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Dual Enrollment as a Path to Higher Education in Oregon

Michael S. Arthur

Concordia University - Portland

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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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DUAL ENROLLMENT AS A PATH TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN OREGON

Michael S. Arthur

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership

Committee Chair, Barbara Weschke, Ph.D.

Lori Sanchez, Ed.D.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted at a community college in Oregon with a full-time enrollment of 4,954 students during the 2015-16 academic school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). A phenomenological research methodology investigated the lived experiences of first-year college students who participated in a dual-enrollment (DE) program under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) umbrella. A sample of 6 students represented 0.86% of the eligible population of 700 potential participants. In order to qualify for the study, participants had to be first-year college students (35 credits or less), and have participated in a dual-enrollment program under the OTM. The data were gathered using two in-depth interviews with individual participants during the winter of 2016. Unique themes that developed in the research of the DE program were a lack of program awareness by participants, a need for hybrid-type coursework, the teaching style of the instructors, and difficulty of the coursework. The success and ability of students to persist in a postsecondary environment relates directly to their critical skills, support, and level of knowledge developed while in high school. The dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module was highly acclaimed by participants in this study. However, the four core themes, which emerged from significant statements by participants in this research, offer ideas for improving the effectiveness of the overall program.

Keywords: dual enrollment, Oregon Transfer Module, phenomenological research

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Kindra Leanne Arthur, who instilled within me the importance of completing a journey to its fullest. Through Kindra, I learned the significance of *patience, kindness, and longsuffering* (1 Corinthians 13), from which I worked diligently to apply throughout this work. Through Kindra's example of love, I learned how to be patient with myself. I also dedicate this work to my children, Christopher, Rachael, Shawn, and Michael, who have each inspired me in their own unique way. Hopefully, I have done the same for them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The number of high school students in the United States participating in college preparatory coursework has grown in recent years (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2015; An & Taylor, 2015). The statistics show that if designed well, early college programs provide high school students with an improved path to postsecondary success. Programs such as dual enrollment enable students to get a head start on college while still attending high school. Referred to by Richardson (2007) as the *dual-credit phenomenon*, concurrent-enrollment programs have been widely accepted by educators and politicians as a means to improve postsecondary outcomes (Hoffman, 2005).

Accelerated learning opportunities for high school students are referred to as dual enrollment (concurrent enrollment), dual credit, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate. While Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate offer programs that challenge students to excel in their studies, and each has a national curriculum, dual enrollment provides a path into the college environment through high school district and college partnerships (Wachowiak, 2015). Students who participate in their school's dual-enrollment programs are able to earn both high school and college credit while still attending high school. The terms dual enrollment and dual credit are often used interchangeably in the literature. However, the term dual enrollment, for this research study, will refer to a specific dual-enrollment program while dual credit refers to credits earned by students after completing college-level coursework within a dual-enrollment program.

High school students who participate in concurrent enrollment potentially gain insight into the college environment while earning college credit at the same time (Cassidy, Keating, &

Young, 2010). Further, participants in dual-enrollment programs potentially save money in the long run (Hoffman, 2005), reduce the time necessary to achieve a degree (Westcott, 2009); increase degree attainment (McComas, 2010; Swanson, 2008; & Westcott, 2009); improve motivation and persistence (Davis, 2014, Robinson, 2011; & Wintermeyer, 2012); and mitigate the need for developmental education coursework (Adelman, 2004).

Dual-enrollment (DE) programs have grown exponentially in recent years, becoming available to students in approximately half of the high schools in the United States (Marken, Gray & Lewis, 2013). In consideration of the rapid availability of this type of college-preparatory program, the purpose of this phenomenological research was to understand the perspectives of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school. This research study was designed to determine the supports and challenges of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module, a one-year program for transferring into college.

Background

High school students who take part in dual-enrollment programs have the opportunity to complete requirements for their high school diploma while earning college credit at the same time. In addition to earning early college credit, which saves college tuition costs (Hofmann, 2005), students who participate in dual-enrollment programs are more likely to continue their education at postsecondary institutions (An, 2015; Hofmann, 2012).

The focus of this study was to investigate the perceptions of first-year college students enrolled in a community college in southern Oregon who participated in dual enrollment while in high school. Under the umbrella of the Oregon Transfer Module, high school students have access to early college credit through a secondary-postsecondary partnership between high

schools and local colleges. This study included students who participated in a dual-enrollment program at a partnering college and an Oregon high school.

Statement of the Problem

A perception exists among high school students that they are not fully prepared for the challenges of the postsecondary learning environment (Farrell, 2009; Wachowiak, 2015).

Students who do participate in dual enrollment hope to assuage their concerns through participation in college-level coursework. How students perceive their participation in a dual-enrollment program is an important element of overall college preparedness. Since perceptions of students may vary, depending on specific courses taken, or number of credits earned, those factors will be considered in this research. Given that dual-enrollment programs have become increasingly available throughout the United States, and that educators and policy makers continue to push for improved educational outcomes, an investigation into student perspectives might provide additional insight for program improvement.

The intention of dual-credit courses is multi-faceted, with a major goal being student preparation for postsecondary instruction (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). The problem central to this study was that some students receive college credit for courses taken while in high school; however, it was not known if they had acquired the critical skills, support, or level of knowledge necessary to be successful in college under the Oregon Transfer Module.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

An investigation into how first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school derived meaning from their experience provided insight into successes and/or challenges of the program. This study examined the perceptions of first-year college students to ascertain the supports and challenges they experienced while participating in dual

enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module. Data are readily available that indicate students who participate in dual-credit programs tend to be more successful in college than students who do not enroll in dual enrollment (Allen & Dagdar, 2012; An, 2015; Hofmann & Voloch, 2012; Hughes, 2010; Karp & Hughes, 2008; Kim, 2014; Overman, 2008; Ozmun, 2013; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011). Therefore, research that included the perceptions of first-year college students, who participated in dual enrollment (under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella), may help administrators identify ways to confirm the current process or find ways for improvement.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning from their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?”

This research question is expanded by the following sub questions:

- R1. What academic successes did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R2. What academic challenges did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R3. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience positively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?
- R4. Which elements of a dual-enrollment experience negatively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

In this phenomenological approach to inquiry, the open-ended nature of the interview process provided opportunity for students to express their lived experience in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module.

In order to address the research questions, and provide synthesis to the overall work of this research, data were gathered through two in-depth interviews. Using a structural interview process described by Rubin and Rubin (2005) as “main questions, follow-up questions, and probes” (p. 134), the goal of the researcher is to foster an environment that encourages “depth, detail, and vividness” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 134). Main questions provided a structure or foundation for the entire interview process. While preparing questions, Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “The goal is to encourage people to talk about their experiences, perceptions, and understandings” (p. 135) in a way that naturally segues into follow-up and probe-type questions.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

All educational programs in the state of Oregon are accountable to the Oregon Department of Education, governing boards, participants, and other stakeholders in the process (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.). Through secondary and postsecondary partnerships, and under the authority of the Oregon Department of Education, high school students are provided the opportunity to enroll in early college credit coursework. Taking dual-credit courses potentially provides a number of benefits for students. For example, according to some researchers, high school students taking early college credit save tuition costs in the long run (Kasper, 2003), increase persistence and degree attainment (McComas, 2010, & Westcott, 2009), and reduce the need for remediation (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). However, evidence that participation in dual-enrollment programs in Oregon (from the student perspective) increases college readiness is difficult to find. Student perspective on actual college readiness was

necessary to provide a more comprehensive assessment of dual-enrollment programs under the Oregon Transfer Module. As a result, student perspective was important since it may help to provide common meaning among study participants of a dual-enrollment program.

Nature of the Study

This study investigated the perceptions of first-year college students on their participation in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module and if their perceptions indicated the experience helped or hindered their preparedness for college. The method for reporting perception involved open-ended questions of individual students through in-depth interviews. The objective of this research was to look for emerging themes, or *phenomena*, common among participants. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained through use of a number system assigned to each student. This approach to research helped students feel more comfortable throughout the process (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010).

This research design was qualitative in nature, meaning that data collection involved an assessment of student perceptions and feelings (Creswell, 2013). The nature of this phenomenological approach placed an emphasis on a “phenomenon to be explored” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78) by highlighting common elements of meaning (Creswell, 2013).

Definition of Terms

Advanced Placement (AP) is an exam-based program started in the 1950s by the College Board. AP courses offer college-level coursework via examinations to high school students. The purpose of AP programs is to develop students’ college-level academic skills, save money for college students and/or their guardians, choose a major sooner, take more elective classes in college, and add a minor or second major more easily (Grove, 2015).

Developmental Education refers to a program that supports students who enter college academically underprepared. These students are provided remedial coursework, such as math, reading and writing, meant to bring their skills to the college level. Developmental education courses do not count toward the student's degree or certificate program (Rogue Community College, n.d.).

Dual Credit refers to coursework that provides both high school and college credit simultaneously (Conley, 2010).

Dual Enrollment is a partnership between colleges and high schools that allows students to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. This type of secondary and postsecondary cooperation allows students to meet both secondary graduation requirements and postsecondary credit requirements (Wachowiak, 2015).

Oregon Transfer Module provides a one-year curriculum for students who want to transfer to another Oregon community college or public university prior to completing a two-year degree. The module allows students to complete one year of general education courses that will be applied to the general education and academic major requirements of the transfer school (Rogue Community College, 2014–15).

Phenomenology is a philosophical model whereby researchers gain insight and understanding of a particular phenomenon. The understanding is founded in the shared experiences of participants within a study (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The following assumptions formed the foundation and purpose of this study:

1. It was assumed that participants would provide the researcher with valid information on their experience in a dual-enrollment program; and

2. It was assumed the students who participated in dual enrollment did so by choice.

This study will be delimited by the following boundaries:

1. The study was delimited to first-year students enrolled in a community college in Oregon; and
2. Participants must have attended a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module while in high school.

The researcher recognized that there were certain limitations inherent in conducting this research study.

The limitations are as follows:

1. A potential limitation was the relatively small number of subjects who participate.
2. Dual-enrollment students tend to self-select, so students enrolled in these programs were not necessarily representative of all students who were eligible to participate or who were capable of succeeding; and
3. There may be response bias, as participants will choose to participate or not.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to identify gaps in the literature on student perceptions of dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM). No studies were found that formally investigated how students described their experience while attending a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module. However, plentiful research was available on dual enrollment in general. This study will contribute to the body of literature that exists on the efficacy of dual enrollment as a college preparatory program. Learning the supports and challenges that students experience while participating in dual enrollment may serve to support or modify existing practices in the Oregon Transfer degree dual enrollment system. Further,

administrators at one Oregon community college have expressed interest in discovering potential new ways to improve their existing concurrent-enrollment system. As an ongoing process improvement approach to dual enrollment, administrators at the Oregon college wanted to ascertain if the program could be, or needed to be, improved. If current DE program protocols do need to be improved, administrators wanted to glean ideas from students who have participated. This research may serve as a catalyst for improving the current system by learning the actual experiences of dual-enrollment participants.

