

A Case Study of the Academic Success of Somali Refugee Students
in a Two-Year Community College.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and colleagues who supported me on this endeavor.

Abstract

This is a mixed-method, qualitative study of 36 Somali students to uncover key factors affecting their academic success in a two-year community college in the Twin Cities of Minnesota/St. Paul. The Twin Cities metropolitan area has become a preferred location in the US for Somali diaspora to settle because of the rich social, economic, and educational opportunities offered.

A purposive sample of 18 current and 18 drop-outs male and female students were selected from a population of 234 Somali students who attended one of the largest and well-known community and technical colleges in the Twin Cities area. All 234 students participated in a screening questionnaire consisting of questions about socio-cultural conditions. Thirty-six students in the purposive sample were selected based on their responses to the screening questionnaire, were asked to participate in a semi-structured focus group interview and an individual interview.

Three major themes emerged from the data related to cultural identity and sense of place, language use, and motivation. Somali students who were most successful academically had acculturated additively keeping their “Somaliness” while at the same time actively adopting American cultural values, skills, and practices. In addition, the most successful students valued persistent, committed educational progress whether their goals were modest or ambitious. Most who succeeded also had the most substantial and consistent family support, university financial, social integration, and years of English language exposure.

Abstract in Somali (Gundhig)

Cilmi-baadhidan hababka kala duwan lagu soo dhiraandhiriyay oo 36 arday oo Soomaali ah lala yeeshay, ayaa looga gol lahaa in lagu ogaado arimaha saamaynta ku leh guulaysashada ardada ee waxbarashada labada sano ee mid ka mid ah macaahida ay ardada Soomaalidu dhigtaan midka ugu badan ee ku yaala labada magaalo ee mataanaha ah ee Minneapolis-Saint Paul, ee gobalka Minnesota. Machadkaas oo ah: Minneapolis Technical and Community College (MCTC).

Labadan magaalo ayaa waxay noqdeen meel Soomalida qurba joogta ah ay dagaan iyaga oo ugu xilanaya fursadaha dhaqan dhaqaale iyo waxbarsho ee taala.

Sideed iyo toban arday oo hada macahdka dhigta iyo sideed iyo toban kale oo intii aysan dhamaynin ka tagay ayaa waxaa laga doortay 234 arday oo machadkaas hada dhigta ama had ka hor wax ka baran jiray oo iyaga oon dhamaynin isaga tagay.

Dhammaan ardadaas 234 ah waxay ka qayb galeen su'aalo yool-baadh ah oo isugu jira dhaqanka, bulshanimada iyo la qabsiga wadankan. Kadibna waxaa laga doortay 36 arday in ay cilimi baadhis dheeraad ah ka sii qayb qaataan markii la fiiriyay jawaabihii ay ka bixiyeen su'aalihii hordhaca ahaa. Kadibna si gooni gooni ah iyo si koox koox ah ayaa su'aalo kale oo dheeraad ah loo waydiiyay.

Waxyaabihii ugu waawaynaa ee cilmi-baadhsitan ka soo baxay ayaa waxay xidhiidh toos ah la leeyihiin dhinacyada: Dhaqan haysashada, deegaanka, isticmaalka luuqada iyo dhiirigalinta. Ardada Soomalaiyeed ee waxbarsho ahaan guul fiican ka gaadhay waxay ahaayeen kuwa iyaga oo wali dhaqankoodii Soomaalinimada haysata, hadana isku dayay la qabsiga xirfadaha iyo hab nololeedka dalka Maraykanka.

Intaas waxaa dheer, inta badan ardada waxbarashada guusha ka gaadhay waxay aad u qiimeeyeen ka meel gaadhka, sii wadida waxbarshooda, yoolkay doonayanaba ha lahaadaane. Waxaa kale oo jiray waxyabao kale oo ka qayb qaatay guushooda waxbarsho sida: Taageerida iyo dhiirigalinta qoyseed, kaalinta jaamacada ee bulshanimada iyo dhaqaale iyo intii sano ee ay luuqada Ingiriisa baranayeen.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher lays the foundation of the study by introducing the education of Somali diaspora in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The rationale and purpose, statement of the study purpose, research questions, study delimitation and conceptual framework context of the study are briefly presented.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in the Twin Cities metro area. The United States has long served as a magnet to immigrants from around the world. Some come to the US because of war and political turmoil in their own countries. Many come to reunite with family members or to seek employment and educational opportunities. According to the US Department of Homeland Security's *Annual Flow Report* in 2013, the United States admitted 69,909 refugees and 25,199 individuals were granted asylum. The US has admitted the largest number of refugees and immigrants of any country in the world. The US refugee acceptance rate is among the highest of any industrialized country and reflects why the US has the highest numbers of resettled refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2012). The Refugee Act of 1980 permitted most refugees to be reunited with spouses or family members. The Act also "provided the first permanent and systematic procedure for the admission and effective resettlement of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States" (Waters & Ueda, 2007, p. 695).

Most refugees come to the US and then sponsor their family members. Upon arrival, many refugees want to be part of this land of opportunity and are prepared to work long hours to support their extended families back in their home countries. Newcomers take advantage of available resources. Some enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in public school districts. Others try to adjust to their new country the best way they know how.

Although little evidence exists of early Somali immigrants in the United States, some data suggest a Somali presence in and around New York City as early as the 1920s. Somali immigration to the US began to increase in the 1960s when Somali students, sponsored by the Somali government or their families, started coming to the US (Putman & Noor, 1993). From 1969-1991, during the ruling term of President Maxamed Siyaad Barre, many Somalis opposed to the military regime sought and received political asylum in the US in 1991, after the central government collapsed, civil war broke out. This event triggered a massive migration of Somalis to the US. Families and US-based organizations, such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services, sponsored many of these refugees during the 1990s. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reports that more than 70,073 Somalis immigrated to the US between 1999 and 2010, including 4,884 in 2010 alone (DHS, 2010). Somali refugees are still coming to the United States today because of the enduring civil war in Somalia.

Minnesota's overall immigrant population has increased significantly over the last three decades. In 2004, Minnesota had approximately 304,000 immigrants. According to the Citizens League (2009), immigrants made up 15% of the populations of Minneapolis and St. Paul in 2008, and 20% of the surrounding suburbs. Minnesota has been an

especially attractive resettlement location for many Somalis. In fact, some Somalis even relocated to Minnesota from other states because of the attractiveness of the unskilled labor market in the meat-processing factories of Marshall, Faribault and Willmar. The large, well-established Somali community and available social services and educational system in Minnesota have also appealed to many of these newcomers (Nderu, 2005; Ronnigen, 2004). The Somali immigration to the US has resulted in a positive rehabilitation, reconstruction, and stabilization of the educational foundation of young Somalis that had been disrupted, reorganized, discontinued and fragmented repeatedly by the unstable political conditions in Somalia (Ahmed & Green, 1999).

After the Somalia central government collapsed in 1991, the entire educational system imploded and the nation sank into a bitter civil war. Many people fled for the safety of neighboring countries as well as the United States to escape the violence and instability. Schools, libraries, and universities served as refugee camps and military stations. The civil war prevented many Somali children from attending school. In 2007, the first private university opened in Mogadishu, naming itself Mogadishu University.

To give their children the opportunity to go to school, many Somalis immigrated to neighboring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. Since schools in these countries were not compulsory and provided limited academic opportunities, many Somali students decided not to enroll. Further waves of immigration to the US occurred in a steady stream from 1991 and continue up to the present day. As a result, many Somali students who came to America have either had minimal home schooling or a fragmented experience through traditional Islamic schools. Additionally, most Somali students never

attended school at the elementary, middle, or high school levels until they began doing so in the US.

Many Somalis in the US now view a college education as the only possible way to attain socio-economic advancement. This pervasive belief places the US educational system in a unique position to play a role in the settlement and societal adjustment of immigrants and refugees by providing opportunities for economic and social advancement (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002).

Many Somali students are non-traditional students in the sense that they have not had a consistent pattern of being in a formal school system. School districts across Minnesota place new students in school according to their age-appropriate classrooms, but this means that many Somali students are academically and developmentally behind their peers. Those who survive the age-grade placement system of Minnesota's schools and are accepted into higher education face many challenges because they are inadequately prepared for college. Many Somali students enroll in community colleges because entrance requirements are less demanding than those of four-year colleges and universities (Bailey & Weininger, 2002). Moreover, first-generation Somali students find the relatively low cost of community colleges, the availability of financial aid, and the existence of remedial English language courses at community colleges attractive. However, despite the advantages that community colleges provide, many Somali as well as other immigrant students fail to complete their course of study or associate's degree within the regular two-year period.

The challenge for US educational institutions, especially community colleges, located in metropolitan areas with high immigrant population growth lies in finding

appropriate ways to respond to the needs of culturally diverse students (Szelényi & Chang, 2002; Kurzet, 1997).

Statement of the Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in metro areas within Minnesota.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding and informing this study are the following:

1. What is the profile of Somali students enrolled at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC)?
2. In what ways did experiences outside of the US influence and contribute to Somali students' attitudes about college success?
3. How do Somali students at MCTC view their college success?
4. What are the most important institutional and personal factors affecting the academic success of Somali students?

Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses only on Somali refugee students who attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College. These students include those who graduated from local high schools, adult schools or area learning centers. Some other Somali students who enrolled and later dropped out are also participants in the study.

Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

Academic Success: Success in this dissertation is defined as whether or not a student fulfills the goal of completing the community college curriculum and graduating. That is,

admission, completing all prerequisites and proceeding through a prescribed curriculum by taking and successfully passing all required coursework without withdrawing.

Acculturation: As a concept in this study, acculturation is used to mean “the change in an individual ... that results from contact with a different culture” (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). The acquisition of a second language is often cited as a prime example of additive acculturation as language is one of the primary pillars of culture.

Assimilation: As a concept, assimilation is used in this research to mean “a process in which individuals give up their old culture, exchanging it for a culture of their new society” (McBrien, 2005, p. 331).

First-generation immigrant student: This term refers to a student born outside the United States who resides in the US, and possesses US citizenship or legal resident status.

Immigrant: An immigrant also referred to as a voluntary immigrant is a person who made the decision to relocate and establish a new, permanent home in a different country.

Refugee: According to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees defined a refugee as a person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 2011).

Socialization: Socialization as a concept is used in this research to describe a process of social interaction by which people acquire those behaviors essential for effective participation in society (Hughes, Kroehler, & Vander Zanden, 1999).

Significance of the Study

Scholars have performed extensive research on how to educate newcomers to the US. Most of these studies have focused primarily on K-12 education since it is compulsory in the US (Portes & Hao, 2004; Portes & MacLeod, 1996, 1999; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996; and Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Little research, however, has been conducted on the educational success of immigrants and refugees at the post-secondary level (Conway, 2009); this is particularly the case for Somali students who have had little formal education in Somalia and who immigrated to the US as refugees.

Many Somali families have encouraged their children to enter higher education in the US to improve their prospects for employment and a prosperous future. They have advised their children to enter community college because of the flexible open enrollment policies, low costs, and large numbers of Somalis who have chosen community college ahead of them (Omar, 2008). Unfortunately, they as well as their children may not understand what detailed factors lead to academic success in community colleges beyond general platitudes. If some of these factors can be revealed in this study, then this knowledge may lead to improvement in the academic success of Somali students in higher education.

Due to the increase in the number and diversity of refugees in recent years, higher education institutions play a key role in the settlement and adjustment of these newcomers (Gonzalez, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studies show that Blacks and

Hispanics are among the largest minority populations entering higher education (Schmid, 2001). Unfortunately, academic support services are either insufficient or unavailable to provide students with the necessary support to succeed in college (Saunders & Serna, 2004; Szelenyi & Chang, 2002; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

The size of the Somali student population in Minnesota's community colleges and universities has increased significantly in the past decade (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004; Pyle, 2004). To accommodate these new students, post-secondary institutions need to understand the academic requirements and readiness, as well as the cultural differences that stand in the way of these new students as barriers to entry. Regrettably, knowledge of refugee students' actual educational experience and success at the post-secondary level is limited, particularly in terms of how these students enter into and progress through college (Szelenyi & Chang 2002). Currently, no published research was found on Somali students' academic success in the community college context. Furthermore, their needs and even their numbers are difficult to gauge, since they are categorized as "Black" for ethnicity purposes a distinction that mixes statistics about Somali refugees with Black immigrants from other parts of the world as well as American Blacks native to the US (Heggest, 2009; Bigelow, 2008).

To my knowledge, this study is the first conducted by a Somali educator specifically concerning Somali community college students and their academic progress and success. The experiences, opinions and stories of Somali refugee students at a community college are voiced for the first time through this research. By studying Somali students' academic success, community colleges may be better able to strategically address these students' academic needs.

Deep insight into the success of academically and economically disadvantaged Somali refugee students may emerge and may eventually contribute to the understanding of overall immigrant and refugee educational success.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher utilizes a conceptual framework put forth by Dr. Vincent Tinto (1975). Tinto theorized that the social integration of students with their institution, community, peers and family increases their institutional commitment, ultimately reducing the likelihood of student attrition and increasing the likelihood of graduation from college. The connection between graduation and social integration is a strength that enables perseverance and persistence to completion of the graduation goal.

The reason for utilizing the Tinto conceptual approach is because the researcher believes that the Somali experience may be significantly different than the empirical evidence that Tinto has gathered. The researcher believes that the Student Integration Model may, indeed, play an important role in the academic success of Somali students, and so the study results are compared with Tinto's factors, but other factors may be important as well.

It is important to question Somali students without prejudice to discover what they think those factors might be. In addition, because so little documentation exists about this specific subject matter, experiential insight may be the only practical information available. The data set includes in depth individual interviews, personal history descriptions from research conducted with a small group of Somali students by the researcher. From these data, themes and patterns may emerge describing what participants have found to be academic success over what period of time.

The Community College Setting

Somalis in American community colleges today are either first-generation young adult immigrants or second-generation young adults of immigrant parents. Since most Somalis are such recent immigrants, both first and second generation young adults have a direct immigration remembrance or a family legacy that may influence their academic achievement in school depending upon the kind and duration of experiences on the pathway they've traveled before entering community college.

In general, community colleges have played an important role in educating immigrant students and providing them with an entry point for higher education and beyond. They provide a broad array of educational opportunities and liberal education; vocational and technical education; adult, continuing, and community education; developmental, remedial, and college-preparatory education; and counseling, placement, and student development services. Community colleges have become arteries into higher education for many working-class and minority students, and those students are more likely to be non-white and have parents who hold working-class jobs, make less than the median family income, and have not gone to college (Dougherty, 1987).

Contemporary community colleges have become a destination for many students with diverse objectives and diverse backgrounds. They are found today in any given community in the US. Currently, there are more than 1,200 community colleges in America that enroll 10 million students annually, which is equal to 40% of all US undergraduate students (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011; Drury, 2003). Community college students come from a wider set of backgrounds than four-year colleges and are more accommodative of these differences. Along these lines, 47% of

community college enrollees consist of minority students, 13% of whom are black a number that is more than 50% of all black undergraduates in all US colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). Many of these minority students also are immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from war-torn nations across the globe. Some of these students have come to the US after completion of high school in their home country where the English language has been the semi-official language in schools and in government. Others who have come had limited schooling and no English language background from their home country.

The distinctive contribution of community colleges to American higher education is their adaptive, transmutable mission education's local, front-line interface with society. Because of this, community colleges have become increasingly popular choices for those wishing to pursue higher education (Bailey, Crosta, & Jenkins, 2006); and they have been especially attractive to immigrants. Very little research has been done on African immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeking students in the community college setting, and Somali students in particular. This study will help fill that void.

Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) was formed in 1996 by the merger of Minneapolis Technical College and Minneapolis Community College, and it is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU). Its unique location in downtown Minneapolis allows many students easy access by bus or by light rail. According to the MCTC website, the college is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges, and enrolled 3,874 students (Fall 2013) where 53% are female and 47% are male. The college offers many fields of study, including Information Technology, Liberal Arts, Business Aviation and

many more. In addition, the college offers certificates and associate degrees to those who successfully complete its programs.

Somali immigrants in community college settings. By the time most Somali students are admitted to community college in the Twin Cities they have been in the US for a long time either as a first-generation immigrant from Somalia or as a second-generation American citizen born in the US. They have also successfully navigated much of the K-12 American school system where they have achieved passing grades and, most importantly, a certification by an accredited American school system that they have passed all classes required and have earned a high school diploma.

Finally, it must be said that they have been socialized and acculturated in some manner, no matter how those terms may be defined so that they have achieved a certain comfort level with their own identity within their new surroundings. All of this means that, theoretically, they have achieved a milestone of “success” in America that enabled them to meet minimum standards of survival as citizens not requiring further formal education or parental guidance. This is the implied social contract the school system makes with every family it serves. Chances are they speak, read and write English well enough to function capably along with other American citizens in the school system and the working world; and they understand enough of the American system to seek and secure employment. They also have become accustomed to American schooling and school systems to continue in it if they choose, and are familiar enough with American language, culture, and values to meet others and cultivate friendships and personal relationships, and resolve misunderstandings and disagreements. In reaching this point, they have received an important right of passage, so to speak, that enables them to

proceed voluntarily on their way to seek full-time employment, further their education, develop social relationships and, generally, enjoy life free of major complications, fulfilling their aspirations.

Seeking admission to community college means then that Somalis have voluntarily chosen to attend community college as a means of achieving certain aspirations they have set for themselves. Fulfilling those aspirations means they have chosen and put themselves on a self-development path that they expect to propel them into the future to achieve longer-term goals. The community college path was chosen from among a number of other choices they might have selected. The success they ultimately achieve in community college is, therefore, related in part to their aspirations as well, as to how well they are prepared to fulfill the community college challenges they will face using the skills, attitudes, and experiences they have formed, accumulated and mastered along the way.

Many Somalis as well as other migrant populations select community college as their first post-high-school graduate program because it is relatively easy to be accepted with generous open enrollment policies; it is inexpensive relative to four-year colleges; it is easily accessible located, in many cases, in downtown areas where students who work can easily attend or in suburban areas within working-class or migrant communities; it is flexible in offering classes at more accessible times for more mature, older and, working students; it has a greater diversity of culture and race in the student body that is comfortable for those who have multicultural migrant backgrounds; it contains more practical, technical preparation for the job market options than four-year colleges; the coursework provides greater remedial learning opportunities for those needing extra help

in academic fundamentals such as English, math and science; and it provides a high probability trajectory to be admitted into a four-year college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Given the situation that Somali students find themselves financially challenged, socially disadvantaged, politically underdeveloped attending community college makes a lot of sense. Evaluating the academic success of Somali students while in community college, given the strategic sensibility of choosing the community college path, must also be considered as a key part of the success evaluation. In other words, the community college path presents its own unique context of challenges that should be considered in evaluating success factors, and it also should be considered or even compared against other career elevating choices open to Somalis.

Community college for immigrant and refugee students. Diversity in American community colleges in the past decade has expanded in part because of the influx of immigrant and refugees students, including Somalis. According to a US Department of Education report in 2008, the student population at community colleges was more varied as compared with other postsecondary institutions; and as students have become more diverse, so have their academic needs (Feliciano, 2006). *Community colleges*, for example, have provided opportunities for immigrant and refugee students to participate in the American higher education system. According to a 2007 study by the Institute of Higher Education Policy, black immigrant and refugee undergraduates have been more likely to be non-traditional students. For example, many students in this group have been older than traditional college students and support dependents. In 2003-2004, almost three-quarters of black immigrant/refugee undergraduates were independent students and 43% were 30 years of age or older (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Research shows that most of these students entered community colleges with little or no academic preparation at the college level in reading, math, and writing (Roska & Calcagno, 2010). Other factors have determined immigrant and refugee academic success in community colleges, the most obvious of which has been limited English proficiency. Another factor, especially among Somali students and their families, has been a lack of knowledge about how the post-secondary American educational system operates. For example, knowledge about selecting the best colleges for their children is limited. In addition, many are unfamiliar with the college application process. Timelines and deadlines can also be problematic. Somali students and their families may be unaware of dates for taking college entrance exams or for applying for financial aid. These factors create academic and social difficulties for immigrant and refugee students as they attempt to become integrated into college environments (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Academic success for Somali students in community college. Academic success for students of all ages and for community college students has been described above; but academic success for Somali students as refugees and immigrants may be measured by other criteria in addition to what has been previously delineated. If you are a Somali refugee, for example, and have endured and survived a gauntlet of experiences in a war-torn nation, lived in refugee camps, immigrated to another country, and traveled a long, difficult road trying to settle in, including contending with a new language, learning a new culture, and mastering work experiences, academic success may be simply making it through whatever is required and not failing.

In other words, the avoidance of failure as defined by a lifetime of very difficult experiences is success. In addition, from a contrasting perspective, success may be

something different if you are a Generation Y son or daughter of Somali immigrants and were born and raised in the US and attended American schools since you were very young. Academic success in this case may be enjoying the relatively low stress camaraderie of your Somali and American peers as compared with your refugee parents exuberant experiences, and insightful exploration of a socialized and acculturated life with your friends in a learning environment that comes with a sense of entitlement to life in America in ways your parents never had. And if you're a Somali student somewhere in between these two extremes, for example, or have been affected by other challenges, hardships, and factors such as poverty, discrimination, violence, isolation, assimilation and cultural religious and political resistance, religious conflicts, single parentage, serial unemployment, your definition of academic success may be more a question of learning to find a path out of hardship, utilizing any strategy you are capable of employing such as maintaining your social, emotional, and economic balance.

Factors affecting academic success for immigrant and refugee Somali students in a Twin Cities community college. This case study focuses on the factors that influence the academic success of Somali students attending a Twin Cities community college. Somali students have been selected as the subjects of this study for two major reasons:

1. A high percentage of recent Somali refugees are entering Minnesota on an ongoing basis. In fact, the Twin Cities have become the epicenter for the Somali population in North America. Therefore, any policy or procedural suggestions resulting from this study could well have a broad impact for other states.

2. Somalis encounter many factors that affect their educational success; thus, research that could benefit them may also benefit the broader immigrant and refugee population.

In addition to the language, geographical and cultural challenges of Somali students and their families, there appear to be socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political factors contributing to many students not completing the degree within the two-year time frame or dropping out from America's community colleges. Although some Somali students are graduating on time, many are not. Despite generic promises made in the Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) catalogue (2010-11) to educationally prepare students to live and work in America, there is no research on the Somali student's academic success at this college or any other community college in Minnesota. This study attempts to examine the factors that are contributing to Somali students' academic success in community colleges.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of this research study about the factors contributing to the academic success of Somali students in a community college in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The chapter includes background information on Somali immigration to the US and Minnesota. The significance of the research is described. Although there is extensive research on educating newcomers to the US, there is little information about the educational success of Somali students, especially those who have had little formal education in Somalia before immigrating to the US.

The chapter describes the purpose of the study and three major research questions including the backgrounds of Somali immigration, what is considered to be academic success, and what are considered to be the most important institutional and personal factors affecting the academic success of Somali students. Key terms are defined such as academic success, acculturation, assimilation, socialization, first-generation immigrant, and refugee. A framework explaining past factors found to be important in academic success is presented including the Tinto model of Student Integration. Numerous methods of defining academic success are presented including academic, institutional, and personal measures.

Chapter II

A Review of the Literature

Overview

There is limited research on the academic journey of Somali immigrants and their family members through community colleges in the United States. To this end, the purpose of this study is to understand how Somali immigrants are able to succeed in this journey by exploring the contextual issues such as interactions with peers through cultural learning experiences and, specifically, what factors affect their academic success. This literature review chapter is organized into three sections: Somali immigrant students' educational experience, historical backgrounds, and theoretical framework.

