research: Theory, methods, and techniques.* London, UK: Sage.

Council on Postsecondary Education. (2004). *General education transfer policy and implementation guidelines: Revised policy 2004.* Retrieved from University of Louisville website: http://louisville.edu/oapa/compliance-table-comprehensive-standards/3_4_4_fn02.pdf

Council on Postsecondary Education. (2010). *Stronger by degrees: A strategic agenda for Kentucky postsecondary and adult education, 2011-2015.* Retrieved from http://www.cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/DE99F133-347B-47F7-9521-32F76A848585/0/StrongerbyDegrees_final.pdf

Council on Postsecondary Education. (2013). *Final recommendations of the Rural Access Work Group.* Retrieved from http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/FA324724-E46C-4E4C-B6F4-EDB8DB748A77/0/RAWGFinalReport61813.pdf

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches,* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Culp, M. M. (2005). Increasing the value of traditional support services. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2005*(131), 33-49. doi:10.1002/cc.204

Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. D. (2007). Eight roles of symbolic leaders. In *The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership* (2nd ed., pp. 197-209). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Demi, M., Coleman-Jensen, A., & Snyder, A. (2010). The rural context and post-secondary school enrollment: An ecological systems approach. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *25*(7). Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/25-7.pdf

Dougherty, K. J. (2001). *The contradictory college: The conflicting origins, impacts, and futures of the community college.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Duncan, C. M. (1999). *Worlds apart: Why poverty persists in rural America.* London, UK: Yale University Press.

Eller, R. D. (2000). Lost and found in the promised land: The education of a hillbilly. In B. Best (Ed.), *100 years of Appalachian visions 1897-1996: A second and expanded edition* (pp. 125-130). Berea, KY: Appalachian Imprints.

Eller, R. D. (2008). *Uneven ground: Appalachia since 1945.* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Giltner, T., Hlinka, K., & Mobelini, D. C. (2012a). The role of the community college as a stepping-stone to a baccalaureate degree: Understanding students' decisions about college transfer in southeastern

Kentucky. In Hlinka, K. F. *Community college student persistence: Understanding students' decisions about college transfer in Southeastern Kentucky.* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2012). 5-123.

Giltner, T., Hlinka, K., & Mobelini, D. C. (2012b). The role of the community college as a stepping-stone to a baccalaureate degree: Understanding students' decisions about college transfer in southeastern Kentucky. In Mobelini, D. C. *Community college student transfer: Understanding students' decisions about college transfer in Southeastern Kentucky.* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2012). 7-125.

Goodman, A. (2010). *Storytelling as best practice: How stories strengthen your organization, engage your audience, and advance your mission.* Los Angeles, CA: Lipman Hearne and Andy Goodman.

Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Hazard Community and Technical College. (2010). *Institutional Research Office report.* Hazard, KY: Author.

Hellmich, D. M. (1993). Assessing the fairness of Burton Clark's cooling-out process. *Community College Review*, *21*(3), 17-29. doi:10.1177/009155219302100303

Higbee, J. L., Arendale, D. R., & Lundell, D. B. (2005). Using theory and research to improve access and retention in developmental education. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2005*(129), 5-15. doi:10.1002/cc.181

Hindsdale, M. A., Lewis, H. M., & Waller, S. M. (1995). *It comes from the people: Community development and local theology.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Howley, C., Chavis, B., & Kester, J. (2013). "Like human beings": Responsive relationships and institutional flexibility at a rural community college. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *28*(8), 1-14. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/28-8.pdf

Kannapel, P. J., & DeYoung, A. J. (1999). The rural school problem in 1999: A review and critique of the literature. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *15*(2), 67-79. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/15-2_4.pdf

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kentucky Community and Technical College System. (2010). *KCTCS Fact Book 2009-2010.* Retrieved from http://casri.kctcs.edu/en/About_KCTCS/KCTCS_Factbook/2009-2010_Factbook.aspx

Kentucky Community and Technical College System. (2015*). Transfer madness online transfer fair.* Retrieved from http://transfermadness.org/

Kentucky River Area Development District. (2010). *Comprehensive economic development strategy update FY 2009-2010.* Retrieved from http://www.kradd.org/FY%2009%2010%20CEDS%20DOCUMENT%20COMPLETE.pdf

Kuh, G. D. (1999). Setting the bar high to promote student learning**.** In G. S. Blimling & E. J. Whitt (Eds.), *Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning* (pp. 67-90). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mertins, D. M. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative & qualitative approaches.* London, UK: Sage.

Norman, G. (2000). An "other" consciousness. In B. Best (Ed.), *100 Years of Appalachian Visions 1897-1996: A second and expanded edition* (pp. 149-156). Berea, KY: Appalachian Imprints.

Perry, W. G., Jr. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Petrin, R. A., Schafft, K. A., & Meece, J. L. (2014). Educational sorting and residential aspirations among rural high school students: What are the contributions of schools and educators to rural brain drain? *American Educational Research Journal*, *51*, 294-326. doi:10.3102/0002831214527493

Quiggins, P. (2011, August 3). *Sykes to layoff about 150 employees by the end of 2011.* Retrieved from WYMT website: http://www.wkyt.com/wymt/home/headlines/Sykes_to_layoff_about_150_employees_by_the_end_of_2011_126712258.html

Schlossberg, N. K., Lassale, A. D., & Golec, R. R. (1990). *The mattering scales for adult students in postsecondary education.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Center for Adult Learning Educational Credentials.

Tinto, V. (1987, November). *The principles of effective retention.* Paper presented at the fall conference of the Maryland College Personnel Association, Largo, MD.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *Annual estimates of the resident population by sex, race, and Hispanic origin for the United States, states, and counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012.* Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=PEP_2012_PEPSR6H&prodType=table

Wheeler, S. R. (2008). *Pathfinders: Identifying the factors influencing first-generation college students' persistence at Texas Woman's University* (Doctoral

dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing. (UMI Number 3323673)

WKYT. (2011, December 12). *American Woodmark will close in Perry County.* Retrieved from http://www.wkyt. com/yourtown/locations/perry/headlines/American_ Woodmark_will_close_in_Perry_County_135485818. html

Wright, C. J. (2012). Becoming to remain: Community college students and post-secondary pursuits in central Appalachia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *27*(6). Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/27-6.pdf