Summary and Transition

Dual-enrollment programs have become more available throughout the United States in recent years and have received acclaim as a viable path to postsecondary success (An & Taylor, 2015; Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). However, no research was found that takes into account the perspectives of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module. Providing an opportunity for college students to share their lived experience in a dual-enrollment program was pivotal in this phenomenological study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The dawn of the 21st Century in America brought rapid growth in technology and educational opportunities for students in secondary and postsecondary settings (Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, Ripley, Miller-Ricci, & Rumble, 2012). In an increasingly complex global environment, educators and policy makers grapple with the best possible learning practices and outcomes for students. Dual-enrollment programs are one promising development that provides a path for students to earn college credits while still attending high school. Dual enrollment allows high school students to acclimate to the college environment while earning transferable credits at the same time. According to the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP, 2015), dual-enrollment programs have increased in recent years with an annual growth rate of seven percent since 2002–03. Additionally, according to NACEP statistics accumulated during 2010–11, 4,000,000 high school students enrolled in more than 2,000,000-college courses from postsecondary institutions nationwide. Dual enrollment has become a popular choice for high school students considering college.

The original purpose for dual-enrollment programs was to introduce high-achieving students to college-level academics while providing a springboard toward degree attainment (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Dual-enrollment programs have inspired student interest in college by providing a compendium of courses that can be taken either at a high school or college. Dual-enrollment programs have even been made available to some rural students through an online option (Harris & Stovall, 2013). With an increased focus on college readiness in the United States, educators strive to provide programs that best prepare high school students for college. Dual enrollment has been at the forefront of these efforts as it provides opportunities

for students to not only test the collegiate waters, but to also work toward a higher degree attainment in an uncertain and complex world.

As the world experiences exponential growth in technology, the United States must remain competitive. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014) referred to the globalization movement as increasing connectedness among people around the world. At the forefront of this phenomenon is the need for advanced educational systems to provide a highly skilled workforce that is able to meet the demands of the competitive world stage.

The development of the problem statement for this study was influenced by the scarcity of research available highlighting the experiences of students who participated in dual-enrollment programs under the Oregon Transfer Module. The intention of dual-credit courses is multi-faceted, with a major goal being student preparation for postsecondary instruction. The problem of this study was that many high school students receive college credit for courses taken while in high school but have not acquired the critical skills, support, or level of knowledge required when they advance to the college environment (Schaffhauser, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This study drew on the constructivist approach to answering research questions. Constructivism in research, as described by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010), is a theoretical tradition with its disciplinary roots founded in sociology. Constructivism, as a philosophical assumption in this interpretive framework, is a worldview in which individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live. Schwandt (2000) referred to this approach as, “an ethic of closeness, of care, of proximity, or of relatedness” (p. 204). Constructivism is an interpretive framework that

provides a schema from which themes are allowed to emerge from among subjects incorporating a complexity of views (Creswell, 2013).

The way in which people construct reality in their own environment is pivotal to constructivist theories. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), it is constructivism’s ontological relativism that uniquely sets it apart from other paradigms, such as positivism, postpositivism, and critical theory, which have similarities to realism, or an apprehensible reality. The relativistic nature of constructivism assumes social realities that are “multiple, apprehensible, and sometimes conflicting...but that may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). The aim of the qualitative paradigm of constructivism is to understand through *reconstruction*, or a consensus through the reconstruction of ideas (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Carr and Kemmis (1986) noted in constructivism there is an objective of consensus, including the subjects and inquirer, but an openness to, “new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 113).

The Four Worldviews Used in Research

<u>Postpositivism</u>	<u>Constructivism</u>	<u>Advocacy and Participatory</u>	<u>Pragmatism</u>
Determination	Understanding	Political	Consequences of actions
Reductionism	Multiple participant meaning	Empowerment and issue oriented	Problem centered
Empirical observation and measurement	Social and historical construction	Collaborative	Pluralistic
Theory Verification	Theory generation	Change oriented	Real-world practice oriented

Source: Creswell (2003)

Protagoras expounded his philosophy that *man is the measure of all things* (Maksymchuk, 2013). Protagoras's constructivist philosophy introduced relativism and highlights the idea that at least two schools of thought exist on any matter. Protagoras opened the door for the idea of constructivism, which evolved through the work of philosophers such as Piaget (Ackermann, 2001) who developed theories related to childhood development and education (Seltzer, 1977). In constructivist inquiry, relativism is important since ideas become interconnected in a scaffolding process that brings new meaning and significance to concepts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) referred to this form of inquiry as a way to understand ideas through reconstruction to a more informed process of recognition and input. The constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm uses primarily qualitative methods of research that incorporate data collection with interviews and can include observation and recordings to possibly lead to more valid, reliable, and diverse "construction of realities" (Golafshani, 2003).

Cohen and Manion (1994) referred to the constructivist approach as a way to comprehend "the world of human experience" (p. 36). Unlike the post-positivist approach to research, constructivism does not usually begin the research with a theory in mind. Instead, the constructivist seeks to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). The constructivist paradigm, as noted by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), partly grew from the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl. Husserl (1970) posited that all the characteristics of *experience* and *consciousness* humans have within their environments are building blocks toward an essence, which defines phenomenology. Husserl (1970) highlighted the significance of distinction between the science of phenomena and the nature of *being*. Within the constructivist paradigm, "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 9).

While other methodologies may have proved reasonable in answering these questions, two primary factors determined the use of the constructivist framework. The first factor recognizes the core of a phenomenon. Creswell (2003) stated, “the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study. Understanding the ‘lived’ experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as a method” (p. 15). Finding the essence of a matter as it emerges in thematic clarity appeals to me as a researcher. Secondly, the constructivist framework provides opportunity in qualitative inquiry for the process of triangulation. Shenton (2004) stated, “Triangulation may involve the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups, and individual interviews, which form the major data collection strategies for much of qualitative work” (p. 65). Triangulation in research supports credibility in the research. The exercise of interviewing in particular, especially as it relates to the phenomenological approach to research, provides opportunity for subjects to share their lived experiences.

The conceptual framework of this paper was founded in constructivism. Because student perspectives provide a unique view into the process of, and participation in, concurrent-enrollment, students were interviewed, seeking an interpretive understanding of events. In an effort to “generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings” (Creswell, 2003, p. 9), this inquiry led to a qualitative data analysis process. The ultimate goal of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore how first-year college students, who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module, made meaning of their academic experience. To that end, the *seeking of knowledge* in this research followed the theory of Piaget, who considered the process as a continuous construction (Ackermann, 2001). This research is interpretivist in nature and is based upon, “The belief that all knowledge claims are interpretations, and that there

is nothing to appeal to in judging an interpretation but other interpretations” (Schwandt, 2001, pp. 68-69).

Review of the Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Attending college has become a significant consideration for high school students during the past several years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), in 1960, 755,550 postsecondary students enrolled in college right after high school. That number swelled to 1,964,820 in 2013 and continues to grow. The increased interest in postsecondary education, along with the advancement of technologies, has prompted educators to reconsider educational approaches. Dual-enrollment programs were seen as a way to acclimate students earlier to college and its demands. In fact, there were 1,277,100 high school students who took courses for college credit (within a dual-enrollment program) during the 2010–11 academic school year (Marken, Gray, Lewis & Westat, 2013).

Dual enrollment. Westcott (2009) highlighted the significance of earning a college degree as the United States fell behind other developed countries in degree attainment. She stated that one clear path to college success is student participation in local dual-enrollment programs. In her thesis, Westcott (2009) hypothesized, “Degree attainment for dual-enrolled students who have completed one or more gatekeeper course[s] in high school will show statistically significant differences from those who have not” (p. 8). Through a non-experimental *ex-post-facto* study, Westcott examined data from the academic years 2000–01 through 2007–08. The researcher found a positive association between students who take one or more college courses while in high school and the eventual attainment of an associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, or career studies certificate.

McComas (2010) found similar results in her dissertation entitled, *Degree Completion and Acceleration Rates of Iowa Community Colleges' Concurrent Enrollment Students*. The researcher examined persistence, degree completion, and acceleration rates of students concurrently enrolled in high school and college arts and sciences parallel programs. McComas's (2010) results showed that high school students who participate in concurrent enrollment programs are more likely to, "...complete a degree and shorten their time to degree" (p. 127).

Swanson (2008) argued that some mitigating issues influence research outcomes associated with dual enrollment. The researcher used the National Educational Longitudinal database (NELS) to examine whether participation in dual-enrollment programs had an effect on persistence and degree attainment. In addition to the causal relationship between dual enrollment and earning one's degree and time to degree, Swanson included sociological considerations and academic relationships of dual-enrollment participation. Swanson's (2008) findings did not corroborate the relationship of dual enrollment and earning one's degree as concluded in the research by Westcott (2009) and McComas (2010). In fact, Swanson concluded that dual enrollment did not reduce time to a bachelor's degree or improve bachelor degree attainment. However, Swanson's (2008) research did demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between students who participated in dual enrollment and earned a certificate or less than a two-year degree. Swanson's (2008) research showed that students who participated in dual enrollment "increased their odds of continuously enrolling in postsecondary schooling through the end of second year by 1.67 times when compared to non dual-enrollment participants" (p. 329). In this regard, Swanson's (2008) research would demonstrate significance between participation in dual enrollment programs and the eventual attendance of a community college.

Fischer (2016) corroborated earlier research in her investigation of bachelor degree attainment rates for students who participated in early college programs. The researcher found that early colleges, colleges that align with local high schools to provide college-level coursework, increase the likelihood of college persistence and the eventual attainment of one's bachelor's degree. Two determinate factors, according to Fischer (2016), in persistence and degree attainment, were college access and readiness.

Although most research shows positive outcomes for participation in early college programs, research is available that does not show positive outcomes in every research scenario. For example, Rivas (2013) concluded in her research, "There was no statistically significant correlation between taking dual credit or not taking dual-credit courses in high school and first year community college success as indicated by a GPA of at least 2.0" (p. 91). However, Rivas (2013) did note some positive outcomes such as reduction of costs, earlier graduation, and acclimation to the college environment while in high school.

High school-college partnerships. If Westcott (2009) and McComas (2010) were correct in concluding that concurrent-enrollment programs alleviate dropout rates, increase degree attainment, and reduce time to earn a degree, then dual enrollment would be a viable option for high school students. Dual-enrollment programs continue to grow through high school-college partnerships around the United States. The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnership (NACEP, 2015) organization highlighted the influence of the dual-enrollment phenomenon around the country. During the 2010–11 school year, there were close to 15,000 schools in the United States (82%) providing postsecondary opportunities for their students. Research is available related to the efficacy of dual enrollment and specific outcomes, such as degree attainment and the time required to earn a degree (Westcott, 2009; McComas,

2010). For some educators and policy makers, dual enrollment is seen as a way to increase student perseverance and, potentially to lower high school dropout rates.

Moreover, community colleges support local communities by providing a wide range of learning opportunities for individuals seeking education in basic skills for adults, career and technical education programs, associate of arts or science degrees, criminal justice, fire science, concurrent-enrollment programs, and other associate degree level programs (Rogue Community College, 2014). Community colleges have been a part of the American fabric since the latter part of the 19th century (Jurgens, 2010). However, in the early part of the 20th century, leaders in the United States began to realize the need for a more educated workforce. Community college continued to evolve providing increased opportunities for underrepresented women and minorities (Jurgens, 2010). Student enrollment at colleges increased from 1,000,000 students to just over 2,000,000 students in the five-year period from 1965 to 1970 (Jurgens, 2010). That number swelled to 4.3 million students by 1980 (Baker, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Phillippe & Patton, 2000, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002/2003) and surpassed 20-million by 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

In an effort to improve synergy between community colleges and local high schools, educators have embraced the idea of concurrent enrollment as a way to improve college readiness and success for young adults. Conley (2010) stated, “Thinking about postsecondary readiness opens the door to the myriad certificate programs at community colleges and a range of formal training programs that are offered after high school” (p. 5). Dual-enrollment opportunities between high schools and community colleges are meant to provide a path for improved transition from the high school environment to the college environment. In light of dual-enrollment program objectives, Robinson (2011) made the argument that more students should

be included in the dual enrollment process to help alleviate high school dropout rates in the United States.