In the first section, the researcher describes the demographics and characteristics of Somali immigrant students, illuminating the historical antecedents related to Somali people in language, culture, and education. In the second section, the researcher describes the Somali foundational educational experiences, particularly those found in Somalia and refugee camps prior to immigration to the US, then educational experiences in the US leading up to entry into US community colleges. Finally, in the third section, the researcher describes the student integration and assimilation theories that are used to help understand and analyze the role of social support systems in promoting academic and social integration among Somali students.

Somali Immigrant Students' Educational Experience

Many Somalis who came to the US after 1990 were underprivileged and could only find housing in minority neighborhoods where their children had to attend large public schools that weren't prepared to handle them. This is especially true with the

second-generation children of immigrants (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004). Somalis arrived for any number of reasons: civil war, political and ecological collapse of their homeland (Garner & El Bushra, 2004), years in refugee camps such as *Dhadhaab* in Kenya that gave them too many experiences with death, dislocation and years of separation from family members. When they finally arrived in the US, they confronted typical challenges many immigrants to the US have experienced in finding housing, health care, transportation, jobs and schools for their children. Nevertheless, even with such great loss and dislocation of their family members, ways of life, means of livelihood, land, and love of homeland, they retained their identity and culture.

Religion. Although Somalis differ in ways that many people do by age, generation, gender, vocation, appearance, education and other factors, most Somalis share a common Islamic religion that plays a strong role in their everyday lives. Bryden and Steiner (1998) asserted that Islam is the most pervasive influence on the social lives of Somali people. Al Tahiri (1977) confirmed the importance saying that Islam is the main moral and social ordering structure for Somali society. As an example, most Somalis, irrespective of tribe, send their children off to places called *dugsi* (Carlson, 2004) to learn the Qur'an before they attend regular school (Al Tahiri, 1977). Even for the Somali diaspora, Kapteijns and Arman (2004) states that Islam and clan culture are the two main sources of Somali cultural and social identity. Soon after immigrating to a new place, Somalis typically set up or find an existing *dugsi* to continue the religious training of their children.

The importance of Islam in the lives of Somalis cannot be denied. However, other authors, especially those describing the Somali diaspora, have emphasized that for

many Somalis, when push comes to shove, personal priorities, family priorities, and clan loyalties that in many cases include the extended family, and “Somaliness,” supersede Islamic guidance over people’s lives (Langellier, 2001; Jenkins, 2005).

Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims as distinguished from many of their African neighbors who are Christian or members of country-based faiths. Somalis in the US have suffered discrimination in employment and housing as well as harassment in schools because of their faith (Columbus Dispatch, 2000; Bnet, 2005; Chu, A., 2008). Practices that provoke this harassment include the Islamic *salah* (prayer) that is traditionally performed five times a day at fixed times. Although these prayers are very brief, lasting no more than five minutes, some especially assembly line employers are not flexible enough to allow this to proceed while Somalis are at work. Muslim women with *hijab* (headscarves) also have had difficulty in some places (Pyle, 2004).

Cultural identity. Despite all of the hardships they have endured, Somalis retain a strong sense of ethnic identity and pride that is clearly apparent when speaking with them (Berns McGown 1999). They are master storytellers of their own difficult journey, following in the footsteps of old, rich, oral traditions of poetry, narrative, and history that are at the core of their culture (Andrezejewski & Lewis, 1964). Langellier (2001) describes one woman refugee in Lewiston, Maine, whom she labels feminist, colonialist, multiculturalist, transnational, Muslim, but not oppressed as a woman in Islamic culture, tribally distinctive, and black without being African or African American. Langellier identified two dominant narratives of the woman’s story that explains her Somali identity: identity as culture and identity as religion. She captures the woman’s feelings in the statements, “my identity anchors me wherever I go,” and “wherever I go I know who

I am” (Langellier, 2001, p 24). She further explains the dominance of her cultural identity by saying that she was born into her female clan and Somali identity, meaning it was so strongly impressed upon her that being it was effortless, whereas she had to learn Islam or relearn it again and again as time went on.

Many studies have shown that Somali immigrants in the diaspora express their earnestly believed cultural values by continuing traditions, obligations, and strong ties with extended families (McGown, 1999; Kapteijns & Arman, 2004; Leitner, 2004; Sharmanie, 2007). These ties extend transnationally and heterolocally now with easy access to and use of low cost communications technology. Other studies of Somali behavior in the diaspora show that they are group-oriented and entrepreneurially resourceful, merchants by “nature” (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004). Many cultural identity factors are associated with Islamic guidance that governs the role of women in social life, family obligations, and the relationships between men and women. Additionally, cultural traditions both called for by Islamic law and clan behavior govern the roles of men and women in employment.

Historical backgrounds. Trading Nation with Nomadic Culture and Education

Somalis have been used to change in their long history on the Somali Peninsula known as the Horn of Africa facing the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea on Africa’s Eastern shoreline. They have historically been a trading, nomadic people occupying a land similar in size to the states of California and Oregon combined. Somalia is an ancient land that has been inhabited since the Paleolithic period at least 9,000 years ago.

Somalia was an important trading nation bordering the well-travelled sea-lanes connecting Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Iraq and India. In the middle ages,

Somalian empires dominated regional world trade. It had an ancient, sophisticated goods producing and international trading civilization during the time of ancient Egypt and Greece known as the land of Punt. The climatically tropical nation has regularly traded with India, Sri Lanka, and China for many centuries. Somalia has been a rich, strategic, and important enough nation to have been conquered by and partially colonized by the British, French and Italians in their time of conquest in the 19th century.

Somalis, up until a few decades ago, were largely, perhaps greater than 90% nomadic (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, n. d.), but a number have moved to urban areas since the late 20th century. The largest proportion of the Somali diaspora has consisted of the best-educated and most affluent elites, many of who have moved to western countries including the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, the United States, and Canada. Large populations of Somalis inhabit Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen, Djibouti, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Somali culture and traditions have developed over the past 9,000 years. Their textile industries continue an ancient business. They are also well known for their woodworking, pottery and monumental architecture. Their foods are exotic, containing many Southeast Asia influences. Somalis are known as a “Nation of Poets” and a “Nation of Bards.” They also have a rich musical tradition.

Eighty-five percent of Somalis are ethnically Somalian (CIA World Fact Book, 2011), the majority of whom speak the Somali language. The balance of the population are Bantus who are descended from six African tribes who originally were from Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003); and a small minority of Middle Eastern Arabs – both of whom have been marginalized. Within Somalia, large

clans, sub-clans, and subdivisions of sub-clans have traditionally formed social units that play a role in Somali culture and politics. Little is known about the social structure of the Somali diaspora spread all over the world. Somali clans are patrilineal and marriage was normally between clans.

Islamic education. Somalis are a deeply religious, predominantly Sunni Muslim people. Islamic religion predominates their society whether in Somalia or in the sizable Somali diaspora. This may be so because the history of Islam from its very beginning has been closely intertwined and integrated with the history of Somalia, so it is deeply ingrained in all social practices. Long before Islam spread throughout the world, it found a welcome home in Somalia.

Although what Somalis valued historically in religious training basic religious and moral instruction differed from what they valued in educational training secular history, language, literature, music, mathematics, and science, both types of training were traditionally served up from the Qur'anic schools that have often been the only schools accessible to the predominant Somali nomadic lifestyle. An important reason for this is that the Qur'an was translated into Arabic script more than 1,000 years ago in Africa and memorization of the Qur'an enabled many to learn to read and write.

Presently, as more Somalis have moved into urban areas and joined the diaspora as refugees and immigrants, Qur'anic education has been limited to basic religious and moral instruction. Public and private schools provided secular and vocational education. Although all Somalis profess a strong belief and loyalty to Islam, they hold stronger loyalties to self, family, and clan (Jenkins, 2005).

Nonliterary spoken language tradition. Although the official language of the Somalia people is Somalian (CIA, 2008), Somalia people also speak Arabic, Swahili, English, Italian, and many clan languages such as the Maay, Jiiddu, Tunni, and Garre by virtue of their location and function as a trading nation in the Arabic region with a history of colonial occupation and Islamic influence. Despite being the official language, Somalian literacy is said to be low (Jenkins, 2005), although there have been a number of attempts after independence to increase national literacy. Most people speak at least two languages. English became the language of commerce in the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries. The Somali language is complex and is part of the Eastern Cushitic family of languages. It is spoken in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, and by the Somali diaspora spread around the world. Somalis are consumed by a rich oral poetry. Many children are taught history and cultural traditions through poetry. Somalis are said to have remarkable memories and chant folk tales as entertainment (Jenkins, 2005).

After independence, Arabic became the official and only written language. However, Arabic is not commonly spoken. Somalian was officially taught in schools using Latin script beginning in 1972.

Colonial basis for education. In pre-colonial Somalia, families and clans educated their children in a way that today might be called home schooling, by using locally produced educational materials. When the Italians and English began colonizing coastal areas of Somalia in the late 19th century, formal programs were steadily established for a portion of the population, primarily elites, who worked in the colonial sectors of the country as administrators in colonial enterprises and became literate in English and Italian. Cassanelli and Abdikadir (n. d.) contended that neither the English

nor the Italians wisely made it a policy to use Christian missionaries to proselytize their religion or education in rural areas for fear of Islamic backlash. They also pointed out that colonial schooling was more successful when Somali associations, religious leaders, teachers, and school planners promoted new schools. Mainly these schools were promoted in urban areas that affected less than 10% of the population. In the mid-twentieth century, beginning after World War II, colonials established the foundation for much of Somalia's higher education system by building small institutions for high school graduates and those entering professions such as politics, economics, education, public finance, mathematics, languages, law, and other cultural subjects. Such efforts were sustained only a few decades, however.

Education under independence, 1960-1991. When Somali independence was won in 1960, the central government built many schools, staffed them with newly educated teachers, mandated Latin script for teaching Somali writing, and carried out nationwide literacy and other secular learning programs.

Despite these efforts, very little changed in the first decade following independence from what had been inherited from the colonial systems, as ruling parties spent very little on education (7.5%) as compared with what was being spent at the same time in neighboring Kenya and Tanzania – 18%, and in Uganda – 27% (Dawson, 1964). In addition to severe budgetary constraints, what was planned may have been too ambitious as the government was trying to: 1) create a national system integrated with the colonial system; 2) staff it with qualified Somali teachers; and 3) convert an elitist system into a mass education system. The government only succeeded in accomplishing the first goal. Staffing became a formidable challenge. For one thing, only the poorest Somalis

wanted to teach as a career (Dawson, 1964). Many who went to teacher's college transferred out to other career tracks. Then it was discovered that women teachers in some regions turned out not to be very dedicated to the teaching profession. Language differences presented other problems.

English was to be taught in intermediate and high school to those who were taught, and only knew, Italian or Arabic in elementary school. No initiatives were taken by the government to resolve these issues. All of this then resulted in attrition rates of 50-75% among students. Another result was that girls attended very few of these schools that were mostly in urban areas because parents of girls who lived in rural areas were reluctant to send their girls to schools in urban areas. This led to tremendous gender inequality as schools had boy to girl ratios of up to 6:1 in the north and 4:1 in the south. The schools that were popular were primary and pre-primary Qur'anic schools.

A new central government administration entered in the 1970s with new reform policies to replace the old ones that did not work out very well. These were known as the Siyaad Barre scientific socialism policies. The new policies were to teach everything in the Somali language, shorten the primary education time by 25%, eliminate elitist education making all education compulsory and free for all children ages 6-14, prepare students for the job market, implement a massive literacy program, expand teacher training programs, increase participation by girls and women in the system, and encourage local communities to build schools in their own districts. All of this worked for a time until it was overwhelmed by: 1) lower standards that, in turn, led to devaluing formal education; 2) expansion of nepotism in hiring, which, accompanied by less educated people, led to expansion of minimally qualified people into government

positions; 3) natural disasters – severe drought; 4) war with Ethiopia; 5) significant disagreements with Islamic educators who were suspicious that socialist education diminished religion.

Social unrest since 1991: Disrupted educational path. There have not been any organized systems of learning in place in Somalia since Somali leader Siyad Barre was removed from power in 1991. Civil war and clan warfare has severely disrupted education in Somalia. Most of the schools, technical training centers, and universities were dismantled and the teachers let go. It has been much the same since then without a central government. At last count, less than 20% of Somali children were in any kind of school, and so-called community-education committees are running schools that do exist. These schools derive most of their funds from international sources such as the European Commission (EC) and UNICEF, but the situation does not look good, and the future is tenuous because the entire country is a war zone despite many attempts to restore a centralized state.

The political history of Somalia in recent times is treacherous, duplicitous, and complex, unlike the relative stability in ancient times when a powerful military government ruled the country. In recent years, national wars with Somali's neighbors and civil wars between tribes and factions have continuously kept the country unsettled and off balance. In the late 19th century, European nations fought among themselves and with Somalian factions for control of Somalian coastal cities and outposts. The Somali civil war in the 1990s severely disrupted agricultural production and distribution that led to famine and further internal strife a situation that has continued to the present. Although the UN made significant efforts, government authority essentially collapsed in

the south of Somalia, and the country is largely a genocidal war zone overrun by factions, tribes and pirates (UNHCR, 1994). Today, Somalia is ranked among the poorest and most corrupt nations in the world, being exploited in some places by Islamic extremists. A large number, perhaps a million of Somalis live outside of Somalia (CIA World Fact Book, 2011).

Fragmented education in refugee camps. Many Somalis have lived in refugee camps or a succession of refugee camps in crowded situations with intermittent hunger, medical challenges, and brutality. Although the specifics in Somalia have not been documented thoroughly, many accounts given to NGOs, such as the UN, describe numerous cases where children in many refugee camps have been frequently raped, abducted, and sold into slavery (McBrien, 2005). Some have been recruited into the military (Hek, 2007). Many young girls have become child brides (McBrien, 2005). A number of children also became heads of households when parents or guardians died (Hek, 2007). Some children suffered from separation anxiety when they fled persecution alone or lost their families during flight (Boyden, DeBerry, Feeny, & Hart, 2002). Because of these traumas, some Somali boys have reacted violently toward their classmates when they have found themselves in threatening contexts similar to their refugee camp experiences. Somali girls, on the other hand, have done better than most in similar circumstances (Ali and Jones, 2000). This is a very unstable situation where access to education is frequently far down on the list of priorities, survival being most important (Boyden, et al., 2002; Tollefson, 1989).

Despite general information about life in refugee camps, the effects of war and trauma on the future lives of children are not well understood. What has been heard and

read in descriptions and anecdotal estimates is grim. According to the UN, from 1991 to 2001, over two million children were killed in armed conflicts, four to five million were left homeless, and one million became orphans (Summerfield, 1999). Moreover, over 50% of all known refugees in the world were children younger than 18 (Summerfield, 1999) in the last decade of the 20th century. Little is also known about what happened to children who were fortunate enough to be resettled out of refugee camps and into other countries (Wilkinson, 2002).

This much is generally understood: Children were not consistently schooled; adults were not employed; and many extended families were not held together; instead they were destroyed, broken up, disintegrated and redistributed across the globe. This kind of disruption on the scale that occurred in Somalia and other war torn places clearly has the potential of significantly hindering learning (McBrien, 2005).

Although refugees may have had traumatic experiences, it does not mean that they can be dealt with in a uniform manner. Leitner (2004) reminds us that all refugee migrants are not homogeneous. They have multiple identities like age, generation, education, gender, race, and ethnicity; they have migrated under very different circumstances forced or voluntary, economic or political; they have varying lengths of stays within and bonding to accepting countries; they have different personalities; and they have different feelings and emotional attachments to the cultural environments and communities in their homelands.

Pre-migration, migration, and post-migration factors that influenced the resettlement of children. The next step after staying and surviving in a refugee camp is moving away to become resettled in a permanent home in a well-established location and

nation. This can be a major undertaking, may involve a large number of challenging steps, and may take a long time to accomplish. Limited research has been done on the pre-migration, migration and post-migration factors that lead to the resettlement of refugee children in accepting nations (Wilkinson, 2002). Ahern, Loughry, & Ager (1999) define pre-migration factors as reaction to trauma, separation, loss, and deprivation. Social and economic supports by family and community can mitigate these influences and determine how quickly children settle into new communities, but knowing the linkages would be more telling (Wilkinson, 2002).

Unfortunately, little or nothing has been reported about the migration process itself; how long it takes; how governments sorted out and made decisions about how families were redistributed into different nations and communities following policies that prioritized some factors and not others; the impact this had on families and children; and the length of time it took to recover from the experience.

Some researchers have reported about post-migration intergenerational conflict between adults and youth (Boehnlein, Tran, Riley, Vu, Tan, & Leung, 1995; Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Huyck & Fields; Zhou & Bankston, 2000; Zhou, 2001). The conflict has been described as growing out of the fact that refugee children usually learn the language of their local area faster than their parents. This learning inevitably has led to a role reversal in which children perform translation services for their parents and extended family for many everyday tasks (Zhou, 2001). Children became the eyes and ears of their parents, so to speak, translating at school meetings, interpreting the meaning of what is said at physician appointments, and negotiating with government bureaucrats about community services and licenses (Zhou & Bankston, 2000; Zhou, 2001); and in such

roles, their educational experience in schools became important in facilitating socialization, assimilation, and acculturation of the entire family. Not all children enjoyed performing this role; and not all adults adjusted to it gracefully (Hones, 2002; Lee, 2002; Olsen, 2000).

Immigration and settlement in the US and Minnesota. Although there has been a trickle of immigration to the US from Somalia going back to the 1920s, the flood of refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia and refugee camps in nearby Kenya and Ethiopia to the rest of the world and the US really took place during the past 20 years since 1991 after the start of the Somalian civil war and other hostilities. Somali refugees were resettled in several nations: United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada, and Australia; and they were relocated to a number of cities in the United States such as Atlanta, Kansas City, Columbus, Memphis, and Minneapolis to fulfill the United Nations Refugee Resettlement Act of 1981 (Farah, 2000). In the broader view, this was part of a migration of over two million refugees - half of whom were children - that has arrived in the US since 1975 (McBrien, 2005).

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, have been the most popular destinations for Somali immigrants and refugees in the US as well as other African refugees from Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Even when Somalis initially immigrated to other cities in the US, many travelled to the Twin Cities to join extended family and friends despite the harsh climate and the predominance of a white population in Minnesota that could not be more different than life in Somalia. The Twin Cities apparently had, and continue to have, a number of characteristics that were found to be attractive that the Somali refugee wants and needs, including a large number of entry-

level employment opportunities, strong social services, good schools, good health care systems, low crime and violence, available and affordable housing, and a supportive local government (Omar, 2008).

Two major influxes or “waves” of Somali immigrants came to the United States. The first wave, smaller, better-educated, and professionally prepared elites, came in the early 1960s to seek higher education and employment opportunities; the second wave came as refugees in the 1990s who had escaped the Somali civil war (Kaptejns & Arman, 2004; Pyle, 2004).

Assimilation has been much more challenging for people in the second influx for several reasons: 1) many were involuntarily forced to flee with little else other than their lives from Somalia; 2) many have suffered the multiple traumas of war, loss, torture, family disintegration, geographical dislocation, violence, and personal depredation; 3) many were unprepared for the cultural, educational, and logistical challenges and differences they encountered in the US, such as social stigma, American multiculturalism, non-theocratic democracy, racial discrimination, greater disrespect for tradition, a high level of mobility, greater individual expression, family disintegration, and smaller family homes; 4) many were forced to adjust and assimilate in much larger numbers that were difficult for communities to absorb; 5) there was a much greater mixture of people with more widely diverse backgrounds; 6) assimilation happened in a different era when technology change enabled inexpensive connection with extended family, friends, and community 24/7, nationally and transnationally; and 7) assimilation of a different kind happened as old paradigms of assimilation and acculturation were being questioned (Kaptejns & Arman, 2004; Langellier, 2010; Leitner, 2004).

Adjustment to life in the US and Minnesota, especially for the second wave of refugee children who had been on such a long journey and had suffered such hardships, no doubt was challenging. Assimilation took a lot longer for many and may, indeed, still be unaccomplished in any traditional sense of the concept.

Community K-12 Education Socialization, Acculturation, and Assimilation

Researchers in recent years have widened and deepened their definitions of socialization, assimilation, and acculturation to account for a more nuanced understanding of the alternative paths and patterns immigrants and immigrant refugees have taken upon resettling in foreign countries. Socialization, assimilation, and acculturation of school-aged children is the subset of the immigrant and immigrant refugee experience that is the focus of this study; they are milestones along the road to academic success and beyond for Somali students.

Socialization as a concept is used in this research as, “the process of social interaction by which people acquire those behaviors essential for effective participation in society” (Hughes, Kroehler, & Vander Zanden, 1999, Chapter 3). There are alternative theories of socialization and specifically theories that relate to socialization at different developmental stages of childhood, socialization in different cultures, and socialization in different groups (Hughes, et. al, 1999). The socialization concepts pertinent to this research are those that pertain to Somali students on their paths to academic achievement in Minnesota, both in K-12 and in community college. Depending upon their age as part of the first or second generation, Somali children may have been socialized at several junctures in a number of ways on their paths to community college in Minnesota.

Acculturation as a concept is used in this research to mean the change in an individual that results from contact with a different culture (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). Individually, people change identity, values, and beliefs. As a group, there are changes in social structure, economics, and political activity.

Assimilation as a concept is used in this research to mean “A process in which individuals give up their old culture, exchanging it for a culture of their new society” (McBrien, 2005, p. 331). Assimilation is a term that is used to describe one form of acculturation. Another form of acculturation goes by several names: biculturalism, transculturalism, cultural pluralism, and additive assimilation. Here, the newcomer adds the new culture to the original culture without giving anything up, in most cases, and moves comfortably between cultures at will (McBrien, 2005). The acculturation and assimilation that is described in this study is the kind students undergo on the pathway to academic success or failure in a Minnesota community college.

Once Somalis refugee and immigrant families arrived in the US, they eventually enroll their children in American primary and secondary schools. Depending upon their ages at enrollment and the quality of the school, this plays a significant role in the future academic success of both 1st and 2nd generation children. It is at the point of entry into the school system where they underwent a further series of socialization, assimilation, and acculturation experiences on top of all they may already have experienced in their young lives.

Somali children also received “home schooling” in their native Somali language. And, as described earlier, most Somali families sent their children to specialized religious classes called *dugsi* (Carlson, 2004) to learn the Qur’an before and sometimes while they

attended regular school (Al Tahiri, 1977). At these schools, children learned to read and write, so by the time they entered community public or private schools, they had a good head start and may have even been ahead of some of their peers, even though they learned to speak Somali and read and write in Arabic while in their *dugsi* classes while at the same time learning to speak, read, and write English in their American schools.

The location, setting, type of school, curriculum and teachers Somali children establish contact with will be where they will acquire firsthand exposure and probably socialization, assimilation, and acculturation of American norms, cultures, values, language, and academic skills (McBrien, 2005; Wilkinson, 2002). Direct contact with American students, teachers, and parents bring them face-to-face with average American people and the American culture a very different experience than they probably have ever had (Omar, 2008).

It is difficult to generalize about how well they may do because so many different experiences may have occurred and influenced them in their long journey to America. For example, if they had negative experiences in refugee camps and other way stations on their journey to America, they may continue to have negative expectations and have self-fulfilling prophecies thinking of schools as unfair places (Omar, 2008; Kapteijns & Arman, 2004). On the other hand, students who do well in school and are treated fairly may have exactly the opposite experience (Blair 2002; Hek, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002).

