

## **Understanding Adult Business Students' Transitions to an Undergraduate Program through a First-Year Seminar Course**

**April E. Bailey**

Assistant Professor

Accounting, MIS, and ITBE Department

John L. Grove College of Business

Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

USA

**Patricia Cranton**

The Pennsylvania State University

USA

**Daniele Flannery**

The Pennsylvania State University

USA

### **Abstract**

*This study addressed a gap in the literature of adult students in the first-year seminar research and explored the importance of tailoring a first-year seminar course to adult student needs. The study participants were seven returning business students who enrolled in a special summer offering of the BSN101 Foundations of Business Administration course focused on designing a curriculum that is relevant to the adult student's needs. The process used was action research where students collaboratively worked together with the researcher to determine what components were needed in a first-year seminar for adult business students and to aid in their adjustment to college. The major finding was a model which can be used by educators when they are working with adult populations in the classroom.*

**Key Words:** Adult students, business students, action research, first-year seminar

### **Introduction**

Over the past few years universities have experienced an increase in enrollments of nontraditional students, also referred to as adult students or adult learners (see for example, Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirx, 2000; Kasworm, 1990, 1993, 2003, 2005). Typically, nontraditional students are defined as 24 years of age or older and returning to school after a significant gap in their education. The traditional student is defined as under the age of 24 and attending college for the first time, seeking their undergraduate degree (Kinsella, 1998). The number of adult students has grown rapidly during the last decade (Chao & Good, 2004). Adult students make up more than 40% of the total U.S. undergraduate population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). Due to this continuous increase of adult students, colleges and universities need to consider redesigning programs and services to meet the needs of these students.

Interestingly, one of the programs designed to increase student adjustment to college is the first-year seminar. Data from the second National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices indicated that 94% of United States higher education institutions offer a version of the first-year seminar (Barefoot, 1992). The content of these seminar courses vary; however, all appear to have the theme of helping the student make the transition to college and fostering student development (Anderson, Gardner, & Kuh, 2006). Many schools list that the primary function of the seminar is to assist new students with their academic and social development in order for these students to make a successful transition into college. Other goals of the orientation course are to prepare students for the demands of a specific academic discipline, increase students' academic skills, and ultimately to aid in the retention of students (Upcraft et al., 2005). Many varieties of the first-year seminar are offered with respect to credit hours and content. Some colleges design their introductory first-year classes to be an extension of orientation, while others are conducted for basic study skills or discipline-related material. The purpose of successful first-year seminars is to assist students with the transition to college by acclimating them to the institution.

In addition, The Policy Center of the First Year of College suggests additional goals for institutions offering first-year seminar courses, such as the ability for the student to be able to self-manage, develop personal relationships, strengthen academic skills, and participate in active learning opportunities (Swing, 2001). Unfortunately, most colleges have one program for all first-year traditional students and do not take into account the life experiences of the adult students and their individual needs for the course.

### **Literature Review**

There is a plethora of literature on the first-year seminar and traditional-aged students; however, much of it is descriptive on the seminars purposes, content, and processes (Anderson, Gardner, & Kuh, 2006; Swing, 2001; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005) or program assessments (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2009). One notable 35-year study (1966-2002) completed by Astin et al. (2002) showed aspects which promote the first-year seminar and how important it was for student adjustment and transition to be tied to active learning in order for students to be successful in college.

What has not been extensively explored is the adult learner in the context of a first-year seminar course; in fact, only three empirical articles exist in this area (Hatch, 2003; Julian, 2001; Welch, 2004). Only a small amount of information is known about the adult first-year student's transition to an undergraduate degree program. Also scant in the literature is the adult undergraduate business student experience in a first-year seminar course. Only one conceptual piece, The Smeal College of Business at Pennsylvania State University's First-Year Seminar Course, regarding adding four modules to the current curriculum (leadership incorporating teambuilding, workplace diversity, community service, and ethical behavior) was found (Sweitzer & Baker, 2006). Since there was very limited literature to draw from that would be directly related for business or any other discipline, we determined that it would be necessary to address adult learners generically so that we could help adult students in transition.

First, education consistently has learner-centeredness as a key component to adult student learning. Due to the increase of adult students, colleges and universities need to consider redesigning programs and services to meet the needs of these students. An underlying assumption from the literature is that "colleges and universities cannot continue with business-as-usual" (Apps, 1981, p. 11) for the increasing number of adult students returning to undergraduate programs. Universities and colleges may want to consider learning more about their adult student demographics, characteristics, and needs for special resources and services. Adult education advocates for the uniqueness of adult's learning. Adult students have vast amounts of experiences they bring to the classroom (Knowles, 1973). They want to apply what they are learning to their real life.