High school dropout rates. Education researchers, such as Robinson (2011), have underscored the troubling trend of increased high school dropout rates during the latter part of the 20th century. Robinson (2011) posited rigorous programs that incorporate a strong academic foundation and increased student engagement would help improve graduation rates. In his research, Robinson (2011) studied dual enrollment as a means to provide the college preparedness that students need for long-term success. In his research, participants shared their experiences through an open-ended survey, interviews, and focus group sessions. Participants in the Robinson (2011) study included students who were dually enrolled, “Between River Charter Academy and St. Aquinas University during the 2007–2008, and 2008–2009–2010 academic terms” (p. 54). Robinson’s purpose in the study was to ascertain whether participation in dual-enrollment programs had a significant effect on college readiness and persistence. He concluded that dually enrolled students “have more confidence in their ability to apply to, be accepted in, and succeed in college” (p. 127). Students who have been acclimated to college entrance requirements have one less worry when entering the college environment. Robinson’s (2011) conclusion makes sense concerning high school students and the boldness they need to move forward with their postsecondary plans. Robinson (2011) stated, “The participants in this study...agreed that being in the program had a positive effect on their academic experiences...” (p. 121).

Student persistence. Wintermeyer (2012) also researched dual enrollment and college persistence but focused on community college as the target institution. The researcher examined archival data of former dually enrolled students and direct entry peers. Wintermeyer (2012)

sampled 764 students who graduated from local high schools and were first-time college students at Santa Barbara City College in the spring of 2008. The study examined measures of achievement and indicators of persistence over a three-year period for students, ending in spring of 2011. Wintermeyer (2012) stated, “Measurements of persistence included enrollment full time versus part time and college transferable unit accumulation. Achievement leading to persistence was determined by placement into college-level coursework, grade point average at two points in time, and completion of college transferable units” (p. xii). Wintermeyer (2012) concluded that motivated students who participated in dual-enrollment programs would seek out the most “efficacious” (p. 47) way to complete required coursework within the program. Further, the researcher found that students who had participated in the concurrent enrollment process during their high school years were more likely to gain confidence toward enrollment in subsequent courses at the college. In other words, according to Wintermeyer (2012), dual-enrollment programs may promote college student persistence to college graduation.

Davis (2014) also wanted to understand how dual-enrollment participation could improve college persistence. Davis (2014) acknowledged that a body of research exists that demonstrates the efficacy of dual-enrollment programs; however, the researcher noted little was known related to the effectiveness of concurrent enrollment as a strategy to improve college persistence and degree attainment. In her quantitative correlational research, Davis (2014) measured college persistence by the number of semesters students stayed in college from fall 2010 to fall 2012. Factors related to students’ college persistence were measured by dual-enrollment credits earned, grade point average within dual-enrollment courses, and algebra grades. The result of Davis’s study showed a significant difference in college persistence between students who participated in dual-enrollment programs while in high school and students who did not participate in dual-

enrollment programs while in high school. The most significant result was a “highly significant correlation between a student’s dual-enrollment credits earned and his or her college persistence” (p. 70) and the potential influence on a student’s persistence to college completion.

As dual-enrollment programs become more available, educators continue to study the best delivery methods for high school students (An & Taylor, 2015). Significant research is available that addresses eventual degree attainment and the time it takes to earn a degree (Westcott, 2009; McComas, 2010). Additional research addresses latent factors that influence long-term degree attainment, as well. For example, Wintermeyer (2012) and Davis’s (2014) research findings supported dual-enrollment participation as a means for building persistence that helps students be successful in college. Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009) provided more reasons for promoting dual enrollment programs when they stated,

If designed well, this college-level work in high school can:

- Increase the pool of historically underserved students who are ready for college.
- Provide realistic information to high school students about the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Improve motivation through high expectations and the promise of free courses.
- Decrease the cost of postsecondary education by compressing the years of financial aid support needed. (Hoffman et al., 2009, p. 44)

Wang, Chan, Phelps, and Washbon (2015) highlighted the positive themes of concurrent enrollment after exploring the relationship between participation in concurrent enrollment and academic momentum for students who attended a two-year technical college. Using metaphoric language, Wang et al. stated, “...dual enrollment ignites the ‘fire’ of a student’s interest in and pursuit of postsecondary education, while early academic momentum represents the ‘fuel’ that

sustains the forward motion to carry students to subsequent educational milestones” (p. 183).

The Wang et al. (2015) figure of speech is powerful and underscores the prevalence of research denoting compelling outcomes for students who participate in dual-enrollment programs through their local high schools.

A survey of the literature on dual-enrollment programs in the United States most often supported dual-enrollment participation as a viable option in preparing high school students for success by making them college and career ready. During the early years of dual enrollment, programs were geared toward providing high-achieving students with an extra boost toward the postsecondary experience (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007). However, as highlighted in the Karp et al. (2007) research, dual enrollment has transformed in recent years and is, “...increasingly seen as a means of support to postsecondary preparation of average-achieving students” (p. 1).

As part of collaborative efforts between high school and college educators, dual-enrollment programs are meant to provide a pathway for college preparedness. Conley (2010) stated, “Students take courses at both the high school and college and can graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree within four or five years” (p. 97). On the surface, dual enrollment seems like a logical path for transitioning into college for both high achieving and at-risk student populations. Students with lower grade point averages and considered at risk may have more to gain, however, from participation in dual enrollment and supportive-type programs. Community colleges, in particular, provide a path for underrepresented students that did not previously exist. Hoffman (2003) stated, “This explosion of options for students to earn college credit in high school underscores our progress in creating a seamless education system from kindergarten through college” (p. 44).

The James Irvine Foundation invested nearly 5,000,000 dollars over a three-year period in California to discover if dual enrollment was an option for high school students who were struggling academically, from low-income situations, and/or were part of underrepresented groups in higher education. The project was called, The Concurrent Courses Initiative, and took place from 2008 through 2011 (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, and Belfield, 2012). Hughes et al. (2012) stated, “overall, evaluation of the initiative finds that those who participated had better academic outcomes relative to comparison students in the same districts. Participants were, on average:

- More likely to graduate from high school.
- More likely to transition to a four-year college (rather than a two-year college).
- Less likely to take basic skills courses in college.
- More likely to persist in postsecondary education.
- Accumulating more college credits than comparison students. (Hughes, et al., 2012, p. 4)

However, the Hughes et al. (2012) research does not correspond with other researchers, such as Schaffhauser (2015), who found discrepancies in how some high school students actually perform in college-level coursework.

Schaffhauser (2015) stated, “Neither university faculty nor employers believe American public high schools are preparing students for the expectations they’ll face in college and career” (para. 1). Further, according to Petrilli (2015), the majority of high school students would like to go to college but, “...only about a third are graduating with the reading and math skills to be successful once on campus” (para. 2). Petrilli (2015) underscored the need to structure high school for student success beyond the senior year. As noted earlier, research is readily available

that underscores the positive outcomes for students who participate in a concurrent enrollment program. However, more research was needed that highlights umbrella programs that manage local dual enrollment programs. In particular, research was necessary that took into account the lived experience of students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Degree program.

Review of Methodological Issues

Qualitative research is defined as “the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. It is also sometimes called naturalistic research, naturalistic inquiry, or field-oriented research” (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2012, p. 630). In qualitative research, there are *tools* the researcher can use to explore complex questions within a given environment (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “Naturalistic, qualitative social researchers gather information by observing and by talking with and listening carefully to the people who are being researched” (p. 2). Interviewing research participants is a significant consideration in gathering information in qualitative research analysis.

Creswell (2013) described interviewee responses as, “...a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textual and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of their experience” (p. 80). Unlike the traditional approach of quantitative research, a process that involves an experimental and scientific method (Savenye and Robinson, 2005), qualitative research provides an opportunity for specialized data gathering.

Savenye and Robinson (2005) described interviewing as beginning with “...relatively unstructured conversations with participants, later analyzing themes that emerge on an ongoing

basis. These are sometimes followed by more structured interviews, using a set of more standardized interview questions...” (p. 78). The semi-structured interview provides an opportunity for the interviewee to tell his or her story (Birchall, 2014). Birchall noted the interview process is sometimes stressful for participants and recommended it begin with broad and open-ended questions to help calm the interviewees nerves. Once the interviewee is more comfortable, the interviewer can then direct probing questions that require more difficult responses (Birchall, 2014). Birchall (2014) recommended face-to-face interviews over surveys since they elicit “access to rich personal experiences” (p. 9). He also recommended that interviewees be allowed to clarify statements that might be misinterpreted. This phenomenological approach to data gathering provides researchers a unique opportunity to gather information from individuals who have lived a certain experience or phenomena. The goal in this type of research is to look for commonalties or themes among study participants.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The preponderance of research indicates positive postsecondary outcomes for students who participate in dual enrollment while in high school. Concurrent-enrollment programs potentially save college tuition costs in the long run (Hoffman, 2005; Vargas, 2013), may reduce time to earn a degree (Westcott, 2009), increase degree attainment (McComas, 2010; Swanson, 2008; & Westcott, 2009), improve motivation and persistence (Davis, 2014, Robinson, 2011; & Wintermeyer, 2012), and reduce the need for developmental education coursework once a student enters college (Adelman, 2004). Hoffman (2005) stated, “The evidence of state and family interest in dual enrollment is substantial and growing in the states that encourage access for a wide range of students” (p. 8). Research is readily available for educators and other

stakeholders interested in a K-16 educational system that is both seamless and effective (Hoffman, 2005).

Research is plentiful on dual enrollment as a legitimate college preparatory path for high school students. However, research is not easily found that gives rise to student voice on their lived experience through a dual-enrollment program in Oregon. Data that includes the narratives of community college students who participated in dual-enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module could potentially improve the dual-enrollment system, reducing the need for remedial education and additional ancillary preparatory programs.

Critique of Previous Research

The majority of research related to dual enrollment, and other programs designed to prepare high school students for college, focus on the benefits (Davis, 2014; Wintermeyer, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Westcott, 2009; Hoffman, 2005; Adelman, 2004). However, none of these researchers explored the specific concept of student' perceptions on academic preparedness within a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module. One researcher in Oregon (Downey-McCarthy, 2013) studied college transition support programs, such as dual-enrollment, but focused on at-risk youth specifically. In a separate study, Martindale (2008) wanted to know how high school students made sense of writing strategies and how those strategies prepared them for college. The participants were seniors and were enrolled in a dual-enrollment English class. Neither of the studies was associated with the Oregon Transfer Module program, however.

Research was found, however, that was insightful to this research study. Donaldson (2012), for example, performed phenomenological research on the perceptions of first-year community college students on inquiry skills. I found this particularly helpful since this research study was phenomenological and also sought out the perceptions of first-year college students. In

a separate study, Wachowiak's (2015) focus was even closer to this research since he sought the perceptions of first-year to third-year college students on their participation in dual enrollment while in high school. Wachowiak (2015) asked college students specifically about their beliefs on being prepared for postsecondary education through dual enrollment or another Advanced Placement-type program. In the Wachowiak (2015) study, the majority of participants indicated that dual-enrollment courses had *prepared* or *very prepared* them for college coursework (88%). However, no research was found that specifically addressed students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella.