Blair (2002) suggests that low-level academic expectations for migrants by teachers have been the principal “impediment” to educational progress. McBrien (2005) asserts that students who are proficient in English, or can speak, read, and write it with ease, are better adjusted to the school environment and suffer little alienation.

Fennelly and Palasz (2003) in a study of English proficiency in the Twin Cities insists that facility in the English language in the US was absolutely necessary for educational advancement, social integration, human communication, and access to government and non-government services. The researchers point out to the success of the Somali people who have been able to achieve the highest level of proficiency faster than all other immigrant groups on all measures of speaking, writing, and reading (Darboe, 2003; Birman, Tricket, & Bacchus, 2001; Waters, Ueda, & Marrow, 2007). They found that the Somalis were able to do this because they had an orally rich, poetic language and a culture in which a person's competence was measured by verbal skillfulness and eloquence (Fennelly & Palasz, 2003).

The host country apparently plays an unexpectedly significant role in the success of students. Contrast the level of success reported by Fenelly & Palisz (2003) about the Somali people in the Twin Cities with findings of researchers in the UK who found that Somali students underperformed all other ethnic groups, citing academic language problems, low level of social skills, housing issues, lack of home learning culture, family conflict, social segregation and marginalization, cultural bias in the UK educational curriculum, and lack of a home-school relationship (Kahin, 1997; Ali & Jones, 2000). It's difficult to understand how these contrasting results could be more different.

What can account for these differences? Opinions vary. Some researchers believe educational aspiration led to academic success (Caplin, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1998) so high aspirations led to high attainment. Others believe that educational attainment is governed by expectations (Kabir & Richards, 2006). Similarly, high expectations leads to educational success and low expectations leads to the opposite. Still

others believe that high educational accomplishment was motivated by a desire for material wellbeing (Jencks, Crouse, & Mueser, 1983; Kao & Tienda, 1998). Blocked opportunities as in disadvantageous circumstances, redirected efforts, according to Ogbu (1982), lower aspirations of migrants because they do not believe education will lead to anything positive. Other studies contradict this point of view. Taylor and Krohn (2005), for example, show how disadvantaged minority immigrants in Canada aspire in significantly greater numbers than native Canadians to go to college (79% versus 57%). They also show that women migrants are more likely to obtain college educations than males.

Other lines of reasoning may have also played a significant role. There may be a strong relationship between student aspirations and the social support they received from family and friends (Kabir & Richards, 1998). Along these lines, researchers generally describe factors that affect student aspirations about their academic performance to include some of the following: parent's education, student's school ties, teacher attitudes, school environment, peers, role models, language skills, household income, valuation of education, size of city, access to educational resources, and interests outside of school (Taylor & Krohn, 2005, Kao & Tienda, 1998). One way parents have supported their children has been by preparing them for challenges they may encounter (Kao & Tenda, 1998). Somali/Muslim parents in the US have taken a very positive approach with their children continuously emphasizing the value of education (McBrien, 2005; Darboe, 2003); and when this positive approach is accompanied by high aspirations of children, the result has been high educational achievement by their children (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004).

On the other side of the equation, sometimes Somali parental expectations have exceeded student realities, such as innate ability, challenging context issues, and difficult challenges (Kahin, 1997). In addition, not all parent-student relationships function well. Language and cultural differences sometimes divide them. Concurrent with this are Islamic issues that students sometimes have with educational institutions and peers, such as scheduling prayers, accommodating special food and fasting, dress code compliance, coeducational physical education classes, and terrorist actions by Islam extremists, all of which sometimes instigate discrimination problems (Kahin, 1997). And too, following arrival in the US, some children may have been channeled into sub-standard schools where they were put on a path variously termed “downward mobility,” “second-generation decline,” and “segmented assimilation,” in the immigration literature (McBrien, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This might be a path, for example, where Somali children attend substandard schools and encounter substantial impediments to successful scholarship.

Theoretical Framework: Tinto’s Student Integration Model

The theoretical framework selected for this study is Tinto’s Student Integration Model shown in Figure 1. Tinto developed a theoretical model to understand student decisions to dropout or persevere with their college studies. His model reflects a process whereby student background characteristics combined with students’ institutional experiences, educational expectations, and institutional expectations enables or disables academic and social integration into or away from the college environment. Tinto theorizes that over time in a long series of interactions, strong student institutional, normative and structural, integration and social normative and structural, integration

modifies the student's goal leading to academic persistence to complete whatever college requirements are required (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Conversely, Tinto also hypothesizes that students who did not feel fully integrated into the academic and social life of an institution, nor who possessed strong expectations, becomes less committed to their institution and would be more likely to leave the institution before graduation. Among other background factors, Tinto contends that high school student experiences shapes later social and academic experiences in college.

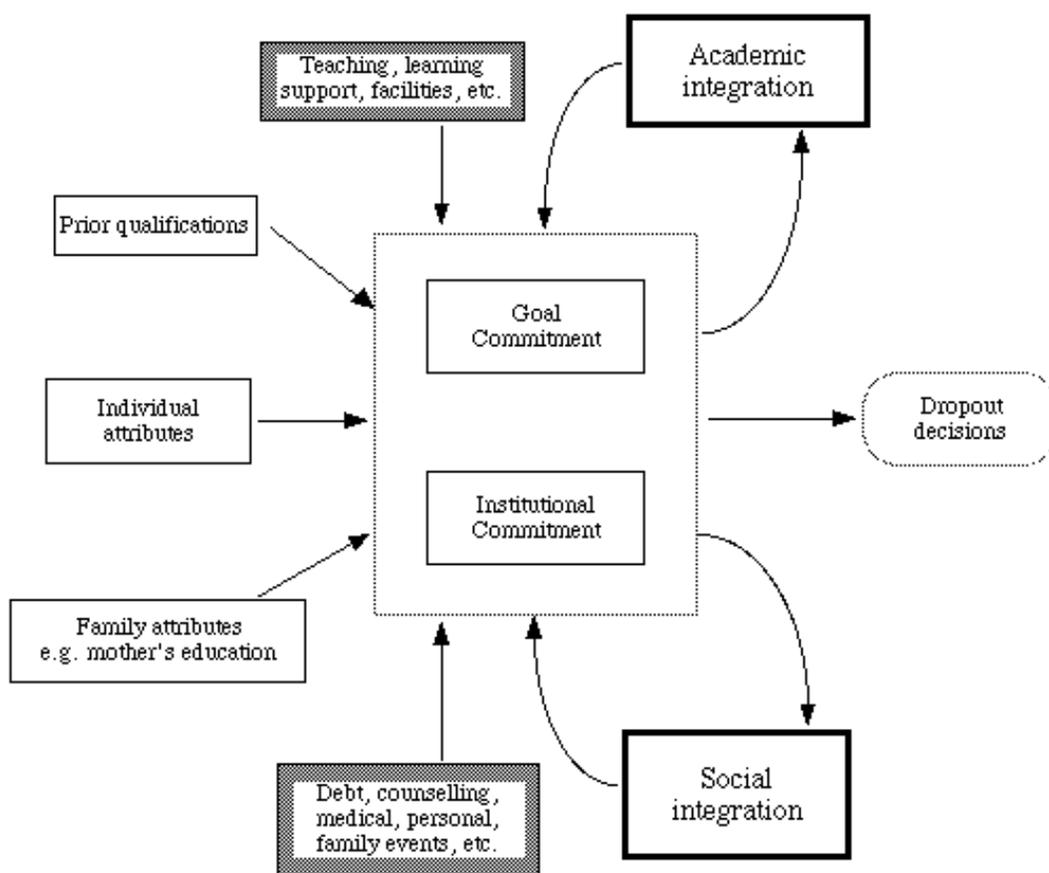


Figure 1. Tinto Retention Model. Adapted from Tinto (1975, pp. 89-125)

The rationale for using these student integration and assimilation theories is to build upon a basis of understanding of why and how students successfully navigate through community college life, a theory put forth by Dr. Vincent Tinto (1975) that he

termed the Student Integration Model. Tinto theorizes that the social integration of students increases their institutional commitment, ultimately reducing the likelihood of student attrition. Social integration is defined as the strength of connection between the student and the community college, including its institutional and social fabric. It is a strength that enables perseverance and persistence to complete the graduation goal. As Tinto (1975, p.96) describes it, "It is the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out."

Academic success is defined in the broadest terms for these models in a phrase, staying the course and completing it. This is to say, the simplest basis of gauging success is whether or not a student fulfills the goal of completing the community college curriculum and graduating, that is completing all prerequisites for admission, proceeding through a prescribed curriculum by taking and successfully passing all required coursework without withdrawing.

In the case of Somali students, Tinto's social integration rests upon a foundation of cultural assimilation into the US culture, without which social integration in a community college would probably not be strong enough to avert withdrawal. Portes and Zhou first proposed a segmented assimilation theory (1993) that suggested how assimilation of new immigrants occurs. The path of successful assimilation, or assimilation upwards as Portes and Zhou describes it, presumably leads to eventual successful social integration that, in turn, leads to academic success in community colleges.

In addition to these factors, Tinto acknowledges that individuals begin their college experiences with a variety of personal attributes demographic characteristic, academic abilities, talent, prior school experiences grades, academic achievement, social skill development, and family backgrounds, status, values, parental expectations, each and all of which have an influence upon future performance, fulfillment of educational expectations, and commitments in the college experience (Tinto, 1975).

If researchers are not careful and use too broad a brush, postponement due to financial constraints, external remediation of an academic deficiency, or other completely unrelated causes changing supply and demand of the job market, loss of a friendship, gain in a friendship, fulfillment of a family obligation may be inaccurately considered as a failure of persistence, for example. Conversely, if researchers are not careful, strong persistence may be presumed by the student remaining enrolled when, in fact, it may be happening due to lack of alternatives. Student perceptions are, therefore, important whether they are factually based or not (Tinto, 1975).

Family background may also play a greater role in college persistence. Many researchers have asserted that greater persistence results from families that are better educated, more urban, and more affluent. Other research has shown that greater persistence results from parental interest and expectations, and parents who are more open, democratic, and supportive of their children (Tinto, 1975).

The innate ability of the student has been regarded by researchers as far more important than family background, usually as measured by grade performance (Tinto, 1975). Personality and attitude characteristics also may play a role. Researchers have drawn inferences from students that are more impulsive, inflexible, anxious, overly active

and restless, and lacking deep emotional commitment to education (Tinto, 1975). At the time of Tinto's research, men were more persistent (Tinto, 1975). Currently in 2011, that factor may have been reversed. Past educational experiences may be related to persistence, but this connection is decidedly mixed. Many researchers have asserted that the higher the educational plans, educational expectations, and career expectations are, the higher will be the commitment to the goal of college completion. Some researchers have held that this is perhaps the most important individual factor in degree attainment.

Academic integration and interaction is primarily focused on grade performance and intellectual development. Grade performance, which is regarded as an extrinsic factor, has been shown by many researchers to be the single most important predictor of persistence. (Tinto, 1975). Whereas the more difficult to measure degree of intellectual congruency with the institution, which is regarded as an intrinsic factor, parallels grade performance in the sense of advancing at a similar pace as grade performance, but it is not regarded as important because of the lesser role it plays in occupational placement (Tinto, 1975).

Social integration is seen as the degree of congruency between the student and informal peer associations, extracurricular activities, and faculty and administrative staff interaction where success was seen as a satisfactory level of social communication, friendship support, faculty support and collective affiliation, all of which can be seen as a reward system (Tinto, 1975). Many researchers have found positive associations between degrees of persistence, academic success, and levels of commitment associated with social integration. Here, friendship associations and connections with subcultures and supportive groups appear to have stronger support from researchers than congruence

with the prevailing social climate of the college. Too much social integration may also play a role in weakening persistence. Peer group association appears to have the most influence over persistence as compared with connections with extracurricular activities and faculty interactions (Tinto, 1975).

Four-year institutions appear to have greater persistence than two-year colleges. Some researchers have speculated that the role of the two year institution is to weed out more committed students from the uncommitted. Interestingly, family income has been found to have no role in determining persistence between both types of institutions (Tinto, 1975). College quality has been found to have higher persistence rates. In other words, higher quality institutions have higher rates of graduation. Quality was measured by those institutions with a greater percentage of faculty with doctorates and students of higher average ability as measured by grades.

Researchers are on both sides of the issue as to whether size of college institution relates to persistence, so no conclusions can be drawn. Researchers have shown that grade performance is the largest single predictor of academic dismissal. (Tinto, 1975).

With a sufficiently low personal goal commitment, students tend to withdraw from college more for reasons of poor social rewards and connections than from poor grade performance (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's model is probably the college retention model most often cited in higher education literature (Braxton; Sullivan & Johnson 1997). Other studies modeled after Tinto's theory examined the differences between Black men and women (Allen, 1992; Brown, 2000; Chavous, et al., 2003), immigrant-origin Blacks (Charles, Torres, & Brunn, 2008), and first-generation college students (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). In addition,

Tinto's model has been applied to non-traditional students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978; Terenzini, & Pascarella, 1981) and particularly, to community college students (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983).

Tinto's model has been utilized in this study to describe the academic experiences and perceptions of first-generation, second-year Somali students at community colleges. Tinto's model emphasizes the vital role of social support in promoting academic and social integration among students. Many scholars view Tinto's as the best-fit model describing the relationship between the individual and the institution (Pascarella, Smart, & Etherington, 1986).

Tinto derived his model primarily from studies conducted at four-year institutions, although he did several studies at two-year colleges; therefore, his theory is also applicable to this study. His model explains the causes for success and withdrawal from college. Tinto's model of persistence emphasizes the important role that pre-college characteristics or resources play in shaping students' chances of completion at two-year colleges.

Tinto's (1975) model incorporates several explanations of students' success:

(a) Individual background: Pre-college schooling, family background, and individual attributes; (b) Goals and institutional commitment: Student aspirations and commitment to institutional goals; (c) Institutional experience: Academic performance, formal and informal faculty interaction, peer group interaction, and co-curricular involvement; (d) Academic and social integration; (e) The external environment: Social and academic communities of the institution; and (f) Outcome: Departure decision: graduate, transfer, or dropout. His model purports that a student arrives at college with certain aspirations,

and must possess a certain degree of commitment to education and the educational institution in order to attain those goals. Intentions or goals, along with students' commitments, develop further and change through constant social and academic interactions with faculty, staff, and peers at the institution and through academic success.

Tinto's success factors did not include some factors that other researchers believe to be important to college dropout rates such as student age, number of dependent children, employment, and whether the student attended college part-time or full-time. These researchers point out that immigrant students are at a higher risk of dropping out than native-born students, contending that more than half of immigrants in college are over 24, one-third have dependent children, and three-fourths work part-time or full-time while attending college as part-time students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix (2000); Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). The findings of still other researchers, however, contradicts these findings, demonstrating that immigrants are greater than or equal to, native-born students in accumulating credits, earning degrees, transferring successfully occurs mostly in middle class immigrant families when second-generation children feel compelled to speak English only, an action that drives them away from their parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Children most likely to follow this path have been found to live in poor, urban neighborhoods, where children mix with native, alienated youths whose parents and community have insufficient resources to provide them with alternatives. This culture usually discourages school engagement so it is viewed as harmful to the children's chances for upward mobility (Xie & Greenman, 2005). These children want to have American identities so they can be more acceptable to their native peers (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Third is a concept that some researchers call selective acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut, (1994). Characteristics of this type of acculturation include residence within a strong ethnic community that preserves, continues, and keeps the immigrant culture alive (Gibson, 1998). This type of acculturation is accompanied by economic integration.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further describes segmented assimilation theory. When both parents and children acculturate in similar ways at similar rates, they refer to this as consonant acculturation. When the rate of acculturation is significantly different, usually when children acculturate more quickly than their parents, they refer to it as dissonant acculturation. This usually leads to conflict between parents and children and a communication breakdown because parents lose their ability to guide and provide support for their children.

This theory emphasizes factors that likely help immigrant students to integrate academically, socially, and educationally into the mainstream US society. These factors include: strength of family ties, extent of community network, and a welcoming college environment; but having said that, this theory only focused on a specific population sub-category of immigrants. Some researchers argue that the current theories and models do not fit minority students and do not take into consideration their unique cultural and educational experience (Rendon, 2000).

Additive acculturation theory suggests that children of immigrants do well in school because they add the new language and culture into their reservoir of knowledge, repertoire of language and cultural tools instead of rejecting or replacing their existing language and culture with another as in subtractive acculturation as proposed by assimilation theory (Gibson 1988; Gibson, 1991; Gibson,1998). Those students who are

most likely to break from this pattern and become assimilated into the dominant culture have been found to acculturate faster than their parents, lose their ability to speak with their parents in their immigrant language, and have no ties to an ethnic community. The dynamic occurring as they learn English rapidly, is they lose the knowledge of their parents' and grandparents' languages, lose their connectedness to their parents culture, and lose the emotional support of their relatives and community (Gibson, 1998).

Success factors for Somali students. Tinto's model involves student academic and social readiness for college and its related factors by focusing on four variables: 1) family backgrounds; 2) pre-college experiences; 3) academic and social interactions, and 4) personal attitudes, all of which affect academic success for the particular group of college students.

In the case of the first- and second-generation Somali community college students, all four of Tinto's factors are probably in play. First-generation students would have especially been deeply involved in Tinto's family backgrounds variable, much more so than second-generation students. For example, they may very well have attended Somali schools in Somalia while those schools were in existence. They may also have been deeply affected by the multiple traumas of Somali civil war, general civil unrest, refugee camps, and emigration to the US. Additionally, there also may be differences within this group's experiences depending upon the age of the students when they arrived in the US.

Those who enter the US school systems when they are very young preschool and elementary school have a high probability of being deeply acculturated and fluent in reading, writing, and speaking English by the time they enter college. Their pre-college

experience, in Tinto's terminology, would have been rich and full. On the other hand, those first-generation immigrant students who entered the US after age 13, for example, may have experienced considerable difficulty by being "overlooked and underserved" (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000). It is even possible that some first-generation students may have completed their primary and secondary education in a country other than the US. In this case, they may be academically sophisticated and possess English fluency, but may need to undergo socialization, assimilation, and acculturation when enrolling in a US college, a process that may be problematic. Both late arrival, first-generation groups may be expected to have a greater likelihood of not having a successful community college experience when Tinto's theory is considered.

One reason is that both groups may have to enroll in remedial education classes that have, historically, not led to encouraging outcomes, as well as having to undergo significant acculturation. In one such study, Bailey (2009) found that less than 25% of students who entered community college in remedial classes graduated within eight years as compared with 40% of those who took no remedial courses because they were already academically proficient enough to enroll. Further, very large numbers of immigrants, including first-generation students, have been found to require remediation when entering community college. In one such study, 85% of the immigrants required remediation as freshmen, compared with 55% of native-born students (Conway, 2010).

It is for all of these reasons that second-generation Somali students have been selected for analysis in this study, and first-generation students have been passed over. First generation students are far more likely to have serious traumatic as well as academic disruptions in their educational preparation, or have started school too late to be

acculturated in the US to have sufficient social and academic preparation to perform well in community college.

Many of the other success factors by Tinto are in this research as described earlier, including: parental experience, urbanity, affluence, parental interest and expectations, student grades, personality and attitude, demographics (gender and age), academic capability, past educational experiences, academic congruence, academic integration, social integration, peer group association, college quality, intellectual development, and grade performance.

The socialization, assimilation, and acculturation theoretical framework must also be considered as a significant factor using the Portes and Zhou (1993) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001) models. In addition, other success factors that cannot be ignored are also be considered, such as: family emigration experience in Somalia prior to arriving in the US, the experience of emigrating to the US, and experience in the US after arrival.

Finally, the success factor that may be the elephant in the room, in that it is clearly one of the most important factors in all of this analysis, is the immigrant students' depth of mastery in reading, writing, and speaking English because this fluency affects the immigrant's clarity and depth of understanding of class content (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Academic success measures. Educational theorists generally believe that academic success means students learn how to integrate academic requirements good grades, completed courses, and accredited degree programs with social and emotional learning (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Academic success in a

community college may involve one or more of the following specific measures reflecting different objectives of the diverse student body (Brockman & Russell, 2009).

Mastery of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information. Even though we live in the information age, it is not enough to have easily accessible information. Knowing how to organize, value, apply the information to the resolution of problems separates ordinary students from extraordinary ones in academic pursuits, and can make these students more valued in the workforce.

Mastery of communicating effectively in speech and writing. Since language is the depository of the largest proportion of culture, effective communication of English through speech and writing may be the quickest route to acculturation in any culture, including American and western society; therefore, mastery of speech and written communications may be the leading indicator of academic success as well as one of the leading indicators of future success in for life in the US.

Proficiency in specific fields such as math, science, computers, languages, music, art, nursing and business. In an information economy, the basic tools of most employment operations are resident in topics such as math, science, computers, languages, music, art, nursing, and business. Those with greater proficiency in these topics in their academic pursuits can be academically rewarded and will likely have significant competitive advantages in the workforce.

Awareness of the importance of community participation. Awareness of the connection of people to the larger community is an important indicator of acculturation, support, and connection. Students who have stronger awareness of the importance of community participation are connecting the dots and recognizing that this avenue can

lead to greater control of their own future. Stronger awareness leads to greater academic and personal success in life.

Connections to community, family, and peers. Community, family, and peers form the social and economic support structure for each person that can be the foundation of individual success in the academic arena as well as in life.

Academic success has been defined in the social and emotional realm as an underpinning of support that may be measured using the following outcome standards (Zins et al., 2004):

Self-awareness (identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; recognizing strengths, needs, and values; self efficacy; and spirituality). Self-awareness begins in childhood and develops gradually over time, especially in the academic realm where there is a variety and frequency of self-awareness tests. This developing march towards maturity can be measured regularly in academic settings and may be a strong indicator of academic success.

Social cognizance: Perspective taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others. Social awareness is similar to self-awareness and develops along the same continuum in the academic realm. Social awareness may also be measured regularly in academic settings as a strong indicator of academic as well as life success.

Responsible decision-making: Problem identification and situation analysis, problem solving, evaluation and reflection, personal morals, and ethical responsibility. Decision-making is complex involving a series of due diligence tasks beginning with problem identification and ending with responsibility for the outcome of decisions.

Similar to other skills that develop over time, decision-making can be taught, practiced, and tested as a measure of academic, professional, and life success.

Competent self-management: Impulse control and stress management, self-motivation and discipline, goal setting, and organizational skills. Even more complex than decision-making is competency in self-management that develops in late childhood and early adulthood in school where there are many training opportunities. This is a very important skill in life that can be an absolute determinant of academic and life success. Similar to other skills that develop over time, this can be taught, practiced, and tested as a measure of academic, professional, and life success.

Competent relationship management: Communication, social engagement, building relationships, working cooperatively, negotiation, refusal, and conflict management, help seeking and providing. Most complex of all and vital to working in social groups are relationship management skills. Many educational opportunities for developing these skills are learned in the academic setting. Thus, many opportunities exist for measuring progress. Alternatively, academic success can be defined by the outcome of academic accomplishments. For example, the following are some outcome measures:

Greater likelihood of being employed because of more employment opportunities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1999). Some believe that the ultimate test of academic success is employability. For those who believe this, and not some longer-term broader measure such as self-assurance, a greater likelihood of being employed can be close to

the ultimate test of a good education, especially given all the competition that exists for employment.