Second, the higher education literature on undergraduate students suggests that student engagement and building relationship is a crucial component in adult learning. The literature suggests that in-class learning time and interactions with faculty have a powerful influence on an adult's campus experience and personal development:

Adults value and seek out classroom experiences that are based in relevancy, respect, adult dignity, and reciprocity of adult-to-adult relationships. The connecting classroom metaphor suggests an environment that embraces the value and worth of adults as knowledgeable learners, and which also values adult life experiences and perspectives as part of the learning process. (Graham et al., 2000, p. 12)

Other authors are in agreement by suggesting that classrooms are the center stage for adult learning (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson et al., 1991; Graham et al., 2000; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997). Students will become connected with their college if they feel the institution cares about them and their success.

Third, we explored the literature in counseling because it gave a basis for understanding the transition that undergraduate students and adult learners experience when they return to college. The most notable literature was Schlossberg et al.'s model (1995) of transition.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) support a model of transition with three components: approaching transition (moving in), taking stock (moving through), and taking charge (moving out). These three phases suggest that an individual who is approaching a transition needs to leave something behind before beginning something new. It is at this stage where evaluation needs to take place regarding the impact the change is having on the individual's life.

Each situation is unique; for instance, it can be an anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event. Schlossberg et al. mentions that students will mourn the loss of goals, friends, and the previous structure. Students have the need to become familiar with rules, procedures, norms, and expectations of their new environment (educational institution). The taking stock phase has additional set of factors: the 4Ss describe and categorize the strengths and weaknesses of individuals experiencing transitions: (a) situation (knowing the student's individual situation and what triggered the change); (b) self (personality, demographics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age and psychological resources such as coping, ego development, and self-efficacy); (c) support (relationships with family, friends, colleagues, faculty, advisor, and institutional support); and (d) strategies (direct action for managing stress and coping) (Sugarman, 2004). We examined these four strategies during our study to assist students with transitions and help them successfully complete their educational goals and become involved more in their environment. One element that this model brings to the discussion of transition models is the difficulty that educators may have when designing curriculum.

Educators need to know their students and the model well enough to know if they are in the moving in, moving through, or moving on phase; adult learners will have different needs depending upon in which phase they are functioning. When developing a tailored curriculum for a first-year seminar course, enrolled adult business students who are returning to undergraduate business school will have different needs from one another. That is why it was important for the students of our study to be at the moving in stage where they are trying to learn and understand the policies and the procedures of the institution. At this stage, the need to learn the expectations of being a student and gain confidence in their decision to returning to higher education. The adult students in the course did not have the same needs when they progress to the moving through phase. In this stage they needed more support from faculty and the institution. This theory is primarily classified as a life-span adult development theory, which identifies the impact that change has on students of all ages (Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model was selected as the primary model from many other transition theories for a number of reasons. First, this model contains an understanding of adult students' transition to college. Unlike many of the models that focus entirely on the undergraduate traditional aged student, Schlossberg's work can be expanded to include adult students. Second, this model is associated with life-span adult developmental theory. Third, this model has been used in the field of higher education, psychology, and adult education, so many educators and administrators with an interest in student development, learning, and adjustment are familiar with Schlossberg's et al.'s work. When designing a curriculum with adult learners for a first-year seminar course, this model is important for structuring the course materials for the first few weeks (moving in) to help assist students adjust to their new environment, followed by the remainder of the course assisting students in taking stock (moving through) the transition. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition model was not fully utilized by reaching the final phase of taking charge (moving out). Since this study was working with incoming first-year students, the moving out phase is what adult students will be faced with during their senior year and at their time of graduation. At this phase adult students will have to evaluate their new goals for after graduation; however, it is beyond the scope of the course and this research study.

The contributions from our study integrated Schlossberg's et al.'s model of understanding the students' individually (self), their situation, support, and strategies to reach their education goals while adding the learner-centeredness of designing a first-year seminar course. This led to each student feeling higher levels of self-efficacy and ultimately indicating that he or she was more prepared and organized for future semesters. Using the techniques of the Schlossberg et al.'s 4Ss model, student-centered teaching (learner-centeredness), having an instructor that was willing to serve as a student advocate, student engagement with other adult learners, and students reflecting on their learning and adjustment led to students making a transition to college life through a first-year seminar course.