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature, which encompasses an overview of dual enrollment and its purpose within the field of education, a conceptual framework, current findings on early college preparation, academic performance of students in the secondary and postsecondary context, and a review of the research and its methodologies. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) believed that educators have students in their best interest; however, the authors also highlighted the challenges of education, which they framed as “problems of practice” (p. xxiii). Challenges in the educational field, according to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) include “resource needs, knowledge gaps, conflicts, and other challenges that arise in educators’ professional work” (p. xxiii). Born from keeping students’ best interest at heart is the college preparation movement and programs such as dual enrollment.

Dual enrollment potentially helps provide a smooth transition for students from the high school to the college environment. Similar to the challenges of educational leadership, students face their own challenges working their way through the educational system (Conley, 2014). The research on dual enrollment shows a positive impact on motivation and persistence (Davis,

2014), time to degree (Westcott, 2009), increased degree attainment (McComas, 2010; Swanson, 2008), need for remedial learning (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014; Adelman, 2004) and saving money in the long run (Hoffman, 2005). However, a gap in the literature exists on student perceptions of their lived academic experience in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module.

The focus of this study was concerned with, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning in their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?” The discussion in Chapter 3 will detail this research design as a qualitative phenomenological approach to address the problem statement of this study and its research questions. Chapter 3 will provide detail on the methodology of this study and details about its design and methods for collecting and analyzing the data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This research considered what first-year college students reported on their personal experience with participation in a dual-enrollment program while in high school. The focus of this research hinged on student' perspectives about their concurrent enrollment program and whether they perceive it helped or hindered their preparation for college. Through a phenomenological inquiry, students who participated in dual-enrollment programs had an opportunity to describe in their own words their lived experience in the program. Through description of lived experiences in a dual-enrollment program, the qualitative research paradigm of constructivism was employed.

The constructivist perspective is seen through the lens of interpretivism in which “individuals seek understanding in the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Guba and Lincoln (1985) further defined the constructivist paradigm as an inquiry that includes, “individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus” (p. 112). The theoretical perspective of constructivism melded with the purpose of this study, to include first-year college students in the discussion or a reconstruction of their experience with the dual-enrollment process, primarily in the state of Oregon.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives of first-year college students on their lived experiences in a dual-enrollment program and factors in these experiences that encouraged or discouraged their academic success. Through the data-collection process of interviewing individuals who have experienced a dual-enrollment program in Oregon, and sharing their experience through detailed description, educators might glean greater

understanding of how to improve the concurrent enrollment programs to better prepare students for college.

Research Questions

This study was concerned with qualifying answers to the following research question: “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning in their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?”

This question was expanded by the following sub questions that helped guide this study:

R1. What academic successes did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?

R2. What academic challenges did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?

R3. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience positively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

R4. Which elements of a dual-enrollment experience negatively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

The intention of this study was to bring value to the significance of the student perspective. Paying attention to student voice may enrich the dialogue among adults about changes in practice. In other words, learning how high school students describe their experiences, and program influences that helped or hindered their progress could be significant. This study, specifically, included students who participated in a dual-enrollment partnership program between an Oregon Community College and participating area high schools. Participants were chosen who have completed their dual-credit program and have not been students of the

researcher. The researcher does occasionally have dual-credit students enrolled in his classes; however, those students did not participate in this study.

Research Design

Qualitative research recognizes the value of human experiences as valid in the research process (Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010). Qualitative inquiry examines the personal stories and experiences of subjects within a given setting. In this phenomenological research design, using the constructivist perspective was significant in seeking out the lived experiences of first-year college students who participated in dual-credit programs while still attending high school. Within the context of the constructivist research paradigm, and using a phenomenological approach to research, interpretation of in-depth participants' description, guided this research design.

Phenomenological inquiry. Edmund Husserl is generally regarded as the “fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century” (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11). Groenewald (2004) discussed Husserl's *phenomenology* when he stated, “Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin” (p. 4). Husserl believed that one's personal consciousness is what connects to the actuality of a thing. Similar to the narrative approach to research, phenomenological inquiry seeks understanding through the lived experiences of individuals. Phenomenological research raises the significance of experience and takes an in-depth review of human thought and emotion related to lived realities.

Creswell (2013) contrasted the phenomenological and narrative approach to research when he stated, “Whereas a narrative study reports the stories of experiences of a single individual or several individuals, a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). In

phenomenology, the purpose is to reduce individual experiences with a particular phenomenon to a “description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Phenomenological research incorporates the detailed description of participants in order to “grasp the very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). In phenomenological research, philosophical assumptions are founded in perspectives of the research participants. Vakoch and Castrillón (2014) stated succinctly about phenomenology, “It asks us to notice the way that the surrounding world and its manifold constituents spontaneously *disclose themselves* to our most immediate awareness” (p. vii). The phenomenological research process helps participants become more aware of their experiences and express those experiences with detailed description.

The significant objective of this research was to explore a phenomenon with a group of first-year college students who derived meaning from their participation in an Oregon dual-enrollment program while in high school. Through a process of two interviews with each student, the goal was to discover their experiences within a dual-enrollment program and whether participation helped or hindered their academic performance during their first-year of college. Burch (1989) discussed the phenomenological practice in research when he stated:

Its chief practical benefit lies...in the reform of understanding, in what its serious pursuit ‘does with us.’ But the understanding reformed is not that of humanity in general, nor even directly of those with whom we speak and act, but of the individual who thinks through lived experience for herself. (p. 204)

Exploring a single concept, or an emergent phenomenon, from first-year college students regarding their participation in early college programs may highlight the effectiveness of the dual-enrollment process and whether it helps (or hinders) student success in the postsecondary environment. A greater understanding of the student perspective on dual-enrollment will add to

the current available research and provide rich description from individuals who were actual recipients in the early college education process under the umbrella of the Oregon Transfer Module.

Early college participation. A focus of this phenomenological inquiry was in-depth interviewing and interacting with individual students in a community college in the educational context and environment. Dual-enrollment programs have been emphasized as a way to improve college and career readiness (Conley, 2010), and provide students, “first-hand exposure to the requirements of college-level work while gaining high school and college credit simultaneously” (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002, p.5). Considering the constructivist perspective, as seen through the lens of interpretivism, this phenomenological inquiry of first-year college students who have participated in a dual-enrollment program provided an opportunity for greater understanding of students in their day-to-day existence within concurrent enrollment academic programs and add value to student voice and perspective.

Population, Sampling Research, and Related Procedures

The research site was a small community college in the state of Oregon, a postsecondary institution with 4,954 full-time students during the 2015–16 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The community college has three campuses located in various cities in the state. The state of Oregon is comprised of the following racial characteristics: African American 2.0%, Asian/Pacific 4.7%, Hispanic 12.5%, Native American 1.8%, White 87.9% (United States Census Bureau, 2014). According to the Oregon Department of Education (n.d.), there were a total of 179,963 students in grades 9–12 during the 2008/09 school years. During the same timeframe, 6,132 of those students dropped out of school and 35,138 went on to earn a high school diploma. Another 2,535 earned their General Equivalency Diploma (Oregon Department of Education,

n.d.). The community college where this study was conducted is comprised of the following racial characteristics: African American 0.8%, Asian/Pacific 1.7%, Hispanic 13.5%, Native American 1.6%, and White 74.6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014–2015).

The main campus is situated on 80 wooded acres and is one of three campuses for the college in Oregon. A second location for the college provides a high-tech type environment offering professional and technical-related programs (Rogue Community College, n.d.). A third campus for the college is located in the downtown region of a larger community in Oregon. The third campus is located within a county with an estimated population of 210,287 in 2014 out of 3,970,239 total people in the state of Oregon (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The main college campus is located within a county of 83,599 people. The third campus, with the largest community, is comprised of the following ethnicities: White 92.6%, Black or African American 0.8%, Hispanic or Latino origin 12%, Asian 1.4%, American Indian or Alaska Native 1.5%, Other 3.3%. In Josephine County, ethnicities were White 93.5%, Black or African American 0.6%, Hispanic or Latino Origin 7.0%, Asian 1.0%, American Indian or Alaska Native 1.5%, Other 3.2% (United States Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, 2015).

The research site is one of the larger community colleges in Oregon, serving 4,954 full-time students during the 2015–16 academic school year. Among the total student population, 10,632 were credit students and 6,462 were non-credit students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The college is an all-inclusive educational institution that accepts students based on their willingness to participate in remedial programs that assist them in their educational goals. To that end, developmental coursework is available to train students in the fundamental requirements of entry-level college coursework.

Developmental education has become an integral part of the educational process for community colleges in the United States. According to the Regional Educational Laboratory of Education Northwest (REL Northwest, n.d.), "...nearly two thirds of community college students are considered academically underprepared for college-level coursework and are referred to developmental education (i.e., primarily math, reading, and writing courses that are prerequisites to college-level courses...)." REL Northwest (n.d.) stated that 76% of students who attended one community college (the proposed research site) during the 2004/05–2010/11 academic school years participated in development education coursework (p. 4). By contrast, another local community college – located about 100 miles north of the research site—had a 71% participation rate in developmental education. Still another community college in Oregon had a 68% participation rate in developmental education during the same time period. The same report showed a 73% participation in developmental education around the state of Oregon (REL Northwest, n.d.).

The three community college examples above demonstrate the high rate of developmental education participation for students attending community colleges in the region. Early college-credit programs could reduce the need for remedial requirements once a student enters college. Bailey, Hughes, and Karp (2002) stated, "dual-enrollment programs allow high school students to enroll in college courses before high school graduation, giving them firsthand exposure to the requirements of college-level work and allowing them to gain high school and college credit simultaneously" (p. 1).

The research site was selected partly because of its substantial commitment to a dual-enrollment program. An appropriate dual-enrollment program, one that is well aligned with local area high schools, may reduce the high levels of remedial course participation. As an adjunct

instructor at the research site, the location was selected due to the researcher's access to the school, students who participate in the dual enrollment process, and other staff members who participate, as well.

Participants. Due to the nature of in-depth interviews, as part of this phenomenological research approach, a purposeful sampling of students was selected from the site. Suri (2011) stated, "Informed decisions about sampling are critical to improving the quality of research synthesis" (p. 63). To that end, six were selected from a list of students provided by the community college administration who participated in dual-enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module. The participants were first-year college students who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school after September 2014. Each participant agreed upon two in-depth interviews and was fully informed about the interview process. The students were informed about how their participation could add an important dynamic to the research that could potentially provide valuable information for educators and policy makers in making the program better for students in the future. The student participants were provided an opportunity to share their honest assessment of whether the dual-enrollment program helped or hindered their actual preparation for college.

Instrumentation. In qualitative studies, the researcher is referred to as an instrument of the research (Patton, 2001, p. 14). To that end, this researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data in this study. In this phenomenological study, this researcher took on the role of interviewer using a stratagem that prompted interviewees to share their experiences during a conversational yet structured interview process. Rubin and Rubin (2005) referred to this process as *responsive interviewing* since "the researcher is responding to and then asking further questions about what he or she hears from the interviewees rather than relying on predetermined

questions” (p. vii). Responsive interviewing in this research was built around “main questions, which address the overall research problem; probes, which help manage the conversation and elicit detail; and follow-up questions, which explore and test out new ideas that emerge during the interviews” (viii). However, the entire interview process operated under the umbrella of the structured interview format.