More stability in employment (Carlino, Defina & Sill, 2005) Employment stability in the US has been dropping over the past few decades for a variety of reasons, including globalization and significant downsizing by major corporations. It is not as clear as it once was that employment security is necessarily a measure of academic success, except in the sense that academically successful individuals are skilled and flexible enough to perform many different tasks.

Greater likelihood of earning higher salaries because of more employment skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1999).

Higher salaries are a function of having some kind of employment skill, but not necessarily more skills. For example, a larger number of low-paying skills will not necessarily lead to higher salaries. Higher salaries may be true for those with a larger number of high-level skills that require a lot of training, skills that are in short supply, and skills that require a combination of natural talent and expertise honed through a lot of experience.

Greater likelihood of being employed in technologically demanding occupations of the future (Brown, 1999; National Alliance of Business, Inc., 1998). Individuals to fill technologically demanding occupations are in short supply almost by definition due to their complexity, requirement for advanced academic training, and the necessity of acquiring a significant amount of experience. With all that it takes to fulfill these requirements, the likelihood of being employed rises. Those with all of these skills

are not necessarily more employable; however, due to the supply and demand economics of the marketplace that varies over time in what it is willing to pay for these skills.

Enjoying employment instead of just earning money (Renter & Kober, 2001).

Some idealistic, romantic purists believe that the ultimate test of academic success is doing what you love because everything else (wealth, security, social welfare, happiness, sustainability, wisdom, good behavior, and all other desired things) will flow from this passion.

Greater likelihood of having better health and having health insurance

(National Alliance of Business, Inc., 1998). Empirical evidence shows that having better health and possessing health insurance follows greater affluence, that in turn flows from greater academic success. This evidence also shows a contradiction. Although life expectancy has been rising, unhealthy obesity is accelerating in a third of the US population.

Greater likelihood of having higher self-esteem (Filozof, Albertin, & Jones,

1998). Empirical evidence shows that greater academic success leads to higher self-esteem. There are many possible-contributing factors leading to higher self-esteem parenting, childhood sports team experiences, and affluence-related outcomes, thus, clouding the direct influence of academic success. This is also a factor that can feed on itself where greater self-esteem can lead to more academic success.

Greater likelihood of having lower levels of depression and anxiety (Cicchetti

& Toth, 1998; Liem, Dillon, & Gore, 2001). Less likelihood of alcohol abuse and socially deviant behavior (Kasen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998). Empirical evidence also shows that greater academic success leads to less alcohol abuse and deviant behavior. On

the other hand, there are counterbalancing factors at work in this statistic as well, such as changing cultural attitudes about substance abuse, economic change, policing, and social tolerance that cloud the effects of academic influence.

Less likelihood of engaging in substance abuse (Hallfors et al., 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1994). Empirical evidence also shows that greater academic success leads to less substance abuse in general. Cultural change, economic change, policing, and political policies are compensating factors that also cause a change in trends in both directions leading to the lack of clarity in the influence of academic success.

Although community college student academic success will be described by evaluations received for coursework performance, the ultimate success of their community college efforts should be judged by whether students have developed sufficient skills to achieve their academic goals, move forward in the learning process, be able to make key decisions about their own life choices, and push them closer to achieving their personal, professional, and career goals.

Furthermore, besides academic success measures and outcome, there are some important factors that related to this topic. Some of these factors include the following:

Individual background (Tinto, 1975). Pre-college schooling, family background, and individual attributes contribute to persistence. Students do not develop in a vacuum. Empirical studies show that individual student backgrounds that incentivize behavior, create study habits, build motivation, and reinforce values influence academic persistence and success.

Family background (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Better educated, more urbane, more affluent, more persistent, more open, more democratic, and more supportive elevate

student persistence Family traits have a strong influence upon student persistence and academic performance. Empirical evidence reveals that children strongly mimic their parents' values, goals, and behavior(Tinto, 1975; 1993). .

Individual attributes (Tinto, 1975;1993). Innate higher student ability elevates student persistence Clear individual differences in ability strongly influence academic success. Abilities vary so widely among so many different fields that the question really may focus on whether the student is able to find where his or her abilities reside and to apply these abilities while in school. Presumably, if this were to happen, higher rates of graduation would be achieved.

Personality and attitude characteristics (Tinto, 1975). Impulsive, inflexible, anxious, overly active and restless, lacking deep emotional commitment to education lowers student persistence. Some people sabotage their own academic success and persistence by their lack of self-control. This is a mercurial factor that changes frequently in unpredictable ways.

Gender (Tinto, 1975). Males have more persistence than female students. Nevertheless, newer trends show that there are now three female college graduates for every two male college graduates in the US (Rosin, 2010). Since researchers determine academic success to be a function of the numbers who graduate, a larger number of female graduates are interpreted as a larger portion of female academic success. Numbers may be different for immigrant groups.

Educational expectations (Tinto, 1975). Higher educational attainment, higher career expectations elevate persistence for degree attainment. Empirical evidence shows that academic performance is strongly related to educational expectations, and

educational expectations are strongly related to family influence. Higher expectations have been empirically shown to lead to higher academic performance.

Academic integration (Tinto, 1975). Higher grade performance, greater intellectual development elevates persistence. Empirical evidence shows that academic success is measured by higher-grade performance, greater intellectual development, and a large number of other factors that run in parallel.

Intellectual congruency with the institution parallels grade performance but does not elevate persistence (Tinto, 1975). Empirical evidence shows that when a student's goals match the educational institution's goals, academic success is achieved more often, although not necessarily until graduation or transfer to a four-year college. Institutional educational goals include such things as participation in the institution's social functions, regularly communicating with academic staff, and other school-initiated academic and nonacademic offerings.

Social integration (Tinto, 1975). Higher informal peer associations, connections with subcultures, connections with supportive groups, more extracurricular activities, and more faculty and staff affiliation elevates persistence. Empirical evidence shows that there is a strong relationship between social integration and academic performance and persistence. Students who participate in peer activities feel more connected to the school, and tend to have greater academic success and greater persistence. (Tinto, 1975).

Social climate of the college (Tinto, 1975). Schools have cultures all of their own similar to human personalities, a result of traditions and habits carried over from the past. This culture has been found to have a weak empirical influence over academic success and persistence.

Private institutions (Tinto, 1975). Students in these institutions have stronger persistence. Empirical evidence shows that private schools that tend to be smaller than public institutions, have smaller class sizes, and be more specialized in their course offerings empirically foster more academic persistence.

Higher-quality institutions play a greater role in persistence (Tinto, 1975). Empirical evidence shows that higher-quality institutions, meaning those that have more rigorous acceptance standards, better quality teaching staffs, and better reputations, also empirically graduate and successfully transfer more students.

Immigrants have a mixed record of persistent academic success as compared with native-born students. Some immigrant groups do better than native-born students; other immigrant groups do not do as well (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Hagy & Staniec, 2002; Vernez & Abrahamse, 2003).

Upward assimilation: (Tinto, 1975; 1993). Immigrants socialized, acculturated, and assimilated into the American middle class will have more persistence. Empirical evidence shows that upward assimilation into the middle class works where the English-speaking, second-generation student has been entirely educated in the US, yet communicates closely with his or her immigrant parents in their native language.

Immigrants not acculturated and assimilated head into the poverty class when second-generation children speak English only students will have less persistence (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Xie & Greenman, 2005). Empirical evidence shows that downward assimilation occurs when the second-generation student learns English but does not learn the language of his or her immigrant parents, and becomes culturally estranged from

parents and an extended family. This student may not complete his or her academic training at the community college, if he or she enters at all, through lack of parental support.

Immigrants accommodated and acculturated with assimilation students will have more persistence (Gibson, 1988). Empirical evidence shows that this kind of assimilation acculturation is where the immigrant, who may have arrived and entered US schools at a young age, substitutes the new culture for the old culture and, subsequently, does well enough in community college to graduate or transfer to a four-year college. Empirical evidence shows that when both immigrant parents and children assimilate, the mutual support is instrumental in enabling both parents and students to propel through to graduation from the community college or transfer to a four-year institution.

Dissonant assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Immigrant students who have acculturate more quickly than their parents may have less persistence. Empirical evidence shows that, similar to the situation described above as downward assimilation, once the bond breaks between the student child and his or her parents because the parents do not acculturate at the same rate, the situation is described as dissonant; communication and support breaks down between parents and child.

Strength of family ties lead to increased persistence (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Empirical evidence shows the key factor that leads to academic persistence in community college is the closeness of the bond between a student and his or her extended family members. Weak ties lead to the greater likelihood of dropping out of community college before completion.

A larger community network (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Students who have a larger community network will have more persistence. Empirical studies show that the more connections a student has built up with members of the academic community, extended family in the community, and the general community, the greater the likelihood he or she will academically persist through to graduation or transfer to a four-year college. Empirical evidence shows that a welcoming college environment may also count as another kind of community tie that keeps the immigrant student moored to the school and less likely to drop out before graduation or transfer to a four-year college.

Additive acculturation (Gibson 1988; Gibson, 1991; Gibson,1998). Additive acculturation by immigrant students who accept past and present cultures will have more persistence as distinguished from students who replace the old with the new culture. Empirical evidence shows that there are two types of acculturation additive and subtractive. Additive acculturation is believed to be the stronger type where both the immigrant culture and US culture are kept alive in the student's support structure, including family, school, and community friends and peers. It is believed by researchers that this form of acculturation is stronger than single culture acculturation.

Length of stay in US (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000). Students who have been in the US longer will have greater persistence. Empirical evidence shows that perhaps the simplest measure of academic success may come down to measuring the length of time that the immigrant family has been in the US prior to the student entering community college. The longer the stay, the more time is allowed for language to be learned and other parts of acculturation to take place.

Early entry into US education system (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000). Students who have entered the US education system earlier will have greater persistence. Empirical evidence shows that the length of time in the American school system has a major effect on how well students achieve academic success. Immigrants entering elementary school will receive nearly the same education as native-born students. Immigrants entering middle school or high school have a shorter and more difficult time to make adjustments to American culture.

Greater fluency in English (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Students with greater fluency in English will have greater persistence. Empirical evidence shows that the most powerful factor in determining the academic success of immigrant children or the children of immigrant families in community college is their fluency in speaking and writing English. Fluency will open many doors in education, as well as employment, enabling students to meet many challenges with utmost efficiency.

Trauma of refugee camps (Loughry, M., MacMulin, C., Ager, A. Eyber, C. & Brownlees, L., 2003). Students who have undergone the traumas of refugee camps before entering the US will have weaker persistence. Empirical evidence shows that some refugees have suffered terrible trauma before immigrating to the US. These may be experiences that will take many years to recover from, if ever. For some, these experiences will strengthen their resolve to have academic success; but for others it may weaken it. It is not clear if the impact will be common to all who have been affected, or whether it will vary with the individual. The table below demonstrates academic success measures with three different lenses: Academic success, outcomes and factors.

Table 1
Academic Success Measures

Academic Success	Outcome	Factors
<p>1) Capability of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information.</p> <p>2) Capability of communicating effectively in speech and writing.</p> <p>3) Capability of working with others</p> <p>4) Capability of completing projects</p> <p>5) Awareness of the importance of community participation</p> <p>6) Connection to community, family and peers</p>	<p>1) Self-awareness: Identifying needs, values and spirituality.</p> <p>2) Social cognizance: appreciation diversity and respect others.</p> <p>3) Responsible decision making</p> <p>4) Competent self-management: Self motivation and discipline</p> <p>5) Competent relationship management: Communication, negotiation and conflict management</p> <p>6) Greater likelihood of being employed.</p> <p>7) Greater Likelihood of earning higher salary.</p> <p>8) Greater likelihood of having better health and having health insurance.</p> <p>9) Greater likelihood of having self-esteem.</p> <p>10) Less likelihood of engaging in substance abuse</p>	<p>1) Individual background</p> <p>2) Family background and strength</p> <p>3) Social integration</p> <p>4) Social climate of the college: Welcoming environment</p> <p>5) Higher quality institutions</p> <p>6) Extent of community network</p> <p>7) Immigrant stay in the USA</p> <p>8) Early entry into school system</p> <p>9) Fluency in English</p> <p>10) Refugee experience</p>

Summary

Somali refugees are relatively recent arrivals to the United States, arriving en masse over the past 20 years beginning in 1991. Many were fleeing for their lives as a result of political, military, and economic upheaval in Somalia. As a group, Somalis have a unique cultural, spiritual, and family background that contributes to their educational success. This chapter explores the makeup of Somali students and their educational background; the historic backgrounds of the Somali emigration to the US and the theoretical background of studies conducted on the success of other immigrant groups becoming socialized and acculturated into American culture, as well as educated in the primary, secondary, and community colleges of the US. Somalis have an ancient culture that extends backwards for more than a thousand years. Somalis continue to practice the Islamic religion and culture of their forbears.

Tinto's student integration model (1975) is described in detail as part of the theoretical background of this study as well as segmented assimilation theory by Portes and Zhou (1993), and the selective acculturation theory by Portes and Rumbaut (1994) which describe academic performance related to the strength of the connection between students, the institution, the community, parents, and peers as the key factors in determining student success. Other factors such as individual student capability and capacity are also considered.

Chapter III

Methodology and Methods

Overview

In this chapter, the researcher describes the mixed research design approach taken in this study, the associated research methodology, the methods of data collection, the population and sample selection procedure, the survey research instrument, the interviews and observations, and the analysis used to report the study's findings.

Mixed Method Research Design

Mixed-method research design is the strategy used in this study, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This approach enables a relatively restriction-free exploration of a topic that has received very little research attention. It assumes that the educational success of second-generation Somali students in the community college context may be influenced by: a) social interaction between students, extended family, peers, mentors, community residents, and community college faculty and staff; b) other, more difficult to quantify, intangible, cultural, and antecedent factors that extend both forward and backward in time, location, and tradition such as historic language traditions, tribal ways, religious norms, family immigration experiences and prejudices; and c) individual differences in academic capabilities, interests, and values.

Within the overall mixed-method approach, the researcher weights the qualitative research design approach more heavily than the quantitative approach. The quantitative approach is to analyze demographic information and the qualitative approach is to reveal as much as possible about academic success from the student's perspective. Data gathered by these different approaches were integrated and combined with the theoretical

framework described in chapter two to shed light on the research questions posed in chapter one (Creswell, 2009).

Quantitative research. The researcher proceeds sequentially in the data collection process, first using the quantitative approach. The researcher uses a survey questionnaire instrument to collect demographic data from a group of generation-stratified, purposefully sampled Somali subjects that will also be a part of the researcher's qualitative study.

Qualitative research. After the quantitative survey was completed, the researcher implemented the qualitative research by taking a social constructivist philosophical viewpoint (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). The social constructivist approach is, at base, inductive and, therefore, depends upon the research subject's view of the situation being studied by the researcher. To uncover this view, broad, general, and open-ended questioning was employed by the researcher to avoid introducing researcher bias. In addition closed-end follow-up questions about narrower topics were used to reveal the many influences, aspects, and nuances of behavioral choices. Underlying this approach is a belief that the subject has constructed social meanings, formed opinions, engaged in the world, and taken action based upon extensive interaction with others in addition to historical, social, and cultural norms that influence the subject's life (Crotty, 1998).

Here the researcher asks questions based upon both the predetermined theoretical framework principally based on the theories of Tinto (1975), Portes and Zhou (1993) Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Gibson (1998). Consistent with these frameworks, the researcher organized the qualitative research as a series of case studies whose outcomes

can be compared with one another (Stake, 1995). Finally, the researcher integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches as a mixed method strategy. (Creswell, 2009).

The mixed-method strategy include triangulated, multiple sources of data. Statistical as well as verbal analysis of responses was also used. . Focus group interviews were conducted as well as individual one-on-one interviews. The researcher is a participant observer in these interviews, and recorded results in field notes and self-memos, and made digital audio recordings. An overall analysis integrated and triangulated all qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques.

The case study method. By using a qualitative case study method, the researcher identifies the factors influencing the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in the Twin Cities in Minnesota. As Merriam (2001) indicates, qualitative research is “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena in its natural setting” (p.17), and, yet, the researcher still needed to describe the subject under study using quantitative methods, where possible, to give the research a broader value. The researcher chose to emphasize the qualitative methodology because reality is complex, constructive, and subjective, and research is an interpretative process. In addition, very little about the Somali experience has been researched. Qualitative inquiry is a systematic process of describing, analyzing, and interpreting workings of everyday life in its natural setting (Wolcott, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1988). Insights discovered here depend on holistic, meaningful, personal, social, and idiosyncratic knowledge that is inaccessible by any other means (Yin, 2014; Merriam, 1988).

A case study is the preferred method for this research and is defined as a detailed examination of one setting, a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Merriam, 1988).

Yin (2014) also defined the case study as a twofold definition, the first part is that "A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. The second part of the definition points to case study design and data collection features". (p. 2).

The main instruments used in this case study research were questionnaires, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. This study collects valuable, first-hand information from Somali students as they experience higher education. In case study research, the researcher should be knowledgeable about the case under study, sensitive to new and unanticipated issues in data collection, ask good questions, be a good listener, and be adaptive and flexible (Yin, 2014).

Many researchers who utilize the case study approach (Berg, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988, 2009; Stake, 2005) state that case studies can provide very useful information and detailed descriptions about the case under study. On the other hand, Yin (2014) listed several criticisms of the case study method. Among them is Yin's view that case studies often lack scientific rigor, have little basis for scientific generalization, and require a lengthy investment of time and documentation on the part of the researcher.

In general, the disadvantage of qualitative methods of research, including the case study, is that the very subjectivity and interpersonal exchanges of the inquiry can lead to difficulty in establishing the reliability and validity of the information. It is difficult to

prevent researcher-induced bias. Detailed data gathered through open-ended questions can elicit direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation.

Reality changes with changes in different people's perceptions.

Sample

The sampling section includes the site of the study, the participants, and the sampling method.

Data collection site. The researcher collected data at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), which is a two-year community college in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This particular community college has been selected because it has the largest Somali student population of any higher education institution in Minnesota and, therefore, offers the largest sample size that can be accessed in Minnesota, and probably any state in the US. In addition, the college has a Somali guidance counselor and a mosque to accommodate students' spiritual and cultural needs. In the larger geographic sense, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul has been selected for this study because a large number of Somalis live within the metropolitan area and, again, the largest number of Somalis in any metropolitan area within the US.

Sampling and Selection of Participants

The entire class of approximately more than 234 prospective Somali students attending MCTC as well as an unknown number of Somali students who had formally dropped out or transferred out to other schools has been identified. Upon completion of a pretest to confirm the validity of the questions that would be asked in relation to their relevance in answering the study's research questions, a research recruitment email was sent to all students on the list together with an announcement and an invitation to

participate in the research study. The sessions held on campus on several dates and at times calculated to attract as many students as possible. The invitations were supplemented with announcements and fliers posted on campus containing the dates, times, and locations. The invitation to participate in the study stated participants answers to the questionnaire might help future Somali students succeed in their college experience. There were 14 questions in the survey questionnaire that took approximately 30 minutes to complete. At the time of each on-campus event, students were invited into the on-campus classroom, asked to register with their name and contact information, handed a questionnaire and a pen, and asked to complete it to the best of their ability.

The questionnaire contained questions about standard demographic identity, immigration status, educational history, and a request to opt-in or opt-out of further studies by the researcher, including a focus group and a one-on-one interview. After completing the questionnaire, students were asked to hand in the survey instrument to the host. The responses on the questionnaires were tallied, analyzed with quantitative tools, and interpreted by the researcher.

Next, the researcher proceeded with the qualitative research process. Based on the data, the researcher turned to the list of students who opted-in to participate in further research.

The reason for gender parsing is the researcher's belief that the strength of traditional Somali culture may strongly bias responses by both males and females when they are asked to respond in formal, mixed male and female public groups, unless they are separated by gender. More specifically, the researcher believes that females may defer to males instead of responding independently and candidly. The reason for

selecting students who qualify for second-year status was to allow for students to have enough college experience to enable more seasoned choices about remaining or dropping out of school. The reason for selecting permanent dropouts or part-time students was to define the limits of successful student performance. The success and failure are relative terms, and the dimensions are not really known until the limits of both are tested. The belief was that many Somali students would be found to be stretching those limits as part-time students for economic reasons, as distinguished from motivational or other reasons. The question was important to address as it directly related to one of the key issues in student retention in this study.

Focus group participants were asked six open ended questions, which they were expected to answer verbally as a group and interacting with the researcher. The sessions lasted approximately one hour. The students' answers were recorded on digital audiotape for further analysis. Following the focus group interviews, the researcher recorded his impressions of what occurred in field notes and self-memos.

Some advantages of using focus groups are that participants naturally interact and are influenced by one another; data in focus groups is given up more quickly than by individual interviews; focus groups are relatively easy to conduct; the researcher can interact directly with the respondents, allowing for clarification, follow-up questions, and probing; and the results are easy to understand. Some disadvantages of focus groups are that the researcher does not have complete control over the group and the information produced; focus groups may produce relatively chaotic data; the moderator may bias results by providing cues; and a dominant or opinionated member may squelch responses by more reserved members who are hesitant to talk.

After the focus groups were completed, the researcher compiled and analyzed the participants' responses. Following this analysis, the researcher scheduled and conducted one-on-one interviews with six students on campus at times convenient for the students and the researcher. The interview included a set of six questions and follow-up questions. Responses were audio taped for future analysis. After completing the interviews, the data was compiled and analyzed.

Background of the study population and sample. Two populations of Somali students were selected to participate in this research study: 1) a population of 234 Somali students currently enrolled at MCTC; and 2) a population of 18 formerly enrolled Somali students who did not complete their studies at MCTC and were still residing in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, who are described as dropouts in this study.

Both populations were invited to participate in the study and to first complete a written survey questionnaire. From the survey results, two samples were drawn from both populations: 1) a sample of 18 currently enrolled MCTC students, nine men and nine women; and 2) a sample of 18 drop out MCTC students, nine men and nine women. The sample included a total of 36 participants, 18 men and 18 women.

From this sample of men and women, two groups were formed: One group contained 24 men and women to participate in focus group interviews (12 represented currently enrolled MCTC students and 12 represented MCTC dropouts); and the second contained 12 men and women to participate in individual interviews (six represented currently enrolled MCTC students and six represented MCTC dropouts).

From each of these two groups of participants, four focus groups were formed: Six men of currently enrolled MCTC students; six women of currently enrolled MCTC

students; six men who were dropouts; and six women who were dropouts. Twelve individual interviews were conducted: These included three men of currently enrolled MCTC students and three men who were drop outs; three women of currently enrolled MCTC students; three men who were dropouts; and three women who were dropouts.

Sample selection procedure. Eighteen participants were selected from a larger group of over 234 currently enrolled Somali students at MCTC who were contacted by the researcher and invited to participate in a written questionnaire survey of Somali students. All 234 students were contacted in person one-by-one by the researcher, mostly during a two week period at a table and six chair setup in a third floor lobby of the MCTC student center and asked to complete the questionnaire shown in Appendix A. Others not contacted there were met at the MCTC Mosque, learning center, computer lab, classrooms and cafeteria. One of the questions in the questionnaire requested volunteers to participate in a related follow-up study.

From the list of 234 students who volunteered, 18 currently enrolled students were purposely selected. Six males and six females were selected to participate in two separate gender focus groups led by the researcher; and three males and three females were selected to participate in individual interviews with the researcher.