## ***Method***

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were returning adult business students at the University. Students who were interested in getting a start on their fall class schedule who enrolled in the course by contacting the Extended Studies program. The criteria for the participants to be in the adapted seminar class were:

1. Were age 24 or older;

2. Were returning to an undergraduate business program (after a 2 or more year break from college and/or 6 or more years of separation from high school);
3. Had applied and been accepted by the university as a business major or who have recently completed the change of major form (and declared business as their major) and returned it to the Dean's office;
4. Needed to take the Foundations of Business Administration course (BSN 101) as a requirement for graduation;
5. Had an interest in completing a research project with the instructor of the course and be interested in assisting the design of a first-year seminar course for future adult business students.

The one credit class was a month summer session meeting on Tuesday and Thursday from 3:00-5:00 p.m for a total of 16 credit hours. The course was pass/fail and the students made a request to the Dean of the College of Business and to the Extended Studies Program to enter the course. Seven adult business students participated throughout the duration of the action research study. Not every student attended every class, but each student stayed in communication with the rest of the group. All missed classes were legitimate due to work or family obligations. The 7 participants, 1 male and 6 female, came from a variety of backgrounds, careers, and experiences and varied in age from 24 to 34. (See Appendix.) The students freely entered the course knowing its intention to have a research component with the instructor. Students paid regular tuition for the one credit course. Students were asked on the first day of class what they would like to have as part of the class content.

As a group, the course content and data collection consisted of a career paper assignment, other reflective assignments, classroom discussions, on-line discussions on Blackboard, and an exit interview. Students participated in all activities in the classroom regardless of their decision to consent or not to consent to the study, so that the instructor/researcher would not know until after grades had been assigned, who had opted to or opted not to participate. So that students would not feel coerced to participate in the study, a student from the class collected all consent forms as delivered it to the Dean's Office in a sealed envelope. The instructor/researcher left the room after the consent form was explained.

### **Research Process: Action Research**

Action research is a kind of research method that involves collaborative action and relationships with students. In this way, it is different from other forms of inquiry. The relationships encourage collaborative participation for developing interventions to solve a problem with the researcher, who is passionate about the topic and values the relationships of their students/participants. Action research was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology because it takes into the lived experience of adult business students, a collaborative approach with participants, and a continuing, systematic process of reflection and action, to aid in the transitional needs of adult business students returning to an undergraduate program through making improvements to a first-year seminar course (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It is through the process of action research that the participants and researcher constructed knowledge to make these improvements to the first-year seminar course for the adult learner.

Within the action research methodology, the study used qualitative data collection techniques to understand the transition adult business students experience as they return to an undergraduate business program and to explore a how a first-year seminar course could better meet the needs of adult learners. Qualitative research is unique in nature because it contains rich narrative from participant interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In addition, qualitative research cannot be reduced to one-dimensional thought; understanding a participant's social world is much more complex as it is the essence of his or her reality of the lived experience. The researcher is looking at the complexity of the participant's view of the situation being studied and does not want to constrict the meaning of the experience by attempting to define categories (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative inquiry —assumes that there are multiple, changing realities (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101) and that participants are able to express their views (Creswell) and construct knowledge (Ewert, 1991).