Structured interviews provided a platform for collecting and recording conversations that took place between the researcher and his or her study participants. A set of open-ended questions provided opportunities for participants to describe their feelings, observations and perceptions about their experiences (Donaldson, 2012). Through structured interviews involving main questions, follow-up questions, and probes, participants were prompted to describe their experiences in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella. The main question in the interview process, as described by Rubin and Rubin (2005), was the *scaffolding* or *skeleton* of the conversation and helped ensure the research problem was sufficiently examined.

The main questions for this research were composed ahead of time, providing structure to the interviews. The follow-up questions were specific to the responses/comments made by the research participants (conversational partners). In this step, Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “The researcher listens hard to hear the meaning of what the conversational partner has said and then asks additional questions that explore the particular themes, concepts, and ideas introduced by the conversational partner” (p. 136). The last step, *probes*, provided an opportunity by the interviewer to ask for clarification or complete an idea that was not fully explored. In probing, the researcher had an opportunity to ask for clarification from the participants and to steer the

conversation back to an intended path. Probe questions also provided an opportunity for the researcher to request a sequence of events, step-by-step (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Data Collection Methods

In order to address the research questions, and provide synthesis to the overall work of this research proposal, data were gathered through two individual in-depth interviews. In qualitative phenomenological research, data analysis follows a process beginning with “narrow units of analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p. 79), or *significant statements*, and evolving into detailed descriptions that ultimately bring about the *what* and *how* of individual experience (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the *triangulation* process, or the corroborating of evidence (Creswell, 2013), was accomplished through two in-depth interviews of each participant in the study. In phenomenological research, the focus is on how an individual makes meaning of his or her experience, which is the *quintessential element* of the research (Patton, 2002). In phenomenological inquiry, there is an assumption of essence, or essences, of shared experiences among participants (Patton, 2002).

Individual interviews. The individual interview process for this research was informal and conversational, making participants feel as comfortable as possible. In order to build trust in the method, students were asked a preliminary open-ended question to help start the conversation. The goal was to prompt students to share significant elements of their experience in the dual-enrollment program. In phenomenological inquiry, the research focuses on “what is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (Patton, 1990, p. 69). This process of inquiry gives a voice to individuals whose *story* has not yet been told. The story itself unfolds, as the researcher remains flexible to its evolution. The interview process, within the realm of phenomenological research, provides awareness beyond the traditional

pursuit of knowledge. Polkinghorne (1989) stated, “Research methods are plans used in the pursuit of knowledge. They are outlines of investigative journeys, laying out previously developed paths, which if followed by researchers, are supposed to lead to valid knowledge” (p. 41). In phenomenology, the research is refocused from “descriptions of worldly objects” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 41) to a narrative of *experiences* (Polkinghorne, 1989). Through the process of interviewing, this research provided opportunities for students to describe their experiences in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella.

Six students participated in this research study and were each interviewed two times. Each interview lasted less than one hour. The initial objective of the first interview was to build trust and rapport between the interviewer and interviewee and begin the conversation about the student’s personal experiences with dual-enrollment. To that end, the structured interviews followed a protocol described by Rubin and Rubin (2005) as incorporating, “main questions, follow-up questions, and probes” (p. 134). The researcher has experience with the interview process having interviewed approximately 300 guests while working as a radio talk show host. The position provided opportunities for the researcher to ask main questions of his show participants, follow up questions for more depth, and probing questions to provide clarification when needed.

There were a total of two interviews per individual student and is outlined here:

Interview one.

1. Please describe how you derived meaning about college-level coursework prior to participating in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module.

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

2. What specific experiences influenced your initial perceptions about college-level coursework?

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

3. Please share why you decided to participate in the dual-enrollment program.

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

4. What were you hoping to gain from the dual-enrollment program?

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

5. Did you glean from the program what you expected?

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

6. Please describe how you derived meaning from college-level coursework after participating in the dual-enrollment program.

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

7. If your perceptions about college-level coursework changed after participating in the dual enrollment program, what specifically influenced your change in perception?

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

Interview two.

1. Please describe your experiences in the dual-enrollment program.

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

2. What specific academic supports in the dual-enrollment program helped you prepare for college?

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

3. What specific academic challenges did you experience while you were enrolled in the dual-enrollment program?

Probe: Concerning your challenges, what was your immediate reaction to the challenge(s)?

Probe: Why did you react the way you did? What did you feel?

4. Now that you're in your first year at college, describe any adjustments you had to make that may not have been addressed while you were enrolled in the dual-enrollment program.

Probe: Follow-up probe questions dependent upon participant answers.

5. What recommendations would you make to improve the dual-enrollment program in which you participated?

Probe: Follow-up questions dependent upon participant answers.

Exit script. Thank you for your participation in this research project. Your responses will be kept confidential. You can email me if you have any questions or concerns about this study: mkarthur@rogucecc.edu

In phenomenological research, this type of interview format, which incorporates *probing questions*, provides a means for delving into unforeseen and unscripted territory, allowing participants (co-researchers in the process) to explore the essence of their own experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this research, specifically, first-year college students, who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, shared their personal experiences in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module. When participants share lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon, a reduction of that lived experience, or phenomenon, to a universal *essence*, is the crux of this project (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is a process for organizing information into a manageable structure. In qualitative research, data analysis involves organizing the data and reducing it into *themes*. Themes are key issues or categories, as described by Creswell (2013), which “are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). The common ideas are then represented by figures or within a table for discussion (Creswell, 2013). The data analysis process enables the qualitative researcher to look for emergent themes, which is the crux of this type of study. Once information is gathered, and themes are identified among the data, themes will then be analyzed for constructed meaning of participant experiences.

Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological method of analyzing participants’ transcripts was employed in the data-analysis process in this research. Colaizzi stated, “In this method, all written transcripts are read several times to obtain an overall feeling of them” (p. 332). From the recorded transcripts of this research, significant phrases and sentences that apply directly to the students’ lived experiences in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module were identified. After multiple reads, these statements were then clustered into themes based on keywords common among all participants. From each transcript, significant statements or phrases that pertain directly to the past experiences of dual-enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module were identified. Meanings were ascertained from these statements. Once descriptions and themes were identified among all participants’ transcripts, results were integrated into an in-depth description of the phenomenon. This process took place over the course of two interviews.

In the interpretation of student accounts within a dual-enrollment setting, this research was based on giving students a *voice* about their experiences through a supportive strategy from

the researcher. Wolcott (2009) stated, “One of the opportunities – and challenges – posed by qualitative approaches is to treat fellow humans as people rather than objects of study, to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research among others rather than *on* them” (p. 17). To ensure the researcher understood student narratives correctly, students were consulted during (and after) each interview to maintain cohesion in the search for meaning and emergent themes throughout the process. In this research study, the researcher was at all times remained cognizant of his background as an instructor at the research site and how this vocational experience may have affected his role as a participant in the research process.

Limitations of the Research Design

Given the characteristics of phenomenological research, and a focus on one form of data gathering, careful attention was given to choosing participants for the research. Creswell (2013) stated, “participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding” (p. 83). The small sample size of this study was considered a potential limitation in the research design. However, some benefits existed in the approach since a limitation in the number of participants increases the opportunity to become immersed in the study through multiple in-depth interviews with participants (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

The potential for bias in this study included the professional role of the researcher. As a community college instructor, the researcher was familiar with the basic constructs of the dual-enrollment process and has had dually enrolled students in his courses. To that end, the researcher took steps to enhance credibility in the research through the process of bracketing in order to reduce his bias and any prejudgment that might exist (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

In qualitative research, the credibility, or trustworthiness, of a study needs to be well established (Creswell, 2013). According to Merriam (1998), research should always produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical way. In the process known as *triangulation*, “Researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). However, in the phenomenological approach, triangulation is accomplished through multiple interviews with each study participant. Creswell (2013) stated, “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76). The in-depth multiple interview process provides triangulation and, ultimately, credibility in the research. It is during the multi-interview process that the researcher becomes aware of an essence that bubbles to the surface as participants share, individually, their experiences. Patton (1990) stated, “These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to the identity of the essences of the phenomenon...” (p. 70). In this proposed phenomenological study, credibility in the research will be in the common meaning found in the lived experiences of participants in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella.

Expected Findings

As expectations and accountability continue to grow for educational programs, educators increasingly look for opportunities, such as dual-enrollment, as a means for improving learning situations for students. Programs such as dual enrollment, under the Oregon Transfer Module, allow students to earn college credit while still in high school. The courses students take are often free of charge and provide an option for students to earn a college certificate, or even an

associate's degree, while still in high school (Rogue Community College, n.d.). The underlying idea is that dual-enrollment programs better prepare students for the academic challenges of college. The expected finding of this research study was that students would benefit from participation in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module. However, research that included the perspectives of first-year college students who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school may provide insight into program improvement.

Ethical Issues

This research involved human beings. Ethical concerns were held in high regard especially since participants will include first-year college students. Administrators at the targeted community college in Oregon were contacted and approved this research regarding their dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module. Administrators specifically approved research-related activities, including interviewing up to ten students. In order to protect the identity of students in the study, aliases were used throughout the process. Creswell (2013) stated, "...A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (p. 174). Throughout the research process, mindfulness was given toward ethics at every stage. Up to ten subjects were sought to participate in this research. All individuals asked to participate were given opportunity to decline without fear of consequences. Since the researcher is employed as an instructor where the study took place, considerations were given to his biases on the dual-enrollment process. That is, in order to ensure student narratives were correctly understood, students were consulted during (and after) each interview to maintain cohesion in the search for meaning and emergent themes throughout the process. Through this study, the researcher remained cognizant of his background as a community college instructor and bracketed his feelings and biases. The

researcher suspended his own understanding as a way to cultivate curiosity (Creswell, 2013) and *bracketed* his “preconceptions and enter into the individual’s life world and use the self as an experiencing interpreter” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Chapter 3 Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the perceptions of first-year college students who participated in dual-enrollment programs while in high school. Throughout this research, attention was given to the complex nature of the relationship between researcher and study participants. In the case of phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) stated, “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon” (p. 76). As the researcher, the goal was to perform the study while suspending personal presuppositions with the phenomenon, or in the case of this research, dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module.

Dual enrollment is a promising resource that some educational stakeholders believe provides synthesis in preparing high school students for college (Creswell, 2013; Karp & Hughes, 2008; McComas, 2010; & Robinson, 2011). However, I believe the perceptions of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) could provide additional insight into the successes and/or challenges specific to the OTM program. I wanted to discover if student perceptions of their experiences in dual enrollment under the OTM was as positive as envisioned by developers of the program. Given the responsibilities of a community college instructor, I had direct experience with dually enrolled students under the Oregon Transfer Module. I came to this research study with my own biases, assumptions, and passions on early college preparation. However, for the purpose of this phenomenological study, and the potential to influence change within the dual-enrollment

system, I remained mindful of my biases and be willing to learn from students who participated in the study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

This study was a phenomenological effort that addressed how first-year college students constructed meaning from their participation in a dual-enrollment (DE) program under the Oregon Transfer Module. The primary research question for this study was, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, derive meaning from their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?”

The following questions helped guide the study:

- R1. What academic successes did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R2. What academic challenges did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R3. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience positively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?
- R4. Which elements of a dual-enrollment experience negatively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

Data for the research project were gathered in the form of a two-part interview of first-year college students. At the time of the study, all subjects were former high school students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM). Each individual interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were evaluated in order to identify themes that provided understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon and constructed meaning of their experience (Creswell, 2013). Next, clusters of meaning from the recognized themes were identified. The structure of this qualitative work is detailed

throughout the remainder of this chapter. Primary source data were gathered through information of participants, or the testimony of individuals who experienced the phenomena (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012).