Dropouts were selected using a different procedure where MCTC contacts of Somali students were asked to help locate former students who are known to have voluntarily dropped out of MCTC and still lived in the Minneapolis/St. Paul vicinity. Of a group of 24 dropouts who were contacted, six males and six females were selected to participate in two separate gender focus groups led by the researcher; and three males and three females were selected to participate in individual interviews with the researcher.

The final 36 case study participants were first selected from those who indicated on consent forms that they would be ready with participating in a follow-up interview, then invited and scheduled to participate in four one-hour focus group encounters and 12 individual interviews.

Data collection methods. As described previously, data were obtained by a survey questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews. Focus groups were conducted in both English and Somali. Interviews were conducted in Somali, and later translated and transcribed into English. Data was recorded in the form of narrative descriptions immediately after each questionnaire period, focus group, and interview. These various data sources were compared in validating and triangulating the claims made from the data in line with recommendations made by researchers who administer mixed-method and qualitative studies (Stake, 1995).

The first stage of data collection involved a demographic survey of all Somalis students at MCTC to obtain their opinions and perceptions related to factors influencing their academic success. The researcher shared the results of the written survey with his academic advisors, asked for feedback, and conducted a pretest with 10 students to discover any problems with the questionnaire as a whole. A final questionnaire was distributed to all Somali students at MCTC, including part-time students and those who had dropped out. The questionnaire contained 14 questions and included inquiries standard demographic items age, gender, parent information, immigration status, educational history, and a statement to opt-in or opt-out of further studies conducted by the researcher, including a focus group and one-on-one interview.

The second stage of data collection was gathering information from four focus group interviews with 12 male and 12 female students to discuss factors affecting the academic success of Somali students at MCTC. Focus group interview data is particularly helpful in culturally diverse situations (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus group method is comprised of semi-structured interviews conducted with groups for getting closer to participants' understanding of the topic of interest (Lindsay & Hubley, 2006). These interviews were conducted on the MCTC campus at various times convenient for students. Oral interviews were digitally recorded for analysis later. Students were asked to sign a form giving permission for the interview, as well as a release form allowing the researcher to record the interview, complete the research, and publish general findings that do not identify any interviewee by name.

Stake (1995) described the interview as the main tool of the qualitative analysis researcher in “discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case” (p. 64). The researcher uses an in-depth, semi-structured interview format (Mertens, 1998). Following the focus group interviews, the researcher scheduled and conducted one-on-one interviews with 12 students. The researcher posed a mixture of open-ended and closed-ended questions about their life history, details of their educational experience, and factors they believe affect their academic success. A limited time per interview was the only restriction on responses. Before beginning the interview, each student was asked to give written consent to be interviewed and recorded. After the interview, the researcher personally documented key ideas from the discussion as well as impressions gained from the interview in his field notes and self-memos.

Focus Group Procedure

Four six-person focus groups met as a group with the researcher to discuss their backgrounds and educational experiences at MCTC. Two of the four groups consisted of currently enrolled MCTC students, and the remaining two groups consisted of formerly enrolled MCTC students.

All of the focus group participants met the researcher at MCTC. Female focus group interviews were conducted near the third floor lobby table-and-chair setup in a public area. Male focus group interviews were conducted in a private room near the third floor lobby table-and chair-setup. All participants sat facing each other in a circle.

When each group assembled, the researcher switched on the digital tape recorder, introduced himself, reiterated the purpose of the focus group, described what a focus group does and how focus group meetings are conducted, asked each person to introduce themselves briefly, then he presented the first of six questions. After posing the question, the researcher asked each person to respond as best they could. Once all six participants had responded, the next question was posed to the group. Again, each person was asked to respond as best they could. The same process occurred until all questions had been posed. The entire process took approximately one hour. Conversations were held in the Somali language.

The female dropout focus groups were the most challenging to arrange as most were working, some lived far from MCTC, and others had conflicts with their family obligations.

Once the participants were assembled, the procedure was explained, the consent forms were signed, and the interviews proceeded. Most of the female dropout

participants expressed disappointment for not completing their studies. Some blamed their families in Africa or marriage for making it impossible for them to continue. All showed a willingness to go back to college. There was very little interaction or group discussion during the interviews. Most had never met each other before despite attending the same school during the same timeframe. Most kept their responses to a minimum and did not elaborate about the context of their decisions despite being encouraged.

Male dropout focus groups were easier to setup and hold the interviews. Most took place at the airport where many worked as taxicab drivers. The focus group interviews were held in the taxis. There was much more interaction with the males than the females during the interviews. Most of the interviewees said that family issues were the primary reason for dropping out. All said they intend to go back to college to complete their studies.

After completing each interview both individual and focus group, the researcher transcribed them as soon as possible from Somali to English.

Focus group interviews. The researcher purposefully selected 24 individuals to be interviewed in a semi-structured interview format. Twelve of the interviewees were currently enrolled at MCTC and 12 of the interviewees were MCTC dropouts. Twelve of the individuals were males and 12 were females. The entire group was broken down into four 6-person subgroups for ease of conducting the focus group interviews and to maintain a research balance between currently enrolled students, dropouts, males, and females. Each of the 24 focus group participants was given a code name to protect their identity and ensure their privacy.

Interview participants. Dropout students were located through friends as well as MCTC records. Contact was then made, permissions were secured, and arrangements were made to meet for interviews. Female students were met at the researcher's home or coffee shops. All of the male students were met at the airport and were interviewed in their taxicabs. When each individual interview participant showed up, the researcher switched on the digital tape recorder, introduced himself formally, reiterated the purpose of the meeting, asked each person to introduce themselves briefly, then proceeded to present the questions and record the answers. After posing a question, the researcher asked each person to respond to the best of their ability. The same procedure was followed until all questions had been covered. The entire process took approximately one hour. The conversations were held in the Somali language. Some informal discussions occurred at times when comments and questions were offered, and responses and clarifications given. The atmosphere was informal and friendly.

Data analysis procedure. For the quantitative analysis, the researcher employed simple descriptive statistics that included measures of central tendency mean, median, and mode and measures of variability about the mean range and standard deviation. The data was recorded on the 14-question survey questionnaire, entered and compiled in a personal computer, analyzed using an SPSS statistical package or its equivalent, and interpreted by the researcher.

For the qualitative analysis, the researcher conducted an analysis of the data using a process called qualitative induction. This means that concepts and themes are expected to emerge from an examination of concrete details of the participants' opinions and perceptions. Stake (1995, p. 71) described case study data analysis as "a matter of giving

meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations.” In the case study analysis, there are two ways to analyze the data: 1) through direct interpretation of an individual response described by a participant; and 2) through categorical aggregation of several responses from a number of participants than may be fairly called a group response (Stake, 1995). Both procedures were followed in this study. The process of data analysis was the following form:

1. Data from the transcripts of the interviews, the focus groups, and the questionnaires were organized by when and how it was collected;
2. The final stage of analysis concentrated on the development of themes that emerged from the research.

After all the interviews were completed, the data analysis began with a review of the transcriptions, audio recordings and my self-memos. The researcher identified preliminary relationships related to the different interviews. In doing this, the researcher reviewed the research responses that were generated during the participants’ semi-structured focus group interviews and interactive one-on-one interviews as well as the interpretations in written English documentation that emerged after the translation was made from Somali.

After this, the researcher reviewed the audio recorded elements and characteristics of the interpretations by translating the field notes and self-memos into categories. For example, the educational experiences, the cultural beliefs, and in-depth descriptions of experiences that distinguished one individual from another were put into categories. Following that, categories were assessed for similarities and differences. For instance, students that have spent similar lengths of time in US school systems were grouped in

one category; students with gender similarities in another; and students who were part time were categorized in different groupings than full-time students.

The major categories and additional subcategories are coded with numbers. The researcher compared the observations and the categorizing systems to verify the accuracy of the categories and the position of observations in the categories. When coding continued, the numbers of categories were collapsed and integrated to create fewer and more generalized categories. Through comparative analysis, the core variables for the analysis emerged. The comparison continued until the similarities and differences became apparent and new relationships and categories were created. The categorization process was concluded when sets of categories were constructed thoroughly. The researcher completed the categorization process many times until small patterns began to match other similar patterns. At that point, major themes emerged that addressed the research questions and, therefore, became complete sets. When the data were completely organized, the researcher started writing about, describing, and explaining the major themes.

Validity and reliability of the study. Eisner (1991) asserts that the primary value of qualitative studies is helping others to understand situations that are ambiguous. That is a different purpose from quantitative studies whose principal primary value is establishing fact or explaining what is really going on (Stenbacka, 2001). Reliability is, therefore not relevant in relevant in qualitative design given these different purposes (Stenbacka, 2001). Trustworthiness may be a more accurate criterion to use as a substitute than reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If trustworthiness is a key issue in qualitative research, as many qualitative researchers believe it is, it means that qualitative

research needs to be based on using acceptable research procedures for making observations (Maxwell, 1996). Unfortunately, research procedures are a subjective art and are difficult to quantify. The nature of the information to be discovered by this researcher called for understanding each individual's unique qualities and character that were revealed only in extended personal dialogue in the physical presence of the student. It is important for the researcher to record impressions of eye contact, eye gaze, and the comfort of sharing information, that is how willingly responses were offered.

Relating findings to established theory is also important in qualitative and mixed-method research. The constant comparative analysis approach (Glasser, 1965) was employed as a technique to see if the same findings emerge in the observations as they are expected to in theory. If they match, this may be a strong indication of trustworthiness. An effort was made to relate the study findings to major theories about student retention, socialization, assimilation, and acculturation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of "inquiry audit" as an even better term to describe both the process and product (Hoepfl, 1997). In addition, since there is no reliability without validity, establishing validity is really the most important objective. Although many researchers have claimed that validity is also not relevant in qualitative research design (Golafshani, 2003) and by extension, mixed research design efforts that are weighted toward qualitative design, such as this one; the concept of triangulation in method and data triangulation has resonated with other researchers who believe that the key intent of qualitative research is to seek deeper insights than just the superficial (Johnson, 1995). The constructivist viewpoint, described earlier, especially embraces this view (Golafshani, 2003). Constructivists' view of social truth is that it is constantly

changing and possesses multiple and diverse realities that are best captured by multiple methods of collecting data. Under this paradigm, data triangulation is the most reasonable strategy, including having subjects participate with the researcher in the search to discover truth. Data triangulation implies that there are many methods of truth-seeking data collection and data analysis to test the validity and reliability of research (Golafshani, 2003).

The first test of validity of this study is whether the interview questions created addressed and answered the research questions. The researcher set pretest questions that were used on a small group of subjects not included in the study to determine their validity.

Second, using the constructionists' viewpoint and triangulation, the following procedure was followed: after completing each focus group and individual interview, the participant(s) were asked to confirm answers and elaborate or clarify responses where additional information was thought to be useful for the research. Additionally, the researcher triangulated what information was gathered by comparing it to the other data collected in the different formats the questionnaire, the focus groups, the audio recordings, and the researcher's participant observation field notes and self-memos.

Finally, the researcher compared and contrasted findings with other research findings.

Third, the validity of the questions put to participants depended upon the extent to which the researcher utilized the interviewees' experiences apart from their theoretical knowledge of the theme (Kvale, 1996). In this regard, the researcher was supportive, but non-judgmental in receiving participants' responses so as not to distort the responses in any way. The researcher documented the response accurately. When there may have

been doubts about the interpretation of the response, the researcher asked for clarification in a manner that did not reveal what responses might be expected by theory.

Fourth, the researcher paid close attention to the fact that recordings revealed the context of the interactive questions and answers that were exchanged between the researcher and the subjects, a context that was important to acknowledge when describing responses.

With respect to the entire process, Kvale (1996) notes that, "Validation becomes investigation: a continual checking, questioning, and theoretical interpretation of the findings."(p.289). Continuous validation of procedure in this manner was followed throughout the entire study. Reliability of the data was achieved through the sample selection process, methodological consistency, taking meticulous care in limiting conclusions drawn from the findings, and seeking and noting similar and contrasting comparisons with other research findings.

Drawbacks to the validity and reliability of the research include the small number of participants, open-ended questioning, and inadvertent research bias. The researcher is well aware that, inevitably, there may have been a dominant member or members of the focus groups that may have intimidated others in the group and prevented them from responding with their true thoughts. For this reason, it is understood that group responses were not the same as individual responses. Time limitations may have cut off valuable insights. There are many Somali students in the Twin Cities metro area but this study was limited to Minneapolis Community and Technical College because of the researcher's limited financial resources and personal responsibilities. Individual responses may have been so unique that not much could have been concluded or

generalized from them. It is also understood that the results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations or groups. The moderator may bias the results by knowingly or unknowingly providing cues about what types of responses are desirable (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Summary

In this chapter, a sequential mixed methodology was used to collect data. The research design inquiry was biased towards qualitative research. A 14-question survey was administered to 234 current and former Somali students at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) campus in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The survey collected demographic information, screened study participants, and obtained permission to conduct further study of a selected group of 24 students in focus groups, and 12 students in individual interviews.

Descriptive statistics were run on the responses to discover background patterns of the participants. Based on the findings, all focus group and individual participants were purposefully selected, using preplanned criteria, to participate in a qualitative case study research process.

In the first phase, 12 males and 12 females participated in separate focus group sessions in which they were asked to respond open-ended, structured interview questions in a one-hour focus group sessions. Following that, 12 students were interviewed separately in a one-hour, structured interview process and asked eight open-ended follow-up questions. All interviews were digitally recorded. The researcher also recorded field notes and self-memos. Following the interviews and all the data collection, the researcher embarked on a detailed analysis aimed at discovering themes and major

findings. Together, the data formed a triangulation of information that enhanced its validity and reliability.

Chapter IV

Results

Overview

In this chapter, the background information for each of the 36 case study participants is reported in terms of their responses to the research questionnaire. Following that, participant responses to the research interviews are presented. Responses have been organized as themes around these research questions: 1. What is the profile of Somali students enrolled at Minneapolis Community and Technical College? 2. In what ways did experiences outside of the US influence and contribute to Somali students' attitudes about college success? 3. How do Somali students at MCTC view their college success? And finally, 4. What are the most important institutional and personal factors affecting the academic success of Somali students?

This chapter includes the screening questionnaire results, a narrative analysis of 36 individual case studies, and then an assessment of the findings using an analytical pattern-matching technique termed explanation building (Yin, 2014). By understanding the immigrant/refugee experience antecedents outside and inside the United States that shaped Somali attitudes about academic success, the definition of academic success by Somali students and others, and the most important factors affecting academic success, the researcher may be able to provide insights into what backgrounds, contexts, and factors best prepare Somali students for academic success. The narrative analysis is divided into three themes: identity and sense of place, language use and other acculturation indicators, and motivation. The researcher merged both individual

interview responses and focus group interview responses in reporting results except where otherwise indicated.

The first question of the research is: What is the profile of the Somali students enrolled at MCTC? To answer it, the researcher contacted approximately 275 Somali students at MCTC to participate the study, however 234 Somali students expressed an interest in participating in the researcher's dissertation research. Screening questions were formulated and assembled into a 14-question survey instrument designed to ascertain standard demographic information such as age, gender, parental information, immigrant status, and educational history. The final questions were selected and formatted so that the researcher could narrow the study to a purposeful sample population of 36 participants (18 currently enrolled and 18 formerly enrolled at MCTC). The objective of the screening was to achieve a "balanced" mix of subcategories so the students could be organized into focus groups and designated for individual interviews.

The majority of the study participants were born and raised for a portion of their childhood in Somalia. Most of them emigrated in their teens and twenties. Some immigrated to the US when they were less than a year old and some emigrated when they were mature adults as old as in their 50s. Somali or Arabic was the first language for most. Some spoke Swahili. All but a few learned English after they arrived in the US. Several migrated within the US to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, upon the recommendations of people in various Somali communities in other cities. Word spread among Somalis that there were many low paying jobs that Somalis could qualify for in the Twin Cities, and that the people of Minnesota were open minded, accommodating, and generous.

Following are the tabulated results of the survey divided into three information categories: Demographic data in Tables 2 to 7; Educational levels in Tables 8 to 11; and Financial information in Tables 12 to 15.

Table 2
Demographic data: Gender

Category	Frequency	%
Male	111	47.4
Female	123	52.6
Totals	234	100.0

Table 2 illustrates the gender category, with females slightly outnumbering males in the sample. This shows a Somali gender adjustment in the US as a larger number of males attend college in Somalia than females who tend to stay home.

Table 3
Demographic data: Religion

Category	Frequency	%
Muslim	225	96.2
Missing	9	3.8
Totals	234	100.0

Table 3 shows that most students who participated in the survey were of the Muslim faith. Although some Somalis did not select other religious traditions, these results closely reflect what is found in most groups of Somalis found anywhere.

Table 4
Demographic data: Place of birth

Category	Frequency	%
Somalia	191	81.6
US	9	3.8
Other	32	13.6
Missing	2	0.8
Totals	234	100.0

Table 4 reveals that most of the survey participants were born in Somalia. Parents of the other 13.6% of students may have come to the US before the central government collapse in 1991, or they represent a second migration from the Arab Gulf countries and other African countries.

Table 5
Demographic data: Home language

Category	Frequency	%
Somali	98	41.8
English	2	0.9
Somali/English	130	55.6
Other	4	1.7
Totals	234	100.0

The home language of the majority (55.6%) of the students was a mixture of Somali and English as shown in Table 5. The Somali only response was also high (41.8%). This distribution may also reveal the MCTC admissions criteria requiring spoken English to be understood as a prerequisite for college entrance.

Table 6
Demographic data: Immigration status

Category	Frequency	%
US born	9	3.8
Naturalized citizen	138	58.9
Permanent resident	82	35.0
Temporary resident	5	2.1
Totals	234	100.0

Table 6 reveals that most Somali students in the survey were naturalized citizens (58.9%), meaning they met the nine basic criteria for becoming a US citizen, including being admitted to the US as lawful permanent residents; having a physical presence in the US for at least 2½ years; having continuous residence as a permanent resident alien for at least five years; having the ability to read, write, and speak ordinary English; having a basic understanding of US history and government; having good moral character and an affinity for the principles of the US Constitution; and being at least 18 years of age at the time of filing. Table 6 also reveals that many survey participants were on their way to becoming naturalized citizens as permanent residents (35%). US-born participants were a fraction of the total (3.8%). New arrivals made up an even smaller percentage (2.1%).

Table 7
Demographic data: Residence

Category	Frequency	%
With parents	110	47.0
With relatives	19	8.1
With friends	14	6.0
Home rented	64	27.3
Private apartment rented	22	9.4
Missing	5	2.2
Totals	234	100.0

Table 7 shows that most of the survey participants lived with their parents (47%) or relatives (8.1%). The remaining number lived mostly in rented homes and apartments (36.7%) perhaps reflecting the older age and greater maturity of this particular group of students. This high percentage of students living in rented homes and apartments also may reveal a situation that would probably not exist in Somalia where extended family and tribal ties play a more dominant role in supporting students in the family.

Table 8
Education data: Father's education

Category	Frequency	%
Never went to school	55	23.5
Completed all primary school	46	19.7
Completed all secondary school	60	25.6
Completed Associate's degree	19	8.1
Completed Bachelor's degree	20	8.5
Completed Master's degree	12	5.2
Completed Doctorate degree	2	0.9
Don't Know	20	8.5
Totals	234	100.0

Table 8 reveals that many of the fathers of Somali college students have had some type of formal education from primary school to high school (45.3%), and a significant number (22.7%) hold some form of college education. These statistics suggest that a significant amount of parental support underlies the attendance of their children in advanced education courses at MCTC

Table 9
Education data: Mother's education

Category	Frequency	%
Never went to school	97	41.4
Completed all primary school	51	21.7
Completed all secondary school	52	23.3
Completed Associate's degree	14	6.0
Completed Bachelor's degree	5	2.1
Completed Master's degree	1	0.4
Completed Doctorate degree	13	5.6
Don't Know	1	0.4
Totals	234	100.0

Table 9 indicates that the majority of mothers of Somali college students have participated in some type of formal education, most of which was primary (21.7%) or secondary school (23%). This is a very high number compared with mothers typically found in Somalia. Thus, this group of Somalia students is part of a very select group of relatively educated Somali families that can be expected to do well at MCTC.

Table 10
Education data: Grade level begun in US

Category	Frequency	%
Primary school	73	31.1
Junior high school	34	14.5
High school	71	30.3
College	56	23.9
Totals	234	100.0

Table 10 shows that most Somali students in this sample (76.1%) began attending school in the US after primary school, junior high school and high school. Nearly a quarter of the entire sample began in college. This would generally suggest that Somalis have had a significant amount of education formal or self-directed outside of the US in

Somalia, or when they were refugees in other countries. This would be consistent with the education records of many Somalis who attended Qu'ranic schools in addition to or instead of attending government-operated schools in times of government disruption.

Table 11
Education data: Major in MCTC

Category	Frequency	%
Business	35	15.0
Information/Communication	6	2.6
Justice System	9	3.8
Liberal Arts/General Education	54	23.0
Nursing, Counseling and Healthcare	35	35.9
Math and Science	25	10.7
Public Service	9	3.8
Service Industry	4	1.7
Missing	8	
3.5		
Totals	234	100.0

Table 11 reveals that although there is a wide scattering of college majors, a large number of these students (35.9%) has selected healthcare and math and science (10.7%), which may be a strong foundation for healthcare as a major. This concentration of interests may be unusually high. The remaining double-digit college major selections were for liberal arts (20.9%), and business (15%).

Table 12
Financial data: Financial aid

Category	Frequency	%
Loan	9	3.8
Grant	182	77.8
Scholarship	21	9.0
Work Study	4	1.7
Parent Support	6	2.6
Other relative	12	5.1
Totals	234	100.0

Not unexpectedly, Table 12 shows the importance of financial aid as the majority of students have grants (77.8%), scholarships (9%) work-study (1.7%), or other relatives (5.1%) to attend MCTC. Very few students are relying on their parents (2.6%).

Table 13
Financial data: Currently employed

Category	Frequency	%
Yes	127	54.3
No	106	45.3
Missing	1	0.4
Totals	234	100.0

In addition to a large amount of financial aid being provided, more than 50% of students also have jobs (54.3%) to support themselves while pursuing their education. Studies show that some work can enhance student success outcomes (Furr & Elling, 2000; Van de Water 1996; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, Desler, & Zusman, 1994; Astin, 1993; Stern & Nakata, 1991), but in general excessive work greater than 20 hours per week may be distracting to successful college outcomes (Furr & Elling, 2000; Perkins, Pitter, Wijesinghe, Howat, & Whitfield, 1999; Ford & Bosworth, 1995; Astin, 1993, 1975).

Table 14
Financial data: Family income

Category	Frequency	%
Less than \$1,000/month	85	36.3
\$1,001-\$2,000/month	77	32.9
\$2,001-\$3,000/month	40	17.0
\$3,001-\$4,000/month	16	6.8
More than \$4,001/month	15	6.4
Missing	1	0.4
Totals	234	100.0

Most students (69.2%) have modest family incomes ranging between \$12,000-\$24,000 per year as seen in Table 14. This indicates that they require a significant amount of external financial support to attend college.

Table 15
Financial data: Internet usage

Category	Frequency	%
Yes	200	85.5
No	28	12.0
Missing	6	2.5
Totals	234	100.0

Table 15 shows that most students (85.5%) use the Internet. This suggests that they have a heavy reliance on access to computers with Internet access. Most Somali students in the US use the Internet in many different ways, such as communicating with family members and relatives in Somalia and learning cultural aspects of their new homeland.