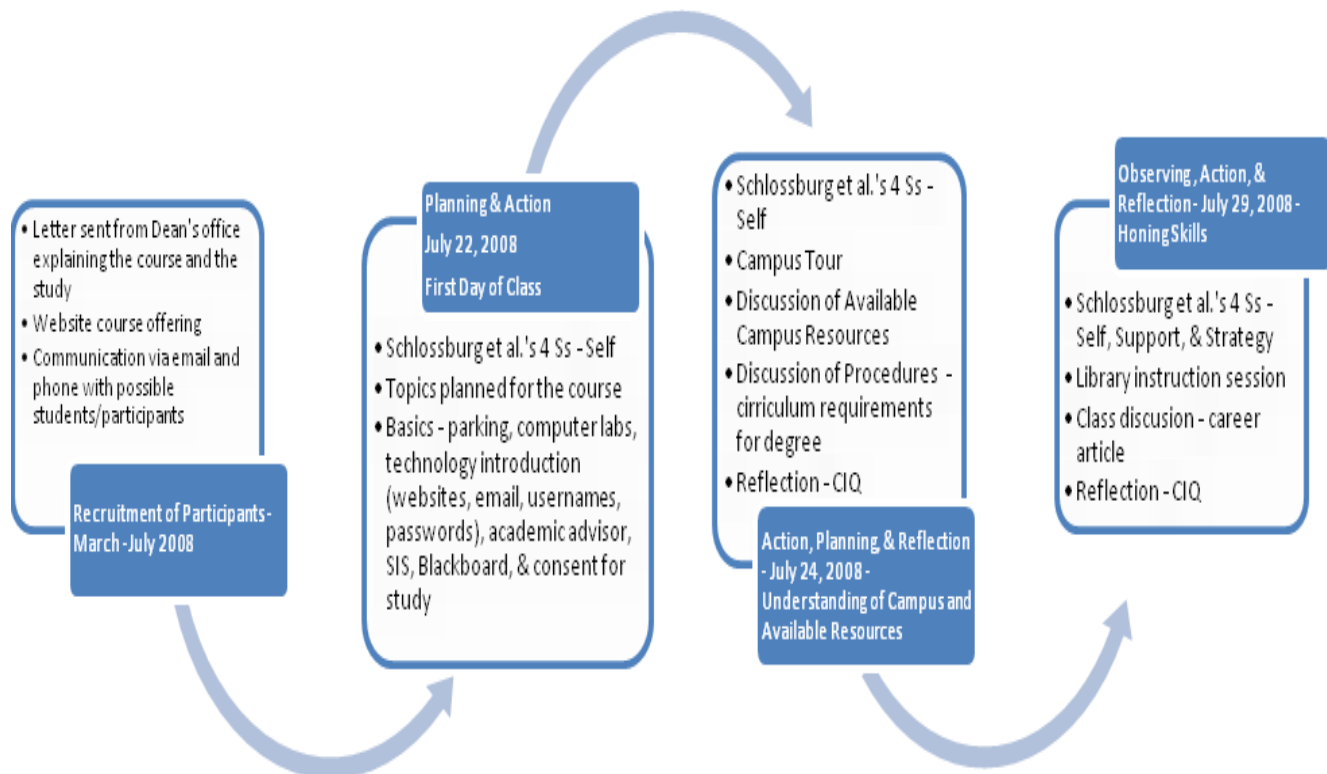
It is within the purpose of this study for participants to use this knowledge construction for their own personal development and engagement by assisting the researcher in the design of a first-year course for adult business students. The classroom context used for this study provided opportunities to collect and analyze descriptions and reflections from the participants. The assumptions of qualitative design include understanding the meaning-making of an individual's experience, which is inductive in nature, and themes emerge from the rich in-depth data. It does not generalize the participant's experiences to all human experiences and perceptions but can be applied to other contexts.