I am an instructor in the business technology department at the study site. In that capacity, I have experience facilitating the learning process for dually enrolled high school students who were enrolled in my college courses. However, no participants in this research were enrolled in any of my classes. As a result, there were no consequences for individual students who agreed to participate in this research. My role as a postsecondary instructor with experience teaching early college students provided insider perspective on the course workload requirements for students who participated in dual enrollment.

Description of the Sample

Population, Sample, and Demographics

The research population and participant sample for this study included six first-year college students who are currently attending a college or university. Each of the subjects participated in dual enrollment (DE) during the 2014–15 academic school year in a partnership program between a local community college and high school administrators. The DE program in which these students participated is an umbrella program of the Oregon Transfer Module. In total, 18,749 high school students participated in a DE program during the 2012–13 academic school year, according to the Oregon Department of Education’s most recent statistics (ODE, 2013). The purposeful sample was randomly selected from approximately 700 eligible first-year college students who participated in a DE program (under the Oregon Transfer Module) through their high school in an arrangement with the community college where I am an instructor. Each of the participants had earned 35 or fewer credits while in college. The concept of purposeful

sampling is used in qualitative research and involves selecting individuals because “they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158).

In seeking participants for this research, 700 invitations were sent out via email with two students agreeing to participate in the study. In order to increase validity in the research by increasing the participation rate, a second invitation was distributed, using a modified approach. That is, the second invitation included a twenty-dollar coffee gift card for participating in the research and was sent to the same group of 700 potential participants through regular mail. The response from the second attempt eventually netted four more participants from the pool of qualified candidates. A third and fourth invitation was sent out through regular mail, which also included the offer of a twenty-dollar coffee gift card for participation in the study. The third and fourth invitations had no responses. The final sample for this research included six first-year college students attending post-secondary institutions but having one early-college program in common while participating in a dual-enrollment program while in high school.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants

Participants	Grade	Age	Sex
Student One	First-Year College	18	Male
Student Two	First-Year College	18	Female
Student Three	First-Year College	18	Male
Student Four	First-Year College	19	Female
Student Five	First-Year College	19	Female
Student Six	First-Year College	18	Male

Research Methodology and Analysis

Phenomenological Research

This project was a phenomenological research study that sought to understand the perceptions of first-year college or university students who participated in an Oregon dual-enrollment (DE) program while attending high school. The research sought to discover how these students constructed meaning of their experience prior to, during, and after participation. Within Chapter 1 of this dissertation is the section entitled *nature of the proposed study*, which captures the reason phenomenology was an appropriate methodological approach to the research. The research design of this work was qualitative in nature and involved the collection of data through an assessment of student perceptions and feelings (Creswell, 2013). To that end, an emphasis was placed on a “phenomenon to be explored” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78) through an in-depth interview process. In the case of this research, the phenomenon of student experience in a DE program was explored through identification of common themes among individual participants in the research.

In seeking the “universal essence,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) from among participant statements, I was looking to find a “grasp of the very nature of a thing,” as described by van Manen (1990, p. 177). This study drew on the constructivist approach in answering the research question, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning from their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?” As an interpretive framework, constructivism provided means from which themes were allowed to emerge from participant statements bringing in a complexity of views (Creswell, 2013). According to Piaget’s theory on constructivism, in which this research was founded, “knowledge is experience that is acquired through interaction with the world, people, and things”

(Ackermann, 2001). In this research, *knowledge*, as described by Piaget, was gained through the lived experiences of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment (DE) under the Oregon Transfer Module. That is, students who participated in DE in this research gained an understanding of the program, its coursework requirements, credits, and instructors.

Data Sources and Analysis

Throughout this research project, I used the constructivist theory described by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) as my conceptual framework. To that end, the constructivist approach was used as a guide to answer the research questions. Constructivism in research is an interpretive framework in which individuals seek understanding in the world in which they live. The research questions presented to participants of this study provided a schema from which themes were allowed to emerge from among subjects incorporating a complexity of views (Creswell, 2013).

Individual interviews had to be modified to accommodate participants' schedules. Because each of the participants was attending a college several miles from the research site, arrangements were made to interview the students during the Winter break, 2016. The students were very cooperative and enthusiastic to participate in the research. During the interviews, I followed the qualitative interviewing process presented by Rubin and Rubin (2005). That is, I asked a primary question of individual participants followed by probing questions meant to bring about clarity and understanding of their experience. Participants agreed to my recording the interviews, which I later transcribed, verbatim. Overwhelmingly, participants stated the dual-enrollment experience bolstered their academic success in preparing for college with only a few comments about how they constructed meaning in a negative way through participation in the program. The participants did provide input about how to improve the dual-enrollment program, which is discussed later in this chapter.

After carefully reviewing my recordings, and transcribing them word-for-word, I listened a second time to ensure that accuracy was present in each transcription. While listening to the recordings a second time, I made minor changes in the transcriptions to reflect the precise statements made by participants. The transcripts of the recordings provided detailed description of human experience with a phenomenon. My data-analysis process in this phenomenological study followed the steps presented by Creswell (2013) in which the review moved from *narrow units* (significant statements) to *broader units* and on to *detailed descriptions*. In following this procedure diligently, and referring to my transcripts, summaries, and memos (Creswell, 2013), I noted themes that emerged from the data. Some of the themes have been commonly observed in previous research. For example, participants stated that DE would reduce time to earning one's degree (Westcott, 2009), provide a savings of money in the long run (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and improve momentum going into college (Robinson, 2011). However, four primary themes will be described that presented unique perspectives on the lived experience of six students who participated in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella.

Summary of the Findings

In this phenomenological study, I interviewed six students who were former participants of an early-college program in Oregon. The students each participated in dual-enrollment (DE) programs that were guided by Oregon Transfer Module (OTM). The OTM, a one-year curriculum for DE students desiring to enter a college or university, is structured to help students prepare for college by meeting many of the first-year general education requirements. While the OTM is neither a degree nor a certificate, it provides the kind of support and direction students need in moving their educational objectives forward. Since graduating from high school and the DE program, participants in this study have committed to their ongoing education at a

postsecondary institution. Keeping in mind constructivism as an interpretive framework in this study, participants were given opportunity to make meaning of their experience through an open-ended interview process (Creswell, 2013). To that end, the research questions were designed with primary questions and follow-up questions as described by Rubin and Rubin (2005).

The qualitative data in my research revealed that the high school students who participated in dual enrollment (DE) believed the program helped them acquire the critical skills, support, and level of knowledge they needed to be prepared for college. My data analysis also revealed that participants agreed with previous research that concluded DE provides momentum going into college, for example (Robinson, 2011). However, the lived experiences of participants in this study also revealed a lack of program awareness (about coursework and the DE program, in general), the need for hybrid-type coursework in high school, and a preference for DE instructor style over non-DE instructor style.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The in-depth interviews for this research consisted of 11 main questions, each followed by *probing* questions used to seek greater understanding. The primary question, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning from their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module,” was used as a reference to inform the interview questions. Keeping the philosophical assumption of constructivism in mind, my analysis sought to understand the world in which first-year college students lived while participating in dual enrollment. Overwhelmingly, the participants of this study stated the program was beneficial in regard to reducing time to earning one’s degree, saving money through dual credit, and gaining momentum going into college.

An analysis of the results demonstrated that participants of dual enrollment liked the program and had few suggestions to improve its efficacy. In fact, Student Five stated, “It was an amazing opportunity to get some college credits while I was in high school and kind of differentiate myself, especially since it would define what college is.” When asked what recommendations they would make to improve the dual-enrollment program in which they participated, three students out of the six students suggested that the entire student body at their respective high schools needed to see more advertising about the existence of the dual-enrollment program and how it could potentially benefit students in the long run. Two out of the six participants in the research expressed a desire to have a hybrid-type course (both in-class and online) in high school to help prepare students for that type of online learning environment during the first year at college.

Students’ Experiences with Dual Enrollment

Student one. The first participant in this study was a first-year college student who was 18-years-old and attending a University in Oregon. Student One emphasized the importance of his family and their contribution to his decision to ultimately attend a postsecondary institution. Student One had an older brother who specifically encouraged him to participate in the dual-enrollment program, along with teachers who were involved with the early college program at his high school. In explaining the significance of family, and how he made meaning from his brother’s own experience with dual enrollment, Student One stated:

I had a brother, a half-brother, who is three years older than me and he went through the same program because he went through the same block class. So, I learned a little bit about that through him. Largely, it was just that I knew I would come across it eventually. I didn’t know exactly what to expect.

Student One also placed a high priority on the value of each of his early college credits based on the transferability of his coursework and credits. His investigations of credit transferability ultimately led him to the University of Oregon where all of his early college credits would transfer.

That was something I looked into when I started applying for colleges because I knew that there was quite a bit that was coming from the schools so that was definitely a factor when I was looking at bigger institutions because, I'm at the University of Oregon, and I figured out that all my credits transferred if I went over there and that was a big factor. Student One discussed the significance of earning early college credit and how some of the credits earned made him think more about attending college after high school. He stated, "I would say that once I actually went to [community college] and took that test to get credit, it kind of made it seem more real that I'm working for college credits."

One particular question during the interview seemed to bring about a more animated response from Student One. When asked, "What specific academic challenges did you experience while you were enrolled in the dual-enrollment program," Student One quickly returned to his comments on end-of-course testing. That is, testing that was administered after a course was complete in order for him to earn the dual credits. He stated that teachers warned him the tests were difficult to pass. Student One stated, "Back to that test. We took the test twice, the one at [community college] and it was intimidating because the first time I didn't pass, and a bunch of other people didn't pass." He continued, "We went through the course then took the test. It was challenging. And, going back the second time it was an intimidating process." The experience was meaningful for Student One since it challenged his thinking about what college might actually be like in relation to taking and passing examinations.

When asked what recommendations he would make to improve the dual-enrollment program in which he participated, Student One stated “Maybe to have some [DE program administrators] come in and talk more specifically about these programs. Whether it’s talking about the courses or just talking about the dual enrollment program making sure it’s better understood.” Student One’s comment about improving informational systems regarding the overall dual-enrollment program, and specific requirements within the program was mentioned by other participants in this research. Student One, in particular, believed it would be meaningful for future students to have specific outlines on how the program is constructed.

Student two. The second participant in this study was 18-years-old and attended a university in Oregon. Student Two was intimidated by what she determined would be a “big jump” from high school to college. She was concerned about the general academic requirements and had a fear of what the environment at college would actually be like. Student Two stated,

College was something like no one had ever really experienced and so it was more like a fear of the unknown. I didn’t know what to expect because no one had done it before me. My parents had gone to college but that was a long time ago and I knew that classes had changed since then and it would probably be more difficult than it was when they did it. I guess I was nervous because I didn’t know what to expect from it yet.

Throughout the interview, Student Two emphasized her fear of attending college after high school due to the “unknowns.” In other words, her framework for making meaning and understanding the college experience and its requirements was minimal. However, she also indicated that going to college was always part of the plan in her situation. She stated, “I feel like I can’t remember a time where I wasn’t planning on going to college. It was something that was embedded growing up. I guess that could have been through my parents.”

When asked what she was hoping to gain from the dual-enrollment program, Student Two stated, “Maybe just being familiar with college-level work before I got to college might have been something that influenced it but it was mostly just going into college prepared having credits already under my belt before enrolling into another college.” In particular, the dual-enrollment program helped Student Two grasp that success with college-level coursework would be possible.