Table 16

Summary presentation of the survey data

Category	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	111	47.4
Female	123	52.6
<i>Religion</i>		
Muslim	225	96.2
<i>Birth</i>		
Somalia	191	81.6
<i>Home Language</i>		
Somali	98	41.9
Somali/English	130	55.6
<i>Immigration status</i>		
Born outside USA	225	96.1
<i>Residence</i>		
With parents	110	47.0
Home rented	89	38.0
<i>Father's education</i>		
Never went to school	55	23.5
Completed primary school	46	19.7
Completed secondary school	60	28.8
<i>Mother's education</i>		
Never went to school	97	41.4
Completed primary school	51	21.8
Completed secondary school	52	22.3
<i>Grade level begun in US</i>		
K-8 th grade	107	45.7
High school	71	30.3
College	56	23.9
<i>Major in MCTC</i>		
Liberal Arts	73	31.0
Health	84	35.9
<i>Financial Aid</i>		
Grant	203	86.8
<i>Currently employed</i>		
Yes	127	54.3
No	106	45.3
<i>Family income</i>		
Less than \$1,000/month	85	36.3
\$1,001-\$3,000/month	117	50.0

The researcher wanted to address two broad research questions: In what ways did experiences outside of the US influence and contribute to Somali students' attitudes about college success? What experiences outside the US contributed to Somali students' college success? The researcher relies on the results of a survey questionnaire taken by 234 Somali students currently enrolled at Minnesota Community and Technical College (MCTC) as well as 18 formerly enrolled students. A number of questions were asked in the survey questionnaire about specific details of life outside the US, including educational background of parents, and their socio-economic background. The researcher also posed detailed questions about academic background experiences inside the US, including what level of school was started in the US (primary, secondary, college), whether they took English as a second language (ESL) classes as a prerequisite to entering MCTC, and whether they found the college coursework easy or challenging.

An Uprooted Refugee Population

“Leaving one’s country involves profound losses ... one has to give up familiar food, native music, unquestioned social customs, and even one’s language” (Akhtar, 1999, p. 5). Refugees or exiles that flee their native lands to survive starvation or coercion are very different from immigrants who voluntarily decide to move away from their homeland looking forward to new growth and self-expression opportunities.

Refugees remain attached more deeply and longer to their past, thinking about returning home someday, and retaining many of their ways and cultural ties. Some of the first steps involved in the exile process are getting over mourning the loss (Volkan and Zinti, 1993, p. 65), giving up a part of their individual identity (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989, p. 90), and determining whether the move is going to be temporary or permanent

(Akhtar, 1999, p. 6.). This combination of lingering attachment, loss of identity, and indecisiveness can retard assimilation in a new land.

Immigrants, on the other hand, by virtue of the deliberate choice they have made to make a change, are less burdened by the move and are more eager to take up new ways. Leaving probably involves a comfortable planning and preparation period as compared with a refugee. Trauma does not accompany this preparation as it probably does with a refugee. Immigrants know that returning home for a visit is always a possibility, whereas returning is doubtful for an exile. Then, acceptance by members of the host country may be more welcoming as émigrés usually arrive in small groups and are distributed throughout the population, whereas refugees frequently arrive in large groups and settle in a few enclaves (Akhtar, 1999, p. 8).

Many Somalis currently residing in the US, especially those who came to the US as a direct result of armed military conflict, and after life in refugee camps are living a life described by the researchers cited above as refugees. The researcher could sense this in the responses of many of the interviewees, especially those who had dropped out or temporarily postponed their education at MCTC. It was apparent that these study participants were still deeply attached to their homeland culture in their lack of mastery of the English language, their persistent periodic sending of a substantial amount of money to friends and relatives in Somalia, the topics they brought up during open-ended questioning, as well as in their expressed attitudes about adopting new cultural ways in the US.

Significant Challenges for Somali Refugees

When many Somali refugees entered community college in the United States, they experience the challenge of a cultural transformation that Americans born in the US may never fully know about, understand, or appreciate. In addition to experiencing a challenging and acculturation process with English as a second language for many and a disparate culture to cope with, Somalis are bitterly discouraged and disappointed refugees who were fortunate enough to escape the wrenching torment of a war-ravaged nation to avoid annihilation. They are people who were forced to declare political asylum and adopt a new country because their homeland has become too dangerous to carry on a decent life. Somalia has been for over two decades, since the early 1990s, a land where there are no laws, no economic and political stability, and no peace of mind.

In addition to a deep sense of loss for the land of their ancestors, many Somalis brought with them an educational, cultural, religious, familial, and language background very different from what was found in the US. Much of Somali culture is ancient, going back thousands of years; it is indigenous to Somalia and suited to the Somali landscape; a rural population largely raised in a sparsely populated region; agrarian agriculturally based with labor intensive economies; racially homogeneous black African; tribal, small closely knit enclaves of extended families; a decentralized local population very loosely connected to regions and the nation; traditional social rules govern much behavior; spiritual rule culturally and politically as a theocracy, and greater than 99% Muslim.

In contrast, the US is quite different than Somalia in almost every way. Depending upon where Somalis settle in the US and with whom they associate, they may find a context that is more secular, capital intensive, multicultural, complex, racially

heterogeneous, urbanized, and regional. In the US, life is not tribal, nor is it even centered about family or religious life. Klinenberg (2012) recently reported that over 50% of the US adult population is now unmarried and one in seven live alone. In addition, families are principally nuclear in the US, meaning they are significantly smaller and centered around one couple. They are not tribal, and many are not even extended. Women are significantly more independent and engaged in single parenting. Moreover, people, ideas, and goods are more plentiful, accessible, and move about more freely and more frequently; traditions are not prioritized; the rule of secular instead of religious law is the significant organizing rule of society; the country is politically ruled as a democracy; most business operates as a meritocracy by contract; education is more intensive, widely available, and instrumental in fulfilling ambitions, settling disputes, and legal infractions amicably.

Other Somalis See a US Education as Important to Their Future

All that being said, many Somalis, no doubt, experience culture shock upon arrival in the US a jarring reality that may take many years to become fully adjusted to, if ever. Yet, despite all of these formidable challenges, many Somalis see the college educational opportunity, no matter how expensive, difficult, or prolonged, as their best hope for securing a desirable future. This is especially evident with second-generation children of Somali refugees who have been influenced by their parents and extended family and other Somalis who moved to the US independently or voluntarily at the urging of relatives already settled in the US. Many of the study participants, especially those who enrolled and persisted at MCTC, clearly expressed this perspective in the interviews conducted by this researcher.

For these Somalis, becoming well educated at the university level in the US is desirable both for the accomplishment it represents as well as the significant monetary and prestige benefits that may follow. They understand that Americans respect academic credentials and accomplishment and provide many opportunities to those who possess them. The particular pathway to this level of success can be accomplished in many alternative ways depending upon the circumstances of each Somali student. This study has illustrated a range of pathways of objective and perceived success relative to the circumstances of various individuals.

Identity and Sense of Place

Somali people value the significance of their cultural identity and sense of place that they acquired in their original home communities among relatives. They hold on to these memories as a way of preserving their identity and sense of community. Al-Huraibi (2009), in her dissertation entitled *Islam, Gender and Integration in Transnational/Herolocalist Contexts: A Case Study of Somali Immigrant Families in Columbus, Ohio*, described how Somali immigrants make their way in the US, and asserted that, first and foremost, the lives of Somali families, and by extension each member, are significantly influenced by Islamic religion. Islam is fundamental to Somali life, and this aspect stands out as one of the strongest features in the Somali homeland as well as in the diaspora. Family loyalty is paramount. Family, and by extension tribal organization, is the primary way life is organized in Somalia. When Somalis leave their homeland, they carry this organizational sense deep within them. In addition, but perhaps not in contradiction, Somali immigrants select elements of their own culture and of the new culture they adopt, interweaving them in their everyday lives, neither strictly

assimilating into the new culture, nor isolating themselves from it within their home culture.

Bigelow (2010), in her book entitled *Mogadishu on the Mississippi*, describes learning the Somali language as one of the principal methods whereby Somalis learn, maintain, and hold onto their “Somaliness” identity despite living in places as foreign to Somali culture as Minnesota. She points out that even Somalis born outside of Somalia and who have never visited Somalia become Somali by learning to speak and act as a Somali would by mimicking ways of acting and speaking, in other words what other Somalis would do as they had done in Somalia. These actions may be based on nationality, ethnicity, idealizations, and even nostalgic memories. Researcher Langellier (2010) provides an additional perspective in her account of a young Somali woman refugee who carried her culture: feminist, colonialist, multiculturalist, and academic along with her language, race, ethnicity, and Islamic religion wherever she went. In this case, it was from Somalia to Lewiston, Maine, where researcher Langellier met and interviewed her.

In a more practical vein, Thomas-Stineman (2003) reports, in a dissertation study entitled *Factors Impacting Persistence Among Nursing Students at Community Colleges*, that age was a significant factor in increasing persistence in school, the older the participant in community college career programs, the greater was their commitment to remaining in the program. Also relevant to this finding was that individuals enrolled in such programs sought entry into the job market within a short timeframe, and the commitment was greater because of the greater importance placed on expected job-related benefits after completing the degree program. This finding was consistent with

other research cited by Thomas-Stineman (2003) and by Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) who report that family background factors such as providing financial support back home were equal or more important than college experiences in deciding to drop out.

The ideas of Al-Huraibi (2009) and Bigelow (2010) were contradicted by Fuligni (1997), who found that family background, attitudes, and behavior had relatively little to do with academic achievement as compared with the closer correlation to academic success that was found with the emphasis on education placed by parents, student peers, and other peers. Family and peer support helps students to get over hurdles they encountered in school, especially when supportive actions take the form of extra help offered by study groups. This finding found support among other researchers (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Gibson, 1991; Gibson & Bhachu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; and Waters, 1994). On the other hand, Fuligni's study was based on younger children in middle and high school rather than high school graduates in a college level program such as the current study. College students and older students have more independence from parents and peers than middle or high school students and, thus may be more self-reliant. In addition, Fuligni did not study students with different racial characteristics as well as different ties to their base cultures.

Margaret Gibson (1998) offers a theory that may more closely reflect what Somali students in this study practiced. Gibson suggests that parents of immigrants practice accommodation and acculturation without assimilation, leaning more towards accommodation as acknowledgement of the new culture without full acceptance of it or abandonment of their original culture and close-knit family life; whereas, the children of

immigrants practice what she called additive acculturation (Gibson, 1988a, 1991b, 1998) meaning enthusiastically adopting the new culture to add to, but not replace, the older culture. She posits that students who viewed acculturation as an additive process would achieve more success in school than those who thought of acculturation as a subtractive or accommodative process.

Gibson also warns that students who acculturate at a faster pace than their parents risk losing the connectedness to the very support system that provides emotional, spiritual, and financial support, a point reinforced by Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) who also found that maintaining language bonds between children and parents enhanced student success. Looking at assimilation from a negative perspective, there is also danger in assimilating without accommodation that may have happened with some immigrant males who have assimilated with counter-culture American gangs that led to a path of academic failure, a point underscored by Roxas (2008) in his dissertation study on the socio-cultural factors that influenced and constrained the academic success of a Somali Bantu male high school student in Central City, Kentucky.

There were differences found among Somalis about retaining or giving up their “Somaliness.” Leitner (2008) reveals that less educated, older migrants, who left their families behind, held on tighter to their Somali identity and expressed greater ambivalence towards US culture as compared with their better educated, younger compatriots.

Identity and sense of place may play a key role in maintaining persistence for some immigrant students to stay in the college program. Kim (1995) reveals in her dissertation entitled *Navigating College Life: College Transition Experiences and*

Persistence of Minority Immigrant Students at a predominantly white, public, doctoral granting, residential institution in the Midwestern US that minority students who succeeded academically built strong social networks in their early years on campus by ethnic bonding and cultivating their ethnic identity, despite a weak university environment for accomplishing this.

Finding #1 — Prioritizing religious, spiritual, and cultural values over personal values: Providing financial support to Somali family, extended family, peers, and neighbors in Somalia takes priority over fulfilling personal goals. Somali dropouts, all of whom embraced the refugee frame of mind, expressed the sentiments described by researchers above such as Al-Huraibi (2009), Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) and others (McGown, 1999; Kapteijns & Arman, 2004; Leitner, 2004; Sharmanie, 2007) very clearly in one key aspect. Although every one of the dropouts expressed several reasons for dropping out of MCTC, 13 of the 18 dropouts gave financial support to extended family, friends, and neighbors in Somalia or nuclear family in the US as major reasons for dropping out.

This finding was more strongly held by males, perhaps consistent with their traditional breadwinner roles. Of the student dropouts, eight of nine males (89%) and five of nine females (56%) described providing family financial support specifically sending money back to Somalia as an important reason for dropping out. All eight males described family financial requests from Somalia as the most important reason to drop out. Three of five females (60%) described family financial requests from Somalia as the most important reason to drop out. Two of five females (40%) became mothers while enrolled at MCTC, and expressed a motive to financially support their own nuclear

family, as well as to fulfill Somali cultural expectations presumably by their religion, their husbands, and their own deep-seated moral beliefs of being a good wife.

It is noteworthy that nearly all 36 Somalis who participated in the focus group interviews and regular individual interviews have received or currently received financial support from the US government, the State of Minnesota, their relatives, and their own efforts, so it may not have simply been a matter of too little money to go around. Presumably, similar monetary requests are being made of the ongoing MCTC students but, unlike their peers who dropped out, they have found a way to fund both their Somali obligations as well as their own goals.

It is also noteworthy that all 18 dropouts in the study expressed a desire to return to MCTC when their financial situations enabled them to do so. This was consistent with internal directions given by parents, relatives, and peers consistent with accounts described by various researchers (Fuligni, 1997; Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Gibson, 1991; Gibson & Bhachu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Waters, 1994). It was clear to all of the dropout students how important getting an education was in securing a successful future in the US. Some participants expressed mixed feelings about dropping out. They did not feel as the majority did, that helping their Somali family, extended family, friends, and neighbors was as important as securing an education first before sending money back. They took a longer-range perspective in reasoning that more money could be sent home once they graduated and secured higher paying jobs.

What is significant here is that nearly two-thirds of the dropouts (67%) made deliberate decisions to prioritize supporting their family, extended family, and even their friends and neighbors in Somalia and the US over their own personal desire to secure a

good education; all of the currently enrolled students did not prioritize in the same way as the dropouts. This decision to help family and friends back home can be seen as prioritizing their Somali cultural values over personal gain.

In the case of Somalis, culture includes both strong religious and Somali social values towards the family and clan that Somalis carry with them wherever they go as described by Langellier (2010). One reason that may explain this finding is that most of the dropouts were, on average, a few years older than the ongoing students (30.4 years vs. 26.9 years), and they seemed to be more strongly attached to Somali culture than the currently enrolled students. These kinds of stronger religious, spiritual, and cultural values might be expected from an older group of students as described by other researchers such as Thomas-Stineman (2003) and Leitner (2008) in the acculturation literature. It is also consistent with the idea that refugees and exiles are the ones who carry stronger attachments to home country values than voluntary émigrés or their children of the second generation born in the US, or who spent mostly all of their primary and secondary school upbringing in the US.

Many Somali students, both those currently attending MCTC and dropouts, provided financial support for friends and family who remained in Somalia or in refugee camps. Financial support came from money earned by Somalis while attending college. Many Somalis dropped out of college to maintain this support or worked a significant number of hours while attending school.

The Somali civil war disrupted and devastated normal life in much of Somalia. Many Somalis immigrated to neighboring countries where they lived in refugee camps. For example, the *Dhadhaab* refugee camp in Kenya is considered the third largest city in

Kenya where a half million exiles, mostly Somali, are housed (CARE, 2011). The fortunate Somalis emigrated to North America, Europe, Middle East and Australia.

Among all Somalis, there is a general perception that if you are in the US, UK, or Australia, you have the ability to support your immediate family, extended family, distant relatives, friends, and neighbors with payments of \$100–\$200 per month, for food, housing, and business startup, regardless of your own circumstances in those countries. In both Islamic and Somali culture, you must support your family. If you are or become reluctant to help your family back home, you will be cursed as deserting your culture. Every month, millions of dollars are sent, through money transfer agencies in a process known as *Hawalah*, to Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, where Somalis are found in refugee camps. Without this money, many Somali people in these refugee camps would probably starve. Many Somali students drop out of school to enable this support to continue.

To address the research question of how Somali students at MCTC view their college success, the researcher posed open-ended and semi-structured interview questions about how they defined success to the study participants in focus groups as well as individual interviews. The researcher also sought to address alternative definitions of success posited by other researchers in response to the questions posed to these participants, such as relative competency at self-management, relationship management, decision-making, social cognizance, self awareness, connection to community, capability of completing projects, capability of working with others, likelihood of having self-esteem, and likelihood of becoming employed.

Finding #2 — Patience and persistence with sustaining an educational pursuit: Academic success is continuing a college education even if it means taking

just one course per semester or one course per year. Two-thirds (12 of 18 or 67%) of currently enrolled male and female older students expressed the sentiment that continuing their education, no matter how long it took, was very important when asked what academic success meant to them. Even if some did not respond with this answer initially when asked directly, they provided this answer when other questions were asked, for example, whether dropouts plan to return to MCTC someday. The question was answered in the affirmative in a manner that indicated they had considered the matter previously. This issue had clearly been on all of their minds before in conversations they had previously with family and peers, and may even have been a recurring thought. Many answered that academic success simply meant not quitting or dropping out. Many clarified that academic success meant taking at least one course per semester no matter how long it took to get a degree.

Some thought that continuing to take courses might have been more important than having a degree. One ongoing student stated that he would continue going even if he were in his sixties. Given all the other statements students made about the importance of getting an education, the strength of this very emotional response left no doubt in the researcher's mind of just how important getting an advanced education was to students who are attending and have attended MCTC. Perhaps the strength of this attitude reflected what researchers have reported after all (Fuligni, 1997; Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Gibson, 1991; Gibson & Bhachu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Waters, 1994).

The dropout students answered quite differently. Only one out of 18 former students (6%) remarked that academic success meant not dropping out. On the other hand, all 18 dropouts expressed a strong interest in returning to school.

The close agreement on either side of the question by both currently enrolled students as well as formerly enrolled student dropouts indicated that this might be a very important issue among Somali students regardless of what side of the issue they favor. There were minor differences between responses given by male students as compared with those of female students, and between focus group responses as compared with personal interview responses.

Finally, to address the research question of what are the most important factors affecting the academic success of Somali students, the researcher asked open-ended follow-up focus group and interview questions, supplemented by responses to the initial survey instrument used to screen participants.

Finding #3 — Family and peer group support and social networking was important for some and not important for others in achieving academic success. A clear majority or 11 of 18 (61%) currently enrolled students thought family and peer support were very important to their accomplishments and success; whereas, two-thirds (67%) of the male dropout students thought that it wasn't important. Since dropouts, almost by definition, have had limited academic success, this response was not surprising. The differences were even greater between currently enrolled females and currently enrolled males, as 7 of 9 (78%) females thought family and peer support were critical. Focus group males and females were evenly divided. Focus groups contained an

equal number of currently enrolled and formerly enrolled students, as well as an equal number of males and females.

Family and peer group support were described in the focus groups and individual interviews as helpful in a variety of ways to students: As family financial support and encouragement, spiritual support in repeated daily mosque attendance at MCTC, advice as a substitute or supplement to student advisors and teachers, as inspiration in seeing other Somalis working hard and dedicated to their studies, and as social support dealing with challenging personal issues in a multicultural and multiracial setting. It may also mean what Kim (1995) described about family playing an important role in providing support in the early years of higher education.

Finding #4 — Somali students who practiced socialization, or additive acculturation found more academic success than those who practiced accommodative or subtractive acculturation, but at a price. Successful socialization, and acculturation in general, and successful additive acculturation adopting both Somali and American culture together by keeping both languages alive and continuing spiritual and traditional cultural values in particular, was another factor that clearly divided currently enrolled students from dropout students. Among currently enrolled students, 15 of 18 (83%) displayed especially significant additive acculturation successful learning practice, adoption of English, participation in US schooling prior to entry into MCTC, length of stay in the US, adoption of widely held American educational values, and expression of clearly directed personal ambitions in line with predictions by Gibson (1998). Currently enrolled males responded this way by a two-to-one margin (6 of 9 or 67%), and currently enrolled females responded this way by a three-to-one margin (9 of

12 or 75%). Conversely, among dropouts, only 5 of eighteen (28%) displayed the same evidence, with one of nine males (11%) and four of nine females (44%) being acculturated. That may also be in line with Gibson's ideas about subtractive acculturation (1998), Portes and Zhou's segmented assimilation theory, or Portes and Rumbaut's selective acculturation theory (1994).

Finding #5 — Somali student participants in study demonstrated that those who mastered English earliest and most effectively achieve greater academic success. Conversely, the lowest academic achievers were those who encountered the greatest language difficulties. Many have expressed that the culture of a society is most clearly represented in its language; or put another way, if you want to learn the culture of a society, learn its language. Of all the factors analyzed in this study, acquisition and skill in the English language was the clearest and most distinctive factor in determining academic success. There were a number of contributing elements making up this factor in the study, including: where and when English was first learned, the length of time it was practiced, the relative degree of fluency there was in the language, whether taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes was a necessary course as a condition of entry into MCTC, and whether it was expressed as a challenge to the researcher.

Perhaps the reason why language is so instrumental to academic success is that it also fosters acculturation, in general, and additive acculturation, in particular. If language is the key to understanding culture, then accessibility to culture is what may enable appreciation of that culture. Appreciation of the culture may also enable access to the information flowing from the many media sources: books, newspapers, magazines, movies, social media, television, as well as face-to-face communication; and access to all

this media may, in turn, have made possible mastery of communication skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, and socializing. That mastery of communication skills, in turn, may have enabled students to connect the-dots about the many things going on all around, which, in turn, may lead to commitment to the new culture and, ultimately, academic success.

Whatever the pathways and precise mechanisms, the results were congruent with the assertions of White and Lowenthal (2010) as well as Bizzel (1986). Among currently enrolled students, 18 of 18 (100%) demonstrated the most English proficiency; among dropout students, 18 of 18, or 100% expressed the greatest difficulties. Among this group of study participants, English language played an important role in determining academic success.

As an extension of access to English language proficiency, White and Lowenthal (2010) describe one of the largest challenges to immigrant students when they assert that students cannot and will not succeed in academia until they adopt, embrace, and excel at the institution's literacy skills what other researchers Bizzel, and White and Lowenthal have termed its "codes of power". These theoreticians, as well as others, (McBrien, 2005; Fennelly & Palasz, 2003) purport that if those who have different communication styles don't learn academic discourse as practiced in the academic institution they enroll in, they have little chance of succeeding academically. Academic advisors, student services personnel, and faculty members share the burden of clearly communicating this reality to students and steering them onto a path with as many supplemental exercises as needed to reinforce this message.

These communication skills, what may be more accurately called academic literacy, include reading, writing, listening, speaking, socializing, open questioning, providing continuous feedback to students and instructors, responding to Socratic query, employing wit and humor, exploring topics in debate, engagement in discussions, and challenging meaning all should be encouraging the development of unique voices. Portes (1999) confirm, in major extensive studies among students of 77 different nationalities representing 27 cultural groups of immigrant parents in San Diego and Miami, that the lowest academic achievers were those who encountered the greatest language difficulties.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) as cited in McBrien (2005, p. 357) took this to a different level by suggesting that mastering English itself by an immigrant represents making a commitment to the US as well as a commitment to learning its culture and, by extension, enabling greater academic success. In addition, they also believed, as did Olsen (2000), that learning English was directly associated with achievement of academic success, acculturation, and continued close connections with parents and peers from their native country.