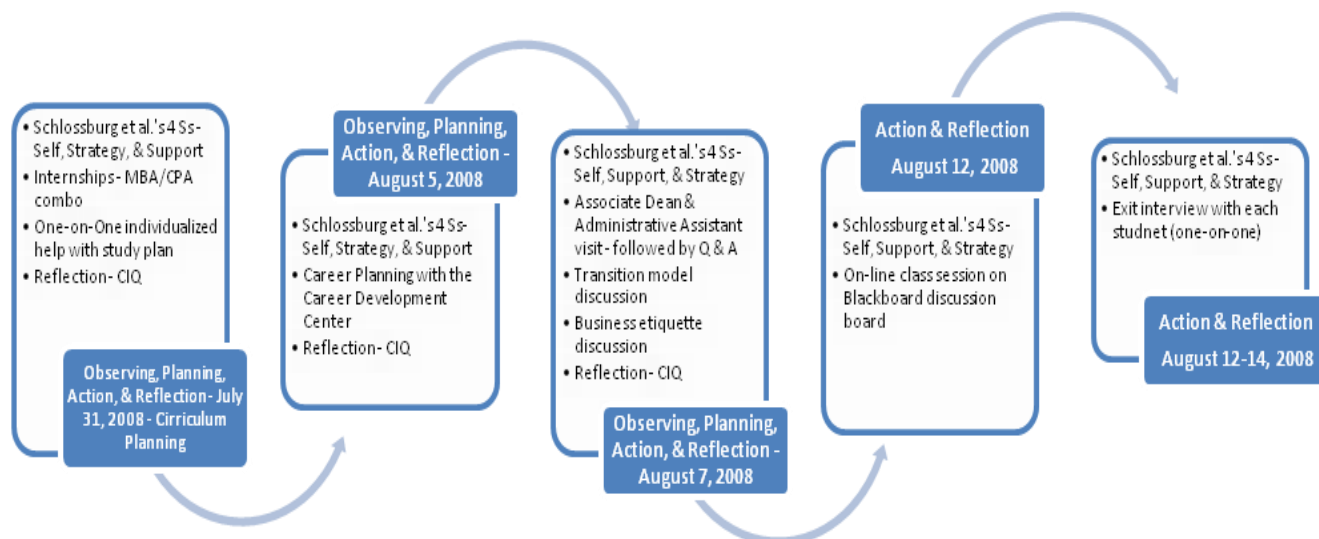
The meaning is central to the study; the participant was encouraged to be an active participant in the study as the researcher sought to build rapport and credibility with the participants (Creswell, 2003). Action research assumes that there are individual variations among people that defy categorization. The underlying belief of action research is that the researcher is cognizant of these individual differences and acknowledges the environmental influences, and how these influences, as well as cultural differences, vary greatly among individuals. The unique lived experiences of individuals are valued and assist the researcher in improving practice. It is a goal of action research that the participants experience growth and development, while becoming socially conscious individuals who want to assist with change and democracy (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997). Action research is —designed to develop new skills or new approaches to solve problems with direct application to the classroom or other applied setting (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 122). Action research is closely tied to self-reflection and Kurt Lewin (1946), a developmental social psychologist, who is credited for his work with action research in the natural setting. The core belief of action research is that theory can often times be articulated through action (Gustavsen, 2001) and that theory alone has minimal power in generating change. Therefore, a synergistic effort of both theory and practice is required. Lewin sees action research as a way of conducting social inquiry, which has the goal to improve practice (e.g., instruction, student learning, use of materials, and curriculum) by developing individuals (student achievement). Action research is often undertaken in a school setting and is an inquiry —done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3).

**Action Research Process**

The experience of engaging students to participate in an action research project yielded its own significant learning points and offered a curriculum for future sections of the first-year seminar, Foundations of Business Administration (FBA). The following flow chart reflects the group’s planning session, classroom sessions, on-line discussion board conversations, reflective writing assignments, and exit interviews will describe the various content and activities of the group during the study. Figure 1 offers a flow chart to represent the study’s progression.

**Figure 1. Study Session Flow Chart**





Action research is an ongoing, non-linear spiral of knowledge, and as the class sessions unfolded, so did a cyclical pattern of knowledge creation – a curriculum for adult business students. We examined student responses to the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ), we could identify specific learning needs, or if a student requested more information on a certain topic, we was able to make adjustments to our syllabus for the remainder of the class sessions. This evolving design was consistent with the action research process and demonstrated some important findings for educators and administrators who work with adult students. Some of the things that students wanted to participate in were meeting the Dean of the College, taking a campus tour, learning about the internship program, having their résumés critiqued by the Career Development Center, and understanding more about how they incorporate the MBA program into their program plan if they were an accounting major. The action research process beginning with the planning stages and followed by the acting, observing, and reflecting stages spirals back to planning. This class was taught with adult students and the way the literature suggests but also within the framework of the College of Business and to meet accreditation standards of The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

Through this research project a standard curriculum was designed for the adult student.

The interests of adult learners were quite different, and adapting to their needs requires flexibility in curriculum design. Many of the adult learners already knew exactly what they wanted to major in and many had a résumé. The adult business students wanted more workshop-type sessions which they designed. They suggested inviting guest speakers and campus resources, such as a library faculty member to present tools for doing on-line research, and counseling services. The Career Development Center was also invited to do mock interviews, look at their résumés, cover letters, and reference pages. They asked for additional time during class to reflect and discuss what they are experiencing as a part of being in the class. During the action research process, the adult learner participants determined which elements of the curriculum best met their needs and interests.

### Findings

This research had four research questions but this paper will highlight the first research question, which is: How can we best meet the needs of adult business students? Through class discussion, reflection papers, email correspondences, Blackboard discussion boards, and individual interviews we were able to find two themes: Fear, Self-Efficacy, and Doubt and Belonging and Support.