The workload was a little bit challenging because the way our classroom was formatted it was like a two-hour block class, it was really different from any of the other classes I had taken in high school and so that work load was maybe a little challenging but everything was doable but it was also learning how to time manage.

Student Two concluded that the workload within the DE program was demanding, and it limited the amount of available time with friends but she also acknowledged unforeseen benefits. For example, her participation in dual-enrollment activities taught her the significance of time management, a skill she continued to apply during her first year at college. The dual-enrollment experience, and its academic requirements, helped build a framework about college that Student Two did not previously have related to workload, time management, and ultimately, her own post-secondary success. When asked what she would say to future dually enrolled students who might be struggling in the program, Student Two, once again, emphasized time management.

I think that falls back to time management. The reason I feel like I was able to do it is because I was willing to make sacrifices. I couldn't just go home and watch TV for an hour. I need to really work on studies and so I think students that are struggling maybe need to put a little more time into it and schedule out specific times for that.

In her closing comments, Student Two stated she was impressed by the DE program. She had

few comments regarding improving its overall effectiveness for future participants.

I'll talk about what I like about it because I can't really think of anything negative. I like how it eased that transition of high school class to college class because it was in my classroom. I feel like if I was driving to another campus I might have felt out of place and it might have been harder for me to focus or adjust but I felt really well adjusted because it was in my school. While I was in the program, it did seem overwhelming at times, but looking back on it, now I see it, but not at the time. Maybe it was a little intense? But, by senior year, it was totally doable and I was used to it by then.

Student Two entered the dual-enrollment program with very little personal meaning about what college would be like. For her, dual enrollment meant more than daily requirements within the program. Therefore, the dual-enrollment program at her high school provided a framework from which to assess her own possibility of long-term post-secondary success.

Student three. The third participant in this study was 18-years-old and attended a community college in Oregon through an Oregon Transfer Degree program. Student Three entered the dual-enrollment program bringing his own expectations based on his father's example. That is, his father was a "pretty high speed-low drag" college student and was an exemplar on always working hard, no matter the task. Student Three's father expected him to maintain at least a 3.0 GPA in high school and set the bar on how to be successful along the way. Student Three was able to make meaning and understand the nuances of college through his father's example.

He was setting the example for me but he also showed me how much hours he put in for homework for the master's program so I was like, wow, this is the real deal. This isn't

anything like elementary school, middle school or high school. This is the big league. So, in high school I thought I really should start getting prepared for college.

Student Three learned through watching his father that college-related work would not be easy, but he was prepared for its challenges. Because of his father's example, Student Three was not as much interested in gaining credits in the DE program as much as he was gaining momentum.

I did a little bit for the credits but not really. I didn't know what I was gonna [*sic*] go into so I took different things. For example, I took FBLA, Future Business Leaders of America, so we actually did business presentations and power points, and actual business studies for companies like how much of a profit and where you're going to get all your stuff. I actually went to national in my freshman year. So, that gave me a lot of college credit toward my business degree.

When asked about specific academic challenges in the dual-enrollment program, Student Three immediately referred to what he perceived as a high workload within the program.

However, the challenge was not remembered as something negative. Student Three stated,

The other thing was the massive amount of homework we were given 'cause [*sic*] I took writing 121 in high school and my teacher was a great teacher and she gave us a lot of writing assignments. We had a journal due by Friday we had a vocab story due by Wednesday, and about once per month we wrote about a three-page essay on a random topic. It could be a research or persuasive anything. That massive amount of work really set the tone for college.

Student Three reiterated that his primary academic challenge while participating in dual enrollment was the "massive" amount of work required but the program paralleled his father's ethos that hard work will pay off in the long-run. In Student's Three's situation, the dual-

enrollment program helped him gain the momentum he needed as he progressed into his first year of college. The level of work required within the dual-enrollment program reaffirmed Student Three's prior knowledge and experience related to college coursework.

Student four. The fourth participant in this study was 18-years-old and attended a university in California. Student Four was asked what she was hoping to gain from participation in the dual-enrollment program. Her response provided insight into how she made meaning from her previous experience with teachers and siblings. That is, her foundational understanding the DE courses connected directly to significant relationships in her life.

Honestly, when I went in I wasn't really thinking about the dual enrollment. It was more about the teachers that were teaching the classes and the classes that they had. Having siblings that went through those classes, they told me they were good classes and that they were really helpful. So, just learning, I really didn't think that much about college credit at the time.

Student Four continued by discussing her impressions of the teachers who were responsible for administering the dual-credit courses.

I know I talked about the teachers a lot, but the teachers were a big difference 'cause [*sic*] I was in other classes and the teachers didn't care as much about you learning while the teachers that did the dual enrollment were very focused on [us] learning the information and not so much about the grade which was something I really enjoyed. While the grade was always hanging over your head, [it] wasn't like in front of your face while you were leaning.

Student Four then provided more detail on her impression of the early college instructors at her high school and their approach to teaching the courses. The relationships were meaningful to her and provided significant meaning in her educational pursuits.

The teachers that did the dual enrollment were very passionate about what they were teaching and so they always wanted to make sure that you understood and they would take extra time with you, one-on-one. I noticed friends that weren't in dual enrollment when you didn't get something, the teacher would just kind of shove you along and expect you to keep going.

Student five. The fifth participant in this study was 19-years-old and attended a university in Oregon. She always planned on going to college but was nervous about it and even thought the prospect was “kind of scary.” During my interview with Student Five, she talked about her older sister who participated in dual enrollment and provided some insight into the program. She also discussed her parents and the influence they had on her plans for college. For Student Five, the DE program became meaningful through her older sister.

I had a sister who was three years older than me and I'd always be able to see what everything was going to be like before I actually had to go and do it. College was something like no one had ever really experience and so it was more like a fear of the unknown. I didn't know what to expect because no one had done it before me. My parents had gone to college but that was a long time ago and I knew that classes had changed since then and it would probably be more difficult than it was when they did it. I guess I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect from it yet.

Student Five also had friends who planned to attend college, which had an effect on her decision to participate in dual enrollment and ultimately attend college herself. When asked specifically

about the dual-enrollment program and what she was hoping to gain from it, Student Five immediately brought up the credits she would earn through participation. For her, dual enrollment was an opportunity to gain momentum going into college by earning early credit and learning about the college environment and its expectations.

It was an amazing opportunity to get some college credits while I was in high school and kind of differentiate myself, especially since it would define what a college is. And, once I was in college, well, it has really benefited me this semester.

Student six. The sixth participant in this study was 18-years-old and attended a university in New York. Like other participants in this research, Student Six was highly influenced to enter college through family members. This participant has a sister who was his primary influence for continuing his education past high school. He stated that his sister left an *imprint* on him about college, along with his participation in the dual-enrollment program. Student Six talked about appreciation for his classmates and their academic support of him throughout the dual-enrollment program. He also highlighted his gratitude for his instructors who worked hard every class to make dual enrollment an excellent program for the students.

My instructors were really good. I really preferred their way of teaching. They definitely integrated [things]. Photo shop testing, [for example], they molded the curriculum to fit the 2-plus-2 which was nice. 2-plus-2 is the dual enrollment; it's the credits...you [got] multiple credits for taking the class through [the college].

Student Six stated that the early college instructors knew their topics “inside and out” and were more connected to preparing students for the *real world*.

They were a lot more engaged. No, I don't want to diss [*sic*] my other teachers. They were a lot more understanding that this was real world. And what they were teaching was

like biology, they were teaching it and they knew the kids were going to forget it next term. They (DE instructors) knew these were skills that were actually going to stick with them post graduation. There was a lot more fulfillment for them [DE instructors] and I feel like they got more personal joy for being good at it.

Student Six concluded by further comparing instructors who taught dual-enrollment courses with instructors who did not.

I feel like college [dual enrollment] teachers are teaching more for life skills. Economic skills and keyboarding were skills that we used way beyond just the testing. So, the keyboard skills [was] something that we focused on. And, like typing, it's a skill that we still use.

Student Six was able to make meaning of his experience in a dual-enrollment program through his dual enrollment instructors who provided insight into what college professors would be like once he entered college. Through his dual enrollment experience, he determined that his college professors would integrate the important skills applicable for life beyond the postsecondary setting.

Core Themes and Initial Findings

Finding the *universal essence* (Creswell, 2013) within common lived experience was the crux of this research. From the outset, participants expressed appreciation for their dual-enrollment program and were supportive regarding its benefits. Common statements made by participants of this study were similar to themes discovered in previous research such as less time to earn one's degree (Westcott, 2009), saving money (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and gaining momentum by participating in a dual-enrollment program (Robinson, 2011). The lived experiences that were common to participants in this research study included the lack of

program awareness and the need for hybrid-type coursework at the high school level to help prepare for the college environment. Some additional findings among participants of this study were their dual enrollment teachers' styles and difficulty of coursework within the dual-enrollment program.

Theme 1: Lack of Program Awareness

The first core theme referenced during the in-depth interviews was awareness among the school student body about the overall dual-enrollment program. That is, according to four of the six respondents, they did not know much about the dual-enrollment program or its potential benefits for students who planned to attend college. Given the lack of information about the dual-enrollment program, the students were unable to understand or make meaningful assessments regarding its potential benefits as a college preparatory program. Student Two stated since her high school offered dual credit, she had a vague understanding that it was available. However, she was unclear about what the program entailed. She stated, "I don't think I had a really good understanding of what it was going to be like until I was actually in the program, I guess." In a similar comment, Student Five reiterated the importance of advertising the program and its availability, "I know at least for [my high school]...[DE should be] broadcasted more." The invariant constituents or subthemes fundamental to the first theme included: (a) Fear of the unknown (2 of 6 participants); (b) Lack of information on DE coursework (4 of 6 participants); (c); Dual-enrollment program was not advertised enough (5 of 6 participants); and (d) Improved understanding of credits (3 of 6 participants).

Subtheme 1: Fear of the unknown. In the first subtheme of Theme 1, two of the participants in this study stated that they were, to some degree, insecure about the dual-enrollment (DE) program and what it would involve. Most students have a natural curiosity

about what a new program or school will be like so it seems reasonable that some of the participants in this research were apprehensive about their dual-enrollment program requirements, instructor expectations, and other concerns that might have evolved over time. According to Nascante (2001), anxieties that some students include perceived difficulty of a program, working with teachers, homework requirements, assessment practices, and even the classroom atmosphere. Add to these examples, a high school student faced with the challenges of college coursework for the first time, it makes sense that some level of apprehension might exist for a student in the days leading up to a dual-enrollment program and its ongoing course requirements.

Subtheme 2: Lack of information on DE coursework. In the second subtheme of Theme 1, four of six of the respondents perceived that more information was needed on dual-enrollment coursework, specifically. In other words, prior to taking courses, participants felt it would have been helpful to be more informed about the requirements of specific courses and how they were presented. In summarizing recommendations that he would make to improve the DE program, Student One stated that administrators did a good job overall but they should consider providing more detail in regard to the overall program and the individual courses within it. He stated, “Maybe to have some [college] people to come in and talk more specifically about these programs. Whether it’s talking about the courses or just talking about the dual-enrollment program making sure it’s better understood.” Student One’s comments were similar to other participants who felt the overall program, and courses within the program, could have been explained better to help students gain more insight into what courses would be like.