Surprisingly, Somali people, in general, have been able to achieve a higher level of proficiency in English than all other immigrant groups in all measures of speaking, writing, and reading as reported by Darboe (2003), Birman, Trickett, and Bacchus (2001), and Waters, Ueda, and Marrow (2007).

Finding #6 — Somali student study participants who achieved the greatest academic success set and reached for the highest goals, made the strongest commitments, and exerted the most intensive and sustained effort. The presence of clear expressions of goal orientation and commitment to academic success specificity of

professional and personal ambitions, specificity of an educational pathway, specificity of personal habits, and specificity of willpower to overcome obstacles were unmistakably clear in the focus group and one-on-one interviews, and which resulted in a very clear line of demarcation between currently enrolled and formerly enrolled students.

Confirming Tinto's findings about goal setting (1993), currently enrolled students expressed indicators of goals and commitment in 16 of 18 (89%) cases; whereas, formerly enrolled students fell far short of expressing these indicators in just 7 of 18 (39%) cases. Currently enrolled female students showed slightly more evidence of commitment and goal setting than their male counterparts; whereas, formerly enrolled female students showed fewer goals and less commitment than their male counterparts.

A large number of dropouts shows ambivalence towards academic success in so many ways despite vocalizing that they understood the connection between academic achievement and fulfillment of personal ambitions such as economic security.

This finding may not be entirely due to the students' inner motivating forces alone. Kabir and Richards (1998) and other researchers (Taylor & Krohn, 2005, Kao & Tienda, 1998; McBrien, 2005; Darboe, 2003) have pointed out that a strong relationships may exist between student aspirations and the social support they received from family and peers; this force may have been at work, but was invisible to the researcher in this limited study.

Academic discipline and commitment may also play a key role in driving community college success. Porchea, Allen, Robbins and Phelps (2010) demonstrates this possibility in their study of how academic preparation, psychosocial, socio-demographic, situational, and institutional factors influence enrollment and degree

outcomes for community college students. They found especially strong support from psychosocial research conducted by Tinto (1993) whose Theory of Postsecondary Education Student Attrition included five factors that determined student decisions to drop out of an institution of higher education: goals, commitment, institutional experiences, integration, and high school outcome are all factors whose principal component affects the will to succeed.

Although academic preparation is the factor most heavily depended upon, used by many if not most college entrance officers, psychosocial factors such as goals also were suspected by researchers to be quite important. Porchea, Allen, Robbins and Phelps (2010) cite numerous researchers such as Robbins et al., (2006) which provided valuable insights on motivation, social skills, and self-regulation skills; Sternberg (2006) demonstrate the potential importance of a factor called successful intelligence; Kress (2006) demonstrates a connection between success and effort; and Manning and Bostonian (2006), as well as Sandiford and Jackson (2003), assert a close connection between academic preparation and level of commitment.

In addition to these studies, Stineman, in a Tinto (1993) inspired study of nursing students at community colleges, also confirm that having expectations of receiving high marks for courses taken was statistically significantly related to actually receiving high marks. Portes (1999, p. 501) echoed this finding by describing that it seemed achievement motivation had “positive effects on achievement.” There are voices that could not confirm these kinds of findings, however. Banks (2010), in her dissertation study of *Female Nontraditional Students in Higher Education*, could find no evidence confirming that strong motivation was a factor in persistence of the students she analyzed

in her study, despite explicitly attempting to do so. Alitolppa-Niiamo (2004) also cautioned that motivation is but one factor in a host of multiple, complex, and interacting factors that may contribute to academic success of Somali refugee youth.

Another important component of motivation is self-efficacy, which, in this case, refers to the students' perception of their own capabilities. Zimmerman (2000) report finding a close correlation between self-efficacy, motivation, and learning as expressed in choices of activities, effort expended, persistence, and choice of majors. The more capable a student judges himself or herself to be, the higher goals they select for themselves as challenges; the higher the goals they set for themselves, the more they accomplish academically, and the more skills they acquire.

Timm, Chiang, and Finn (1998) as cited in McBrien (2005, p. 353) describes different styles of motivation for academic achievement that determines by the degree of acculturation students had attained, which was directly related to how long they had been in the US.

Finding #7 — Student participants who achieved a high level of social integration, positive institutional experiences, and high school academic preparation achieved a high level of academic success. Currently enrolled Somali student study participants by a ratio of 18:0 (100%) achieved academic success by having high levels of social integration, positive institutional experiences, and high levels of high school preparation; whereas, just one out of every three formerly enrolled students (33%) had similar experiences that led to academic success as measured by GPAs. This finding is in line with Tinto's theories of student integration (1975), and retention (1993), and the idea of a connection between academic preparation and academic success asserted by

Manning and Bostonian (2006) as well as Sandiford and Jackson (2003). Many formerly enrolled students have minimal academic and language preparation for college level work. Some were able to use social skills and connections to overcome those shortcomings, but most could not or did not. Female dropouts had a slight advantage over their male dropout counterparts. The variety of responses among the dropouts, however, could mean that the cautions asserted by Alitolppa-Niiamo (2004) about the complexity of the factors may have been important.

Finding #8 — Generally, the longer the Somali student study participants had been in the US, the more they were acculturated, the more “field independent” they were, that is capable of working independently, intrinsically motivated, and self directed and seeking recognition for their accomplishments, and seeking higher academic performance. By contrast, Somalis who had only been in the US a short time did better if they were more “field dependent”, requiring greater amounts of group work, outside encouragement, and sensitivity towards others. This finding was more difficult to measure than others as there are thought to be many factors and many individual differences involved in the determination of “field independence.” The researcher considered the elements of field independence described by Timm, Chiang, and Finn (1998) as the propensity to work independently, be self-directed, and search for personal recognition. What the researcher found was that just one-out-of-three study participants (33%) expressed attitudes that were judged field independent when both currently enrolled and formerly enrolled dropouts were included. Relatively speaking, twice as many enrolled students, – eight out of 18 (44%) were found to be field independent as compared with four out of 18 (22%) of student dropouts. Field

dependence or preference for group work, the need for outside encouragement, and sensitivity towards others as well as context, were the more prevalent findings overall, and most prevalent among male and female dropouts , seven out of nine (78%), and seven out of nine (78%) of currently enrolled women. By contrast, independence was found to be greatest among six out of nine (67%) of currently enrolled men.

Summary

Two hundred thirty four (234) currently enrolled Somali students at MCTC were given a survey designed to screen and purposefully select 18 students to participate in the study; twelve were to be in focus groups and six in individual interviews. Eighteen (18) formerly enrolled students were also selected through friendship networks to participate; twelve were to be in focus groups and six in individual interviews. Thus, there were 24 students interviewed in focus groups; twelve were currently enrolled and 12 were formerly enrolled (dropouts). In addition, 12 students were to be individually interviewed – six were currently enrolled and six were formerly enrolled (dropouts). Of the 36 participants, there were an equal number of males (18) and females (18).

Descriptive analyses of the research illustrates the diversity of the 18 currently enrolled Somali students and the 18 formerly enrolled Somali students in terms of Somali cultural connection, demographic characteristics, pathway to MCTC, preparation for academic involvement, institutional and family support, future expectations, and academic success.

Focus group interviews, whether with the males or females, did not appear to produce any obvious differences in responses as compared with responses received in the

individual interviews. Cultural norms or interviewer procedures may have played a role in producing these results.

Focus group and interview results merged showed dramatic differences between currently enrolled students and formerly enrolled students in terms of many factors perceived as relevant to academic success, as follows:

- 1) Staying in school was the most obvious academic success factor difference between currently enrolled and formerly enrolled students, and is the reason the researcher selected half of the study participants from each group.
- 2) Fulfilling financial obligations to support families and friends still in Somalia was the primary reason given for dropping out by formerly enrolled students. This response corresponded more strongly with having a refugee background versus an émigré, voluntary immigrant or US-born background.
- 3) Sustaining an educational presence in college, no matter how minimal the presence or how long it took to finish, was the most obvious academic success factor difference between currently enrolled students and formerly enrolled students.
- 4) Earlier entry into the US educational system in kindergarten or primary school was part of the backgrounds of many more currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students.
- 5) More time spent in the US educational system before entry into college was part of the backgrounds of many more currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students.

- 6) Having more family and peer group support was a major academic success factor difference between currently enrolled and formerly enrolled students.
- 7) A greater socialization, and additive acculturation pattern of choices such as having a greater command of English language skills was associated more strongly with currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students who followed a more accommodative or subtractive acculturation pattern.
- 8) Mastering English language skills earlier and, conversely, experiencing fewer language difficulties was a part of the backgrounds of many more currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students.
- 9) Setting and reaching for higher personal career goals that led to stronger educational commitments as well as more intensive and sustained educational efforts was a part of the activity choices of many more currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students.
- 10) Experiencing higher social integration, positive educational institution experiences, and being active in more high school preparation efforts was part of the behavioral choices of many more currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students.
- 11) More time spent in the US led to more acculturation and “field independence” by currently enrolled students than formerly enrolled students a position that led to working more independently, being more intrinsically motivated, being more self directed, seeking more recognition for their accomplishments, and seeking higher academic performance.

These results show more clearly in the interviews than they did in the survey questionnaire instrument. Combining the results of the survey questionnaire with the focus group or individual interviews produced a deeper, more complex and complete picture of each of the 36 case study individuals than that produced by each format alone.

The researcher provided a narrative cross-analysis of three major themes that may be instrumental in determining Somali academic success at MCTC: 1) identity and sense of place; 2) language use; and 3) motivation. These findings are then related to the literature of antecedent backgrounds, expectations for success, and institutional and personal support.

Table 2 illustrates and summarizes 11 academic success factors that emerge from the study. Two very different tracks are represented. Enrolled students were by their very words successful, primarily, because they were deeply committed to staying enrolled no matter what. Formerly enrolled students in the study thought about and prioritize their lives very differently.

Table 17
Two Tracks of Academic Success

Academic Success Factors	Enrolled Students	Drop Out Students
1) Antecedents – identity and sense of place	Voluntary émigré, infant refugee, or born in the US, connected to US	Involuntary refuge, or Exile, connected to homeland
2) Antecedents – future motivation	Open to new culture weak, can return home any time,	deep longing to return home, clinging to culture and past memories
3) Socialization	Strong	Weak, resistant
4) Acculturation – especially language use skills	Additive, indicated by English language use mastery	Accommodative or subtractive, indicated by English language use difficulties
5) Goal setting	High, long-term, challenging	Low, short term, or non-existent
6) Entry into the US educational system	Early kindergarten or primary school	Late secondary school following schooling in Somalia
7) Preparation and performance in high school	Good preparation and performance	Modest to below average performance
8) Family and peer support for education	High, deep, close, and persistent	Weak, non-existent
9) Sustainability of college enrollment	Sustaining indefinitely as long as it takes	Interrupted, discontinued by financial obligation to Somali relatives and friends, substantial funds continuously sent
10) Social interaction, connection in college	High, strong, deeply connected involvement	Low, weak, disconnected
11) Educational institution experiences	Positive and strong, high above average GPAs	Weak, negative, or non-existent, below average GPAs

The study employs mixed quantitative and qualitative research methodology to gather observations on the educational and social backgrounds of currently enrolled and formerly enrolled Somali students at MCTC in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. In this chapter the researcher presents an analysis of eight findings grouped under three themes that were introduced and discussed in depth: 1. Identity and sense of place, 2. Language, and 3. Motivation.

In the final chapter, conclusions from the findings are presented, recommendations based on the eight findings are offered, recommendations for further research are put forth, and limitations of the study are discussed.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

The aim of this study is to explore factors affecting the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan area. The study documents antecedent cultural foundations; socialization, assimilation, and acculturation processes as immigrant refugees; educational preparation and literacy elements in two very different circumstantial contexts; financial and psychological support factors; and intrinsic motivation drivers of two samples of Somali students: one group of 18 who are currently attending the community college, and a second group of 18 students who had dropped out.

The researcher uses a mixed quantitative and qualitative, but mostly qualitative, case study research design approach. The current student sample was purposely selected from a population of 234 community college students at Minneapolis Community & Technical College (MCTC) who completed a survey instrument created by the researcher to collect basic demographic information. The formerly enrolled student sample was selected on an ad hoc basis from contact lists of the researcher's acquaintances and guidance counselors at MCTC. All 36 participants were interviewed either in focus groups or individually using a semi-structured interview process. The researcher posed questions about experiences in their home country as well as their educational and college experiences after they immigrated to the United States and enrolled in the community college. Interviews were conducted at MCTC and in private vehicles at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Three major themes related to academic success factors have emerged from this study:

1. Identity and sense of place,
2. Language use, and
3. Motivation.

The emergent themes were analyzed based on the extant research conducted about Somali cultural identity (Al-Huraibi, 2009; Bigelow, 2010; Langellier, 2010; Roxas, 2008; and Leitner, 2008). The socialization, acculturation were supported by the research of Gibson, 1998; Waters, 1994; Portes & Zhou, 1994; and Portes & Rumbaut's, 1994. Kim (1995) provides research backup for family and peer support processes and social integration as did many others (Taylor & Krohn, 2005; McBrien, 2005; and Darboe, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Manning & Bostonian, 2006; and Alitolppa-Niiamo, 2004). The role of language in academic success is supported by research (White & Lowenthal, 2010; Olsen, 2000; Darboe, 2003; Birman, Tricket, & Bacchus, 2001; and Waters, Ueda, & Marrow, 2007). Finally, the critical role of motivation found significant support from recent as well as well-established research (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Tinto, 1993; Sternberg, 2006; Kress, 2006; Manning & Bostonian, 2006; Banks, 2010; Alitolppa-Niiamo, 2004 and McBrien, 2005).

The study findings indicate that clear pathways to academic success existed for some Somali students based on the experiences of those who are succeeding and those who are not.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is one of three major thematic elements of this study. It is the most important part of what the researcher regards as “Somaliness”. Participants in the study who were academically successful or succeeding were able to consider themselves members of both their home Somali culture and American culture. They kept their Somali identity and traditions, such as speaking the Somali language at home and among peers, and maintenance of a strong connection to Muslim daily rituals at the MCTC on-campus mosque, while at the same time adapting to American culture. They had mastered English and placed a high value on education as many Americans do, such as obtaining and seeking to obtain a high school diploma, a community college associate degree, baccalaureate degrees from an accredited four-year college and postgraduate degrees. They clearly understood that attaining higher levels of education in the US generally equated to better job opportunities, higher incomes, and greater economic security, and they had taken major strides to accomplish just that.

On the other hand, Somalis who had prioritized honoring their home culture over their adopted culture as represented by students who had dropped out of MCTC were not able to attain very much education success, even at the lowest standard. They had not learned English, and they had not stayed on the educational improvement ladder. In fact, they had dropped out of MCTC to earn money to send to family members, peers, and even neighbors in Somalia.

Success Identity

Another factor in cultural identity is the Somali sense of academic success. Somali student participants in the study identify a successful person as one who stuck

with the effort to get as much education as possible. The success standard was simply staying in school regardless of whether or not a degree was attained. It made no difference whether the student was part-time or full-time. If a student had enrolled, that represented success to the participant and perhaps even to the participant's school peers who maintained a physical connection to the participant on a regular basis in the school setting.

At the high end of the scale, not surprisingly, the few students who were enrolled in school full-time achieved the most success as well as success identity. They had the loftiest and most specific future plans for continuing their education and attaining professional achievement.

Most in the mid-success range were so-called work-study students who maintained student status by taking a few courses per semester while earning an income. Somewhat surprising was the older age of many part-time students, many of whom were contributing to their own family support in the US. A number of these students were over forty and fifty, which was a result of immigration to the US after the age of thirty or forty.

Family and Peer Group Support

The third most important factor in the cultural identity is the role that family and peer group support played in the achievement of academic success by Somali students. The supportive function that family and peers played in the lives of the student participants was less critical, but still an important factor in achieving academic success. Support by family and peers was expressed in a number of ways, including extended family relationships, financial security, housing, emotional encouragement, advisory, friendship,

group membership and spiritual. Clearly some forms of support were more critical than others in achieving academic success. Financial support is an obvious candidate, but there were other important factors as well, such as sharing success values, and needed language skills.

Most of the successful participants had some kind of family support, although a few had much less than others. Being an immigrant refugee, cut off from extended family, friends, and peers in their homeland, was difficult for many. A number of the study participants had immigrated to the US by themselves. They had relied upon their own resourcefulness to make friends and establish peer relationships. Although most of the study participants succeeded at making some connections that provided family support, a number of them did not, or did not admit to having it and achieved academic success anyway. For some, this forced independence motivated them to become successful at being independent. For others, independence probably led to psychological struggles and discouragement. There was more evidence of this latter response among the formerly enrolled dropouts, who clearly had disconnected from the educational success pathway that some of their peers were following.

Language Use

Language, ahead of cultural connections and motivation, is one of the strongest thematic elements of this study. Language is such a powerful avenue to academic skill because it is simultaneously a critical communication skill; a window to understanding a culture, and if you are a refugee immigrant, rapid acculturation; and a superhighway to personal and professional opportunity. Learning the English language was very difficult for some Somali student participants, and not so much for others. For those who were

successful at learning English in Somali schools, arriving in the US when they were very young, participating in an early education program in the US, mastering it quickly because learning languages came easily whenever they arrived, or were forced to learn it by being put into full immersion circumstances, academic success was practically assured.

Conversely, study participants who had recently arrived in the US without any exposure to English until they landed, who were in their mid-teens or older and consequently had had fewer years to learn the language, who struggled with learning languages, who had weak family or peer support, and who lived among other immigrants who also didn't speak English, were not able to attain academic success regardless of how intelligent they may have been.

Undetected in this study was the Somali cultural reputation for strong appreciation of the language arts. Historically, Somalis have a strong reputation for appreciation of language and poetry. The country is in a very strategic spot that intersected with highly travelled, ancient land and sea trading routes in which there was significant exposure to a large amount of cultural exchange and integration. In such a place, languages, storytelling, singing, writing and poetry thrived and grew rich with the participation and exchange of many diverse cultural offerings over the millennia.

For many of these reasons, Somali student success at acquiring and mastering English is probably one of the strongest, most unambiguous predictors of Somali academic success. Language in all of its forms and arts speaking, reading, writing, poetry, story telling, song, and prose took a long time to learn, master, and appreciate for most. Mastering academic success, where most all forms of English communication take

place, is probably among the most highly dependent enterprises that rest upon English language mastery. Therefore, it is easy to understand why academic success results directly from its practice.

Goals and Commitments

Motivation was another major thematic component of this study. Those student study participants who were the most academically successful had expressed extremely strong motivation for achieving academic success through clear, precise goals and commitment to the researcher. Equally, those who were the least academically successful expressed the most uncertain, wavering, imprecise goals and commitment to the researcher. Those who were not as successful had moderate, hidden, or the least overt expression of goals and commitment. While not as powerful a predictor of academic success as language mastery, having clear goals and commitment may be a close second.

Von Culin, Tsukayama and Duckworth (2014) indicate that “With respect to grit, this model of personality predicts that individual differences in the tendency to pursue long term goals with passion and perseverance derive in part from individual differences in motivation” (p. 307).

Social Integration

Social integration was another important thematic motivational element of academic success in this study. Social integration was defined as including the strength of connections between the student and the academic institution, and all of the values, recommendations, and requirements the institution espoused. Thus, student academic preparation is an important component, as well as student test participation, academic requirements fulfillment, and connections to academic advisory staff and teachers. The

best-prepared and most socially integrated students in the study were frequently the most academically successful.

Although Somalis traditionally achieved most of their societal success as independent rural farmers, they also had significant experience governing themselves through tightly knit clan structures. Perhaps social integration may be a format that Somalis feel comfortable with even in a foreign land.

Strength of Independence and Dependence

Motivation to succeed academically revealed itself in different ways in this study. For some, strong connections with family and peers what may be called dependence worked well; while for others, dependence upon self what may be called independence also worked well. American culture and many others possess both models of success in academia and other fields. Generally, Somali student participants who had been in the US at least a decade or two demonstrated much stronger independence and independent academic success than those Somalis who had only been in the US a few years, although this wasn't always the case. Some Somalis who achieved success in dependent situations did so because they didn't have to be concerned with earning a living, pioneering where they couldn't speak English, or exerting a strong effort to develop friendships. Some Somali student dropouts, who did not acculturate into the American system and remained disconnected, neither became academically successful nor independent and academically successful. Those who were academically successful only a few short years after arrival in the US usually accomplished this through strongly wrapping themselves up in dependencies upon family and friends.

Pathways to Academic Success

The findings of this study, indicate that there may very well be a pathway to the academic success of Somali students enrolled at MCTC. That pathway may be indicated by congruence with the three emergent study patterns: 1) a future oriented identity and sense of place, 2) a proficiency of English language skills, and 3) goal-oriented motivation.

A Future-Oriented Identity and Sense of Place

The pathway to academic success, however it is defined, begins early in the lives of Somali students, reaching back to Somalia antecedents in the lives of these student and/or their parents or both. If individuals involuntarily leave Somalia, they may be put on a path of mourning for what they lost a deep attachment that may have incapacitated them in achieving academic success. Although this may not be the case for all Somali refugees and exiles, it appeared to be what happened with this study population of formerly enrolled MCTC students. On the other hand, if immigration to the US occurred early enough in life, before culture had a chance to set the course of their lives, or if they were fortunate enough to be born in the US, these students could more easily have assembled the skills, attitudes, and culture of their adopted country. By the time they reached college age, they would have succeeded academically as well as or better than any other native-born American citizen.

The elements that differentiate students who have a better chance of achieving academic success from others is a future-oriented identity with American culture and a sense of place that includes the US, which is important for cultural identity. The degree

to which students socialize, and acculturate additively is a strong indicator that this future-oriented identity has formed and that a sense of place has developed.