### **Fear, Self-Efficacy, and Doubt**

Many students had fears and concerns about returning to college as can be seen in the following quotes by Clifford and Tiff given during their personal interviews:

When I first came in, I was extremely nervous. Then again, I have never been on a campus this big. My first year on this campus and there are buildings everywhere and I don't know where to go and I have no idea what to do. When I got there, a gazillion kids were outside in the parking lot.

Tiff shared,

I am very excited about [University name deleted], but that excitement is accompanied with fear. I am very nervous about starting the fall semester. I am going to be in a new setting with what I imagine will be very different teaching styles and expectations. I hope I will adjust smoothly and succeed here at the University.

By the end of the course, we could see a shift in the level of confidence of all students. One of the most meaningful quotes from the research was written by Sarah. She was very unhappy in her current position and had this to say:

I will have a better relationship with myself because I don't have a lot of respect, confidence, and self esteem for myself and I know in the end I will have more respect, confidence, and self esteem. I have been putting myself down for a few years now and it is time for me to stop. I am better than that.

We were amazed as researchers to how open she was during a reflection paper at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, Clifford discussed his apprehension about his level of cognitive functioning: "Looking back over the last 14 years since I left school and comparing them to the most recent summer semester that I took classes at HACC and [University name removed], I have realized how narrow minded and lackadaisical I have become with my thinking."

### **Belonging and Support**

Our second finding came from the group's relationship with one another and the learning that took place during the semester. The word "learning" was used many times through student oral communication and written communication. Students were engaged with the research and tailoring the course seem to substitute for more organized campus involvement that adult students are not able to attend due to working full-time and family responsibilities. Sarah had this to share: "It was very nice because they were going through the same things that I am. I know someone who will be in the class I'm going to be in [during the fall semester]." Danielle also shared this statement during her interview at the end of class:

I thought this class was very beneficial for learning the ways of the college. I liked the idea that we got to discuss the syllabus and what would be more beneficial for us as a group. It made me feel like more of a participant in the classroom and I got to learn what I really cared to know about.

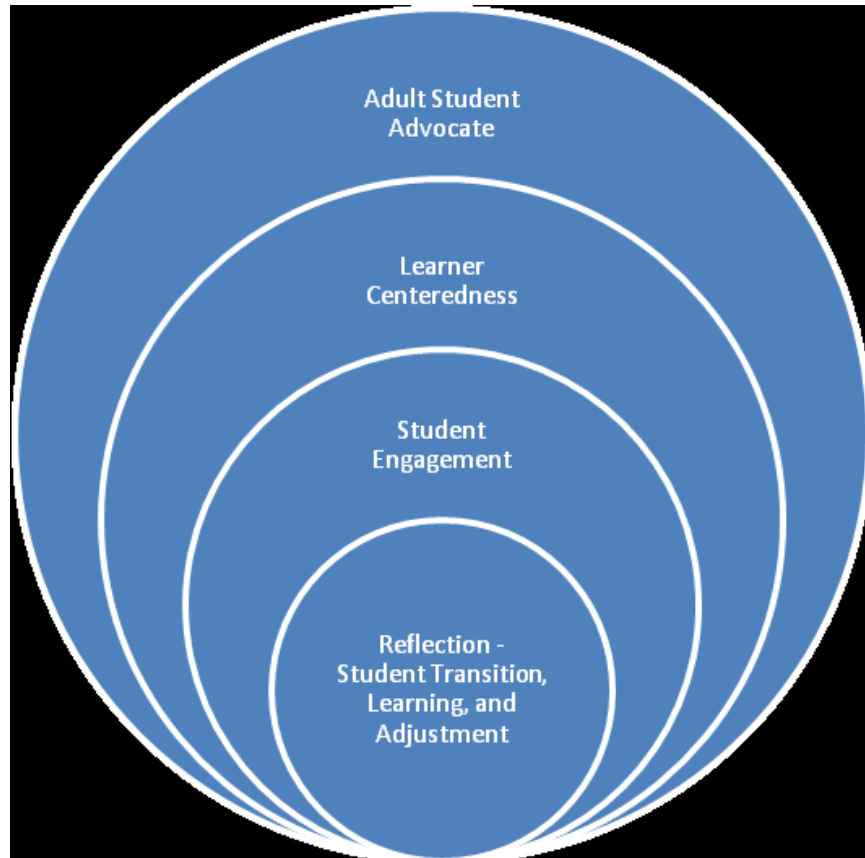
Students saw value in the course and their experience with the action research process. The participants saw the course, myself, and the instructor, researcher, and advocate as a collective piece. Overall the whole process was helpful to this group of student adjustment and transition to college. Clifford shared, "Honestly, coming back to school I felt like the only adult student in the whole world, but I know that's not the case." While Sarah commented on how the first-year seminar course has helped her, "The experience in this course helped my progression by finding out what college life is going to be like and what it feels like to know that I am not alone on returning to college life." While Amy suggested that a campus advocate is what is needed for adult students:

I almost feel that they need to have one advisor for the adult students that understand what they are going through, understands them on a personal level. Like you! Exactly, like what you did there knowing what we are dealing with in the background versus we aren't chained up in a dorm. We aren't spending our weekends drinking. We spend our weekends cleaning our homes and taking care of our kids and grocery shopping, things like that. So I think that is something that would be very helpful.... One who understands limitations and how difficult it can be to be an adult student, especially here. To not treat you as the same.... Not that we should get preferential treatment, but just an understanding.

Students expressed great appreciation for the course and the project; they indicated that they also experienced a transition through the course.

From the previously mentioned themes, there are four key components that have come about from this study. The findings have assisted the researchers with identifying what components are needed in order to assist adult business student with the transition to college specifically in a first-year seminar course. Together we created a model.

**Figure 2. Adult Students' Transition to University Life Through a First-Year Seminar Course**



The model is required to understand how adult students transition to university life by visually demonstrating how campus programs intersect with student learning and development. Cognitive development, dialogue, and reflection are all ways that student learning is created. While the findings did not mention these aspects of the student's experiences directly, there are implications of their existence from the data collected and through students saying they went through a transition and adjustment after having enrolled and completed the class. The interaction with other adult business students in the class was found to be a substitute for the organizational participation and campus activities. The Schlossberg et al. (1995) model of transition implied that understanding the 4Ss regarding the students' experiences of the transition would assist with their adjustment, but did not mention a first-year seminar, the importance of engagement, an advocate for students, and learning and development through reflection. An outcome of this study shares the participants' experience by integrating the understanding of adult transition with the tools, strategies, and learning as a group to meet their needs.

From this study, a model (see Figure 2) was designed to aid other researchers, educators, and administrators in higher education, toward a student-centered approach to fostering adult (business) student transition to college. The model was designed based on our beliefs as a researcher and was inspired by the 7 participants who demonstrated excellence among returning adult learners, voiced a desire to use their business degrees to help others, and described how the first-year seminar program and the action research project helped them. Our findings indicated that the participants immediately recognized the intersection of education and the learning experience as playing a role in their personal development. All participants explained their return to college through obtaining a lifelong goal and bettering their lives and their families' lives. In every reflection paper, interview, and personal correspondences, the participants used repeatedly the word "learn" or "learning." Research in the area of student involvement identifies the importance of learning through active engagement.



Astin (1993, 1999a, 1999b) believes student learning occurs through students developing key relationships with faculty, collaborating with other students, and participating in an active learning environment that continues to design programs that promote success for students in college. Astin et al.'s (2002) 35-year study (1966-2002) concurs with the findings from our study.

Although action research had much strength in that it is a methodology sensitive to the needs of the learners, it also had some limitations. First, action research was unpredictable. Participants were not as enthusiastic about the project half way through the semester as they were at the beginning. As with any ongoing research project, there were attendance issues. Many of the participants had struggles with juggling work hours, family schedules and childcare in addition to other responsibilities. Yet it offered the most effective way to capture the adult business students' experience as they reflect on issues for discussion and study. Second, I used a purposeful sample which was my class roster. This involves limitations in that I was required to give participants their grades for the semester before determining if they have consented to the study and this could have limited the study in not knowing for sure how many participants had decided to consent to the research. Until consent forms were reviewed, I did not know what data I could use from the semester until at the end of the study. Third, participants who are privileged were able to afford higher education and were assumed to have come from stable economic backgrounds with support from family and friends. Therefore, the participants in this study came from a middle-to-upper socioeconomic class. In addition, there was concern that there would not be a range of racial/ethnic identities represented in the class due to the lack of diversity in the College of Business.