Subtheme 3: Dual-enrollment program not advertised enough. In the third subtheme, after participants reflected on their lived experiences, they believed the program was not

advertised enough. In fact, five of the six respondents expressed concern about not seeing information about the program while in high school. When asked what recommendations he would make to improve the DE program in which he participated, Student One stated “Maybe to have some [college] people come in and talk more specifically about these [dual enrollment] programs. Whether it’s talking about the courses or just talking about the dual-enrollment program making sure it’s better understood.” In a similar comment, Student Four stated, “More knowledge about it [dual enrollment] would be amazing. I think there’s a lot of students that really could have done really well but they didn’t know about it.” Student Five suggested the program be *broadcasted* more and, similarly, Student Six stated the he “didn’t know what it was, exactly.”

Subtheme 4: Improved understanding of DE credits. In the fourth subtheme related to the primary theme of a lack of program awareness, three of six participants wanted to be better informed about the credits they would be earning. Student Five, in particular, was confused about how the dual credits would be earned, and also applied to the program. She stated “Not having enough information about the credits we were getting...at the end of the year, they just told all the seniors what credits they had earned throughout the two years.” While not as specific as Student Five, Student Six stated that he liked the idea of earning college credit before actually entering college but he did not quite fully understand magnitude of obtaining those credits. In other words, he wanted to know about the early credits in a more meaningful way. He stated, “So, of course...[I’ll] take it; college credits. But [I] didn’t really get the grasp of what it [was] we were getting out of it until it was like farther down the road and it was like this is amazing!”

In the primary theme, when students were able to reflect upon their lived experiences in the dual-enrollment program, they perceived that students at their high schools should have had

more information about the dual-enrollment program in general. A substantial majority of the respondents, five out of six, believed the dual-enrollment program was not advertised enough at their high schools. Also, four of the six participants stated that more information should be provided specific to coursework within the program.

Theme 2: A Need for Hybrid Coursework

In the second core theme, participants expressed a desire for hybrid-type coursework (a combination in-class and online course) interconnected within the dual-enrollment program as a means for improved post-secondary success. More specifically, participants in the study believed the DE program would have been more meaningful in preparing students for college if they had an understanding of hybrid-type learning requirements. When students were able to reflect upon their lived experiences in the DE program, two out of six students commented that learning how to navigate hybrid course requirements would be beneficial prior to one's first year at college. Student Three, for example, expressed concern over not being prepared or trained in the use of Blackboard, a hybrid virtual learning environment.

Definitely create hybrid classes in high school. Make that switch to where everything gets turned in online. In high school, everything was paper, paper, paper. I would recommend setting up the college website, we did Blackboard so set up Blackboard in local high schools so they learn how to use it or a form of it. I remember one time [during first year of college], I thought I submitted my assignment and I didn't. There was another button I had to press but I didn't. The teacher emailed me and asked if I submitted the assignment. I said, yes I did. And, she said, I don't see you submitting it.

Subtheme 1: Hybrid platforms used in college. In the first subtheme of a need for hybrid type coursework, two participants discussed the significance of hybrid learning

environments in college. These types of courses involve the traditional classroom and an online component of that class. For example, in one course, students may be required to attend class at their campus each week in addition to taking an online weekly quiz for the same class. The participants who discussed hybrid courses stated that the use of online computer technologies is now integrated into much of the college and university experience. They felt that preparation for hybrid learning while in high school would greatly benefit the overall success of first-year college students. Student Three stated,

I didn't realize that a lot of our classes [would be] hybrid classes at the university. I wasn't used to that at all. It was a totally new atmosphere for me. As far as turning stuff in online, etc. I had to learn it from the teachers of the classes.

Student Three's first year at college helped him gain perspective on the importance of the hybrid learning environment. As he reflected on his DE program in high school, he believed it would be meaningful for future students to have training in hybrid environments prior to the first year of college. At his college, Student Six is using Moodle, an online educational platform similar to Blackboard. He stated that at his university there was a week-long learning opportunity about how to navigate Moodle, which helped a great deal. However, he did acknowledge that without the training the online platform would have been "tricky."

Subtheme 2: Currently using technology in DE classroom. During the individual interviews, four of six participants in this study perceived the benefits of technology and how it was used as part of their dual-enrollment program. Student Three, in particular, made the connection that it would not be a stretch to incorporate some sort of hybrid environment within the DE program since computer technologies were already in place. Other participants had similar perceptions about the presence and use of technology in the program and made the

connection to a hybrid-type learning environment in the future. When asked about specific academic supports in the DE program that helped him prepare for college, Student One stated:

It was a strange classroom setup in that everyone was at [his or her] own computer in this big classroom and then they would talk about the work we are doing for the day and they let you do it. It was very independent but they ran it and made sure everything was running smoothly and had a big impact. It was really important to me.

One of the participants in this study, Student Three, emphasized the significance of a hybrid-related learning environment for students who are dually enrolled. After reflecting on his experience in the dual-enrollment program, he stated, “I would recommend setting up the college website. We did Blackboard so set up Blackboard in local high schools so they learn how to use it or a form of it.” Student Six also commented on the prevalent use of hybrid technologies at the university and how they have become commonplace for students who are attending brick-and-mortar classes, online classes, and a *hybrid* mix of the two. According to Student Six, some post-secondary institutions provide training for the hybrid requirements of college but getting a head start in high school would be beneficial.

Theme 3: Teaching Style of DE Instructors

In the third core theme discovered from the in-depth interviews of students who participated in a dual-enrollment program, the majority of participants, five out of the six, were able to reflect upon their experiences and discussed the teaching styles and influence of their DE instructors. Interestingly, every comment that participants made about their dual-enrollment instructors was in a positive light. The subthemes associated with Theme 3 were fairly easy to identify given the passionate responses of the participants in this study. Subthemes of teaching styles of DE instructors were: (a) DE Instructors Linked Real-World Application; (b) DE

Instructors were More Engaged than Non-DE Instructors; (c) DE Instructors Talked More About College; (d) DE Instructors Cared More That Students Learn Material; and (e) DE Instructors had In-Depth Understanding of Content.

After reflecting on her lived experience in the DE program at high school, Student Four perceived that her participation had a positive influence on her thoughts and feelings moving forward. That is, the program helped create a sense of optimism about her first year of college. Student Four continued talking about her dual-enrollment instructors and how they made a positive impact on her participation in dual enrollment and eventual success at her first year at a postsecondary environment. She stated, “So, [our] relationship with the dual enrollment teachers, even though they were just high school teachers as far as [we] knew, they were definitely set apart from the regular staff.”

Subtheme 1: DE instructors linked real-world application. In the first subtheme of Theme 3, two participants of six perceived that their dual-enrollment (DE) instructors made a connection between the material they were teaching and real-world application. That is, the participants felt the DE instructors had a greater understanding of the long-term implications of learning the material. Von Leipzig, Von Leipzig, and Hummel (2016) suggested that learning is based on four principles, which occurs in context, is active, social, and reflective. Von Leipzig et al. (2016) stated, “These principles suggest that in order for learning to be successful, it should be based on real-world situations and contexts, involve the student actively, be provided in a social environment” (p. 467). Incorporating the constructivist learning theory as described by Malan (2008), Von Leipzig et al. (2008) concluded that a teaching ideology that incorporates a constructivist approach could help a learning environment reach its full potential. Half of the students who participated in this research study (3 out of 6 participants) commented on the style

of their DE instructors and their ability to highlight the real world into their courses and teaching methodology.

Subtheme 2: DE instructors more engaged than non-DE instructors. In the second subtheme of Theme 3, after reflecting on their experiences, five of the six participants felt that dual-enrollment instructors were more engaged than non-dual-enrollment instructors. The literature clearly demonstrated the most significant influence on positive student outcomes is a teacher who is a *quality* classroom instructor (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Given that an instructor's level of engagement with the subject matter, and the success of students under his or her charge, it stands to reason that instructors should find ways to create more interest among their learners. The dual-enrollment instructors referred to in the current study were highly effective in creating interest among their students, which had a dramatic effect on their postsecondary preparation. During his interview, Student Six was quick to voice his appreciation for the DE instructors he had and how they were more engaging than his non dual-enrollment teachers.

My instructors were really good, I really preferred their way of teaching. They definitely integrated it. Like, the photo shop testing, they molded the curriculum to fit the 2 plus 2 which was nice. 2 plus 2 is the dual enrollment, it's the credits.

Nearly all of the participants in this study preferred the engaging style of their dual-enrollment instructors. Perhaps Student Five summed the responses best when she stated, "And our teachers [dual enrollment] were both really amazing. I felt like I learned a lot based off the [dual enrollment] credits I earned from them."

Subtheme 3: DE instructors talked more about college. In the third subtheme of Theme 3, two of the six participants in this research stated that their instructors talked more

about college than their non-DE instructors. In essence, the DE instructors emphasized the significance of attending college by continually bringing up the topic. When asked what specific experiences influenced her perceptions about college, Student Four responded by bringing up both of her parents and her instructors who encouraged her to participate. Student One also indicated that he learned a lot about the importance of college through his teachers, who taught the advanced courses. He stated, “My [dual enrollment] instructors were really good, I really preferred their way of teaching. They definitely integrated it. Like, the photo shop testing, they molded the curriculum to fit the 2-plus-2 [college credits] which was nice.” Student Six continued, “They (DE instructors) knew these were skills that were actually going to stick with [us] post graduation.”

The dual-enrollment instructors referred to in this research understood the importance of creating a college-bound mindset in their students. By taking part in their school’s dual-credit program, participants in this study were introduced to the expectations and requirements of college while they were still attending high school. Conley (2010) stated that participation in a dual-credit program has a number of motivating factors for high school students, including the idea of moving through college more rapidly and saving money in the process. The benefits of early college programs for high school students all start with communication about the importance of being prepared for the college environment.

Subtheme 4: DE instructors cared more that students learn material than non-DE instructors. In the fourth subtheme of Theme 3, three of the six participants reflected upon their experiences and indicated that their instructors cared more that they learned the information. During my interview with Student Four, she provided specific reasons why she believed DE instructors cared more that she learn the material than non-dual-enrollment instructors.

I know I talked about the [dual enrollment] teachers a lot, but the teachers were a big difference 'cause [*sic*] I was in other classes and the teachers didn't care as much about [us] learning while the teachers that did the dual enrollment were very focused on [us] learning the information and not so much about the grade [like non-dual enrollment instructors], which was something I really enjoyed. While the grade was always hanging over your head [in the dual enrollment courses], [it] wasn't like in front of your face while you were leaning.

Student Four stated she spent most of the time talking about her DE instructors. Through her DE instructors, she became very optimistic about her future success as a full-time college student. Dual enrollment was a highly meaningful experience for Student Four, one that helped her understand that college would be attainable for her.

When asked to describe his experiences in the dual-enrollment program, Student Six talked about how his dual-enrollment (DE) instructors “molded the curriculum” by integrating the material in such a way to maximize the learning for their students.

I thought it was a really cool thing that our high school offered [dual enrollment] credits while [we were] high school. And our teachers were both really amazing. I felt like I learned a lot based off the credits I earned from them. I thought the credit title; it definitely pertained to what I learned in the class.

Subtheme 5: DE instructors had an in-depth understanding of the content. In the fifth and final subtheme of Theme 3, four of the six participants believed their instructors had an in-depth understanding of the content in which they were teaching. Student One perceived that the courses taught by the dual enrollment instructors had more rigor in an environment that encouraged student success. Student Four, for example, discussed her instructors' deeper

understanding of the content and how that comprehension was conveyed to the students in a way that was apprehendable.

They [dual-enrollment instructors] were very intimidating teachers because they did teach the higher level courses but they were [regular] people and they made that very obvious in their classes which made me think, even though he's a professor and teaching this very rigorous