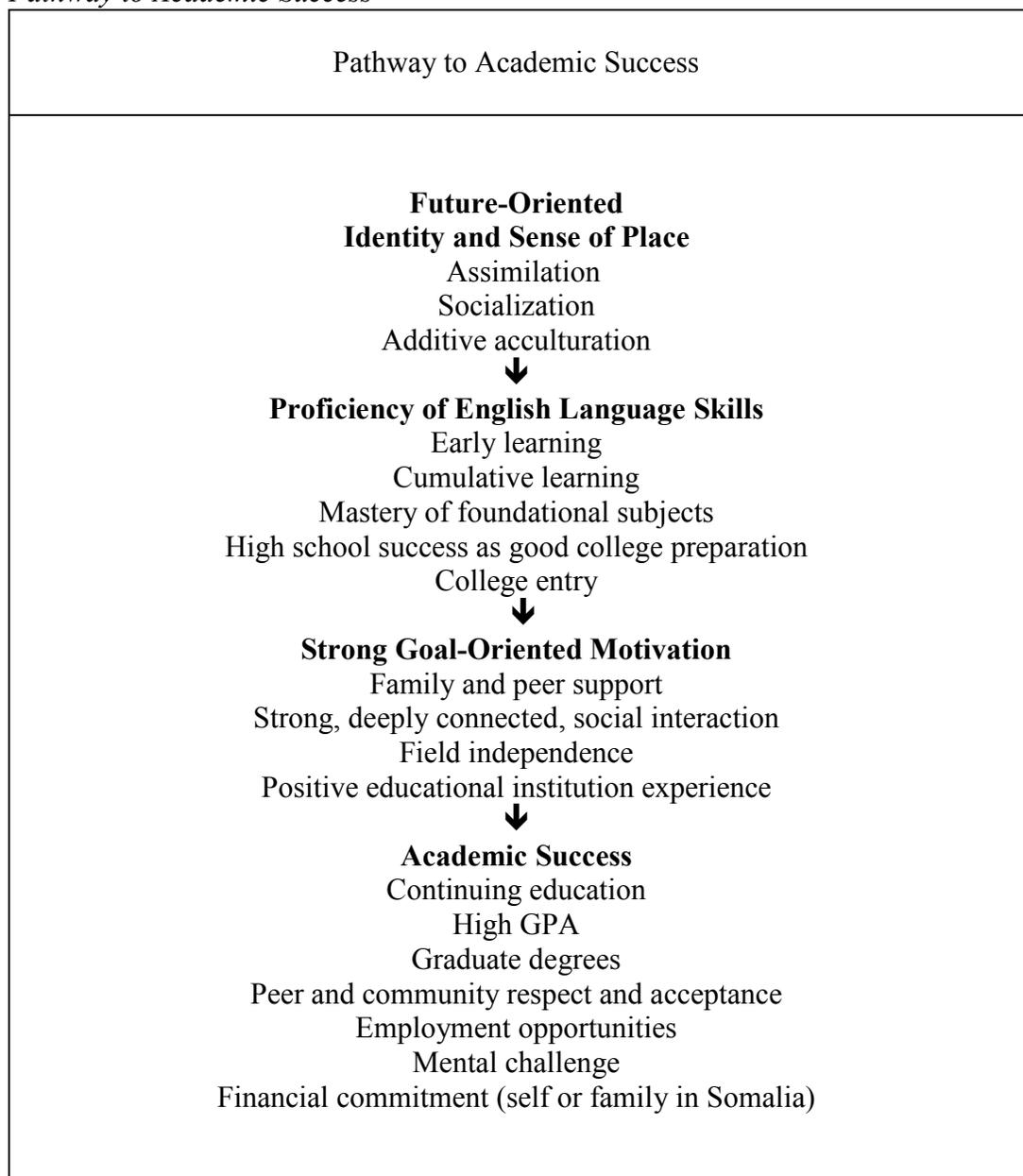
Proficiency of English Language Skills

Perhaps the strongest indicator that socialization and additive acculturation have taken hold may very well be proficiency of English language skills. Proficiency of these skills unlocks and makes accessible so much of the American culture, which is necessary to enable academic success. The earlier this proficiency begins, the better the chance of enabling other learning to progress.

Strong Goal-Oriented Motivation

Academic success was defined very modestly by most of the study participants as remaining enrolled in MCTC as long as possible, no matter how minimal that enrollment may be. Nevertheless, those students who achieved the highest levels of success had higher, longer-term, and more challenging goals than their peers. In addition, they had strong support from family, peers and MCTC in reaching their goals. This kind of motivation may have been the cause of their persistence and tenacity in remaining in college despite setbacks and hardships.

Table 18
Pathway to Academic Success



Academic Success

Whether academic success is defined modestly as continuing education as many of the study participants viewed it who had only achieve modest success, or whether it is viewed as a more ambitious concept as few of the study participants described it, it is widely thought to possibly include high GPAs, graduate degrees, peer respect and acceptance, employment opportunities, mental challenge, and financial security.

Recommendations

Although this was primarily a qualitative research study, the unanimity, strength, and consistency of participant responses points to at least two significant categories of study implications: 1) recommendations for educational practice; and 2) recommendations for societal support.

Recommendations for Educational Practice

There are limited preparation options for Somalis in Somalia before immigration to the US. Political instability continues to reign in Somalia and with it social and economic instability. Somalia remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a disorganized education system. Somali refugees also have an uncertain future.

Once Somalis arrive in the US as refugee immigrants and find their way to large, stable settlements of other Somalis, such as the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, their educational opportunities expand and their pathway to academic success becomes more certain. This pathway requires careful planning and guidance, however, because the outcome very much depends upon students' actions and a host of other contextual factors.

Given the reality of the Somali refugee and immigrant experience, Somalis would be wise to connect with academic counseling services as early as possible upon arrival in the US. Advice would differ for each person, but the sooner it is received, the sooner would be the opportunity to take advantage of it. In addition, taking action sooner rather than later would enable the Somali person to have as much time on their side as possible, for timing is an important issue as this study has shown. For example, if a Somali student is able to enroll in a preschool or an elementary school, learning English and acculturating into the American culture would be easier for the student to deal with. By the time, the student is of college age, opportunities would abound.

Even if the student is older and perhaps even a teenager, there would be ample time to learn the language and many of the cultural ways of the community and the nation, if the right strategies are taken with the academic guidance counselor's advice. And if the student is an adult, the advisor would be able to give as much advice as possible revealed by this study and others to make the process as efficient the least time consuming and the least costly as current knowledge permits.

Promote Academic Success Training Through Somali Student Organizations

Informal gathering places and events may provide a highly effective place for dispensing academic success training for Somalis. Such opportunities are plentiful at MCTC given the relatively large Somali student population. These opportunities also exist in the wider community at communal gathering places such as mosque-sponsored social events, and people's homes where they may be more effectively provided for students of younger ages as well as parents because this study made it very apparent that

the younger the student receives advice the more time the student the student will have to implement it.

Success training should cover recommendations for fulfilling college preparatory requirements. Many Somali students have had a difficult time with college due to inadequate coursework, language barriers, and ineffective study strategies. They may also have had a difficult time finding peers who can help them navigate their way through the challenges.

New Language Teaching Modalities

Formal ESL classes are required for many Somali students who have been accepted into MCTC. Some student study participants described these as excessive, while many others obviously did not have enough or effective enough participation in ESL classes. There were sufficient complaints about ESL classes to recommend that there may be a need for new language teaching modalities such as full immersion learning or other techniques.

Goal Setting, Professional Commitment, and Career Modeling Classes

The interviews revealed that there might be a connection between educational goal setting, professional commitment, career modeling, and academic success. If further studies along these lines confirm these results, introducing and training Somali students in these practices may yield desired academic success outcomes. The students that excelled at the intricacies of these practices might be persuaded or recruited to conduct these classes or provide peer-to-peer tutoring.

Somali Speaking Academic Advisors

There were many who praised the efforts of some of the academic advisors, but there were also many who suggested that advisors who spoke the Somali language be employed to provide more and better academic advice to Somali students. This seemed to be a reasonable request given the number of student who mentioned that they never have connected with academic advisors even though they are aware that they exist, as well as the number of students who are not doing as well as they might and need assistance. Academic advisors who speak the Somali language and are sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of these immigrant refugees may recognize patterns or early warning danger signals of potential academic failure that others may not be sensitive enough to notice and be more proactive about suggesting interventions or solutions. They may also be able to pair up peers who are having similar issues and can help each other.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this mixed method research study was to acquire and examine 36 participants' responses to research questions about contextual and other factors that may have influenced their academic success. The study revealed many tantalizing factors that may end with additional future research proven to change the way Somalis are educated in community colleges. A few of the many potential studies that may be conducted are included in the recommendations listed below

English Language Training May be More Effective Much Earlier in the Refugee Immigrant Experience

The earlier that Somalis made the English language part of their life the more academic success they seemed to achieve in America. Somali refugee immigrants who learned English in refugee camps in Kenya and other places, for example, seemed to have an easier time of achieving American acculturation and academic success much more quickly and effectively than others who were only exposed to the Somali and Arabic languages. They became more strongly committed to achieving educational goals, set more ambitious academic targets, progressed faster, achieved higher grades, integrated better socially, and appeared to have more perseverance and persistence than others. Since so much success may depend upon how American acculturation occurs, research may prove fruitful in confirming this finding and pointing towards useful and valuable future practices.

Loyalty Towards the Somali Culture May Confound Academic Success

For some, loyalty to the Somali culture may be a zero sum game, meaning that holding onto Somali/Muslim culture means excluding American and other cultures. The behavior of many formerly enrolled MCTC students may have uncovered this or some other phenomenon. For example, it may be the case that those who repeat what these students have gone through do so because they feel a duty to their culture that overrides all other personal concerns, including their own educational achievements. However, there may be some other reason that was not discovered in this research that may explain the choices that were made. It would be valuable to confirm the findings in this research as well as to uncover what other reasons, if any, that may be confounding this group of

Somalis who appear to hold on so tightly to their culture that it confounds their own stated education goals and appears to have them so conflicted.

Peer Tutoring May be an Effective Language Learning Method

Language learning is suspected of being one of the strongest factors in achieving academic success. How to maximize language learning, therefore, may be a question worth investing more research efforts on. Peer tutoring may be one method worthy of further investigation as a unique method that has been found to be an effective language-learning strategy among other populations (Gaustad, 1993).

Students May Learn Better in Informal Settings

Yet, another fresh insight may be to reexamine our ideas about learning languages in formal versus informal settings for Somali immigrant refugees. Rather than conventional classroom settings where costs and stakes are high, comparative research might be conducted on the effectiveness of bringing language learning into Somali clubs, mosques, and social settings where Somalis can socialize and practice their English learning for a much lower cost. Are Somalis more likely to learn language in these settings because it is critical to their social wellbeing and survival in the United States?

Are Somalis more likely to learn language in these settings because there is more opportunity for social integration with their own community as well as those of American friends and peers? Are informal settings more likely to engender greater motivation to succeed through goal formation and development of strong personal commitment to self-development? Research to explore these kinds of questions may yield productive results not necessarily to replace existing venues and modalities, but to supplement them.

The Secret of Having Patience and Persistence in Sustaining an Educational Pursuit May Lie in Setting Modest Goals

Many Somali students showed remarkable patience and persistence in sustaining their educational pursuits, expressing that their definition of academic success would be met even if they completed just one course per semester or one course a year. Are Somalis in possession of a different way of looking at goals and their achievement? Do they focus more on the achievement of goals they want to reach rather than the setting of the goals themselves? Further research to clarify this distinction may unlock a distinctive cultural character trait that has so far gone unnoticed and unappreciated.

Limitations

The research provides valuable information that could be discovered exploring the histories of Somali refugee immigrant students further. More questions could have been added to the structured interview format that would better address the research question about the English language learned in Somali schools, refugee schools, and other schools typically found in the Somali refugee experience. Much more detail might have been investigated, for example, the weekly school activity schedules may have revealed more of the actual content, and learning methods employed may have proved insightful. More substantial qualitative and later quantitative studies with larger sample sizes and longer durations in other urban and non-urban geographic regions with varying degrees of academic success are clearly warranted. Other subjects from different colleges could have been selected. Alternatively, participants who had particular kinds of refugee experiences might have been selected to isolate the influence of one type of cultural influence or another.

Limitations of the Interview Procedure

The interview procedures could have gone a lot further. For example, second follow-up interviews could have been conducted with some or all of the participants to ask additional questions, or to clarify some of the original statements; the interviews could have taken place over a longer timeframe; and the interviews could have taken place in different locations that may have inspired different responses, for example immediately after a social gathering at a mosque.

Too many case histories, the semi-structured format, and time limitations compromised the depth of interviews. The focus group procedure did not seem suitable as a format. Many Somalis seemed very tight-lipped, shy, and unable to reveal the full extent of their experiences.

Although the researcher had hoped the focus groups would be more interactive, including some group discussion, this did not happen. Most participants agreed with points made by others and only elaborated briefly for clarification. The atmosphere was informal and friendly. All of the current students expressed contentment about being at MCTC. They were happy to see a Somali graduate student conducting a PhD study and wanted to see more Somali students in higher education. They also said the researcher's presence at MCTC will inspire them and encourage them to pursue graduate school. One student said she had never met a Somali PhD student and was proud to see the researcher who is a PhD candidate and the University of Minnesota at MCTC conducting this research.

This study explored the factors affecting the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in the Minnesota/St. Paul metropolitan area. Three

major themes were found to guide success: cultural identity and sense of place, language and other acculturation indicators, and motivation. Eight major findings fell under these three themes and addressed the study research question underlining success factors.

Under the cultural identity and sense of place theme, some Somali refugee immigrants were found to prioritize religious, spiritual, and cultural values over fulfilling their personal educational goals by postponing and cancelling their educations to provide financial support to Somali family, extended family, peers, and even neighbors in Somalia.

In addition, many Somali students were found to have patience and persistence in sustaining their college educational pursuits by pursuing modest goals. Family and peer group support were found to be an important success factor for some, but not all Somali students. Finally, under the first theme, Somali students who practiced additive acculturation were found to have achieved more academic success than those who practiced accommodative or subtractive acculturation. Under the second major theme of language, it was found that Somali students who mastered English the most effectively achieved greater academic success.

Under the third theme which related to motivation, Somali students who achieved the highest academic success were found to have set the highest goals and made the strongest commitment, exerting the most intensive and sustained efforts. In addition, students who achieved the highest level of social integration, positive institutional experiences, and high school academic preparation achieved a high level of academic success. And, finally, the more “field independent” students were, the more capable they were of working independently, being intrinsically motivated, and self-directed in

seeking recognition for their accomplishments, the higher were their academic performance.

Finally, this study demonstrates the strengths of a population that is somewhat misunderstood due to their large numbers, tragic personal histories, and cultural isolation related to their challenges with a new language and culture diametrically different from American culture. Despite these challenges, their patience, persistence, and adaptability have propelled them to embrace a new culture and a commitment to pursuing academic success in the United States.

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Appendix A

IRB- Exempt study notification

Study Number: 1111E06705

Principal Investigator: Mustafa Ibrahim

Title(s): Factors influencing the academic success of Somali refugee students in a two-year community college

The study has been assigned the above referenced study number which should be used in all communication with this office.

You may follow the progress of the review of your study in the Track Documents section at Research Central <http://eresearch.umn.edu/>

The IRB reminds you that research with human subjects should not be initiated until you have received notification of the IRB's action on your proposal and final approval is granted for the study.

Once your study has been approved, we will be happy to send confirmation of its approval to your funding agency. If you would like us to do so, please send us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

Advisors shoulder the responsibility for students engaged in independent research. As Advisors are copied on all correspondence, the IRB understands they have reviewed the proposal, and accept the roles and responsibilities required to oversee the conduct of this research, prevent harms to subjects and foster benefits to the subjects.

If you have any questions, please call the IRB office at [612-626-5654](tel:612-626-5654).

Appendix B
CONSENT FORM

Asalamu Calaykum, My name is Mustafa Ibrahim. I'm originally from Somalia and I'm currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development (OLPD) at the University of Minnesota- Twin-Cities. I'm personally inviting you to participate in a research project to determine the factors affecting the academic success of Somali students at Minnesota Community and Technical College (MCTC). I will be conducting the project under the supervision of my dissertation advisors: Dr. Deanne Magnusson and Dr. Gerald Fry.

In this project, in addition to asking you about your personal history and I will be asking for your personal thoughts and opinions on a number of academic success factors that may benefit you and other MCTC students. Although I want to emphasize that your participation in this project is completely *voluntary* and safe, and the information you furnish will not in any way be connected to you personally, your responses will be vital to making this project a success. In fact, it will be impossible to proceed without you.

There are three phases to this project. In the first phase, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. For many of you, this will be the only phase in which you will be asked to participate. After you complete the questionnaire and turn it in, I will compile and analyze the responses. When I'm completed, I will ask a small number of you to return for two interviews. The first interview will be held with me as a part of a small focus group of your peers. The second interview will also be held with me as a one-on-one follow-up.

There are no risks to your participation. Your responses will be held in strict and total confidence. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any

questions in the questionnaire or during the interviews. You are also free to withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty for refusing to answer any questions or for withdrawal. No one will be given any information about your personal participation. You will be identified in the research write up report with a fictitious name or pseudonym. Any recorded materials will be deleted at the completion of the study.

Findings from this project will be shared primarily with my dissertation committee members in my written dissertation. The results may also be used for a scholarly report, a journal article, and conference presentations. In any publication or public presentation, pseudonyms will be substituted for any identifying information and no personal individual information identifications will be shown.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to consider participating in this study. This study will help your fellow Somalis to become academically successful

Sincerely,

Researcher: Mustafa Ibrahim

CIDE Ph. D Candidate

University of Minnesota.

Ibra0045@umn.edu

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been offered a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Printed Name _____

Appendix C

Demographic survey

Factors Affecting the Academic Success of Somali Students at Community Colleges

I appreciate your willingness to help with this research project. This purpose of the study is to determine factors affecting the academic success of Somali students in a two-year community college in the Minnesota metro-area. This survey is phase one of a three-phase information gathering process.

To facilitate the survey, please answer the questions to the best of your ability. This information may be vital in helping you and other Somali students have a better college experience in the future. Note that all identifiable information will be kept totally *confidential* and only aggregated data will be reported in my dissertation and other scholarly media outlets.

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1) Gender

Female

Male

2) Religion

Muslim

Christian

Other _____

3) Place of Birth

Somalia

USA

Other _____

4) Languages used at home (check all that apply)

- Somali
- English
- Both Somali and English
- Other _____

5) Immigration status

- U.S. born citizen
- Naturalized citizen
- Permanent Resident
- Temporary Resident

6) Where do you reside?

- With parents
- With relatives
- With friends
- Campus residence hall
- Home owned
- Home rented
- Private apartment owned
- Private apartment rented

7) Father's educational attainment?

- Never went to school
- Completed some primary school
- Completed all primary school
- Completed some secondary school
- Completed all secondary school
- Completed some education/training after secondary school
- Completed Associate Degree

- Completed Bachelors Degree
- Attended graduate school
- Completed Masters Degree
- Completed Doctorate Degree
- Don't know

8) Mother's educational attainment?

- Never went to school
- Completed some primary school
- Completed all primary school
- Completed some secondary school
- Completed all secondary school
- Completed some education/training after secondary school
- Completed Associate Degree
- Completed Bachelors Degree
- Attended graduate school
- Completed Masters Degree
- Completed Doctorate Degree
- Don't know

9) Grade level when you began schooling in the U.S. educational system?

- Primary School
- Junior High
- High School
- College

10) What is your major or your professional specialization (Check as many as possible)

- Business
- Information Technology/Communication

- Justice System
- Liberal Arts/General Education
- Nursing, Counseling and Healthcare
- Math and Science
- Public Service
- Service Industry

11) How do you financially support your education (check all that apply)?

- Loan
- Grant
- Scholarship
- Work Study (Teaching Assistant, for example)
- Parents
- Other Relatives
- Other _____

12) Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No

13) Estimated Family Income?

- Less than \$1,000/month
- \$1,001-\$2,000/month
- \$2,001-\$3,000/month
- \$3,001-\$4,000/month
- More than \$4,001/month

14) Do you have an internet access in your home?

- Yes
- No

Would you be willing to participate in phase two and phase three of this research project? As you may recall, I described these follow-up phases as follows: “After you complete the questionnaire and turn it in, I will compile and analyze the responses. When I’m completed, I will ask a small number of you to return for two interviews. The first interview will be held with me as a part of a small focus group of your peers. The second interview will also be held with me as a one-on-one follow-up.”

I will be selecting a sample of twenty four students for follow-up questions. In phase two, focus groups will be formed for the purpose of a group interview. Students will be placed in four groups of 6 students. I will meet with each group separately an hour. The same questions will be asked of each person in the group and group members will be able to ask follow-up questions. At the completion of phase two, I will schedule then meet ten students individually for an hour.

Would you be willing to participate in the focus group interview?	Would you be willing to participate in the individual interview?
Yes	Yes
No	No
Contact email:	Contact email:
Contact phone if no email or preference:	Contact phone if no email or preference:

THANK YOU FOR TAKING TIME TO FILL OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

Appendix D

Focus Group questions

Focus Group Questions
1. In what ways have your experiences prior coming to the Twin Cities affected your academic success at MCTC?
2. In which ways has MCTC affected you academically? Describe your relationship with your A-Counselors B-Teachers C-Mentors
3. What has contributing to your academic success at MCTC?
4. What is the nature of your MCTC experience?
5. What do you consider academic success at MCTC?
6. What is your plan after graduating from MCTC?

Appendix E

Individual questions

This individual interview with students will be open-ended, semi-structured. The following is a guide that will be used to direct the conversation, not a script that will be followed closely. Some interviews may not cover all the questions that follow, and it is possible that additional topics will be covered as they emerge during the interview.

Probes and follow-up questions will be used as needed.

The following questions serve as a broad guideline for conducting the interviews. The wording of the questions is not exact from interview to interview. The interview is free to move an interview in any direction suggested by the responses of the interviewee.

Date _____

Participant Assigned Code _____

Introduction: Explanation of research. Read and sign consent letter, ask permission to tape record.

Background Information—Immigration, Family, Parental Education

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Probe: Where did you grow up? What do your parents do? What are your family values and traditions?

Tell me what motivated you or your family to come to the United States?

Tell me about your experience as an immigrant student in a secondary school?

What were your biggest challenges?

Going to College— value of education, family attitude, educational aspirations

Who/and what influenced your decision to pursue a higher education?

Why do you choose this institution?

Why did you end up choosing this school?

What does going to college mean to you?

What was first impression about this college?

What activities have you been involved with on campus?

Describe your academic skills

Probe: What are you good at?

Who do you go to if you have a problem with your academic work?

Do you think you are successful in college? If so, what do you think a successful person in college is.

What is your current living environment (dorm, off campus)? Do you live with others or by yourself?

What has been your most positive experience so far in college?

Staying in College—Motivation to Success

What benefits/rewards do you see in obtaining a college degree?

Probe: What do you think a college degree will give you that you couldn't get without one?

From what you know so far, what is it going to take for you to stay until you get a degree?

Probe: What kinds of things keep you going?

Who/and what influences your decision to stay in college?

How important is getting a college degree to you?

Social Ties/Relationships

How would you describe your relationship with family?

Has that relationship changed since you have been here?

Please describe relationship with your friends, teachers, and college staff you contact with on campus?

Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities? How important are they to you in your college experience?

Please tell me about your peer group you've established or how you have formed friendship. Who are your close friends?

How do these people help you with your college experience?

Tell about your relationship with your counselor

Challenge and Strategies

What is required to succeed in obtaining a college degree?

What challenges do you face in staying in college? What are your biggest challenges?

Probe: What challenge do you have in academic work?

Do you feel any pressure to succeed in college? How do you deal with the pressure?

Who do you talk to about these issues? Where do you get academic/social/cultural support to over the barriers?

What barriers or obstacles have you experienced while studying in this college?

What coping strategies do you use to overcome those barriers or obstacles?

Wrap-up

Is there anything else you would like to add or talk about?

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask of me?

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix F

Biographical Description of Vincent Tinto

Vincent Tinto currently is a Distinguished University Professor at Syracuse University and chair of the higher education program. He received his Ph.D. in education and sociology from The University of Chicago in 1971. He has conducted research and written extensively on higher education and particularly on student academic success and the impact of learning communities on student growth and attainment with more than 50 research papers, journal articles and books. According to Syracuse University's website his academic research focus is "Theory and research on student persistence and attainment in higher education, and on curricular and pedagogical innovations designed to enhance student attainment, especially for low-income, underrepresented, and under-prepared students in urban two and four-year colleges."

Tinto has consulted widely with Federal and State agencies, with independent research firms, foundations, and with two and four-year institutions of higher education on a broad range of higher educational issues, not the least of which concerns the success of low-income students. He also serves on the editorial boards of several education journals and with various organizations and professional associations concerned with higher education. In 2015, the American Association of Community Colleges awarded him the Harry S Truman Award for his community colleges work.