The opportunities to build upon this study are immense. The findings of the research illustrate that there is still much to learn about what adult students need in returning to higher education regarding campus resources and activities as well as a first-year seminar program and orientation program. As an under-researched population, adult business students present a demographic ripe for further in-depth research concerning their personal and professional development. Also, business education can learn much from this study's application of action research to engage students in learning, adjustment, and development. As a research methodology, action research is not widely utilized within adult or business education, and this study provides an opportunity where the concerns and experiences of adult business students were a focal point of the research. Today, traditional business classes are still taught from more of a behaviorist philosophy of education and a teacher-centered methodology.

Several recommendations for future research stem from this study. First, evaluations of the first-year seminar programs and services for adult undergraduate students could be extended to colleges where students are not only majoring in business. Other colleges and universities may want to learn how their student body perceives their own campus programs and resources. Further research in this area could lead to finding model programs for first-year seminars or orientation programs for adult learners. Second, the research undertaken in this study has broken new ground for researchers focusing on the first-year seminar experience of adult undergraduate students at institutions of higher education. Using this model with other groups of adult students at institutions of higher education is suggested. To foster adult student transition to college life, this model serves as a guide for future research seeking to learn more about the adult learner in a first-year seminar course. Third, an opportunity exists to conduct a study that investigates the differences between adult students and traditional students who have attended specialized programs and those who attended a typical first-year orientation program. Variables of interest could be grade point averages, retention rates, student perceptions of college life, and the usefulness of campus resources. Fourth, this study could be replicated to include people of color and other minorities.

This would enhance educational institution understanding of a more diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and gender for a more in-depth understanding of these groups regarding their first-year seminar or orientation experience. Fifth, a larger group of participants based on the primary findings of this study may serve to validate adult business students' apprehensions of the typical first-year seminar program and orientation. Sixth, the relationship between adult students' learning and the interaction of faculty and student conducting research is worthy of further research. One could examine if interactions with faculty and other students is a substitute for organized participation. Seventh, an action research study of engaging students in creating a welcome packet for their university to be used during orientation or within the first-year seminar would be a follow-up to this study. Findings from these seven recommendations for further research would ultimately help modify existing programs or aid in designing new initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding thematic descriptions of the study's findings explained how participants experienced university life, their identities, and work as they returned to an undergraduate business program. The stages of planning, acting, observing, and ongoing reflection progressed as expected during the study. Participants were enthusiastic to be part of the study and contributed to the process attending class, posed to Blackboard for our on-line class discussion, completed reflective writing assignments, and finished the study with an exit interview. The themes presented in this paper concentrate on the participant knowledge construction as it relates to the first research question. This paper revealed key findings about how to foster a first-year seminar classroom for adult students to facilitate transition, adjustment, and development. The key factor in bridging the uncertainty the students were experiencing the first day of their return to college was tailoring the course to their individual needs, having the sense of belonging through faculty (adult student advocate) and administrative support, and having a strategy or plan for accomplishing their educational goal. The introduction to the campus resources, program directors, and administration expanded the participants' awareness of the amount of support offered to them and deepened their understanding of their own transition and development through reflection and conversation within the group.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

*Participant Summary*

Name	Company Type	Job Title	Age	Education Level	Reason for Returning to College
Amy	Department of Defense	Human Resources Specialist	26	Transfer Student (Senior – 111 credits)	She felt as if she was in limbo in her career and life, became engaged and education is very important to her fiancé’s family
Clifford	Logistics Company	Operation Supervisor	34	Transfer Student (Sophomore - 51 credits)	Fulfill a personal goal, timing was right, and to advance within current company
Danielle	Banking and Credit Industry	Customer Service Representative	26	Transfer Student (Junior – 66 credits)	Unhappy in past careers (before her current position in credit/banking) and desired the financial security of an undergraduate degree in business
Faith	Veterinary Hospital/Animal Medicine	Veterinary Technician	32	Readmitted Student (Junior - 78 credits)	Wanted to accomplish a goal she began 11 years ago, taking charge of her career, and catalyst event – victim of crime caused reflection and life changes
London Izzy	Food Service Management	Director of Food Service	29	Transfer Student (Freshman – 21 credits)	Life-long goal, trying to do better for herself and her family
Sarah	Accounting firm	Staff Accountant	33	Transfer Student - Associates Degree (Sophomore - 48 credits)	Unhappy in her current career, new staff (with 4-year degrees) taking over her workload
Tiff	Hospitality & Restaurant	Hospitality Manager	24	Transfer Student - Multiple Associates Degrees (Sophomore- 45 credits)	Security and wanting a better life than her family, her mother is disabled dependent on government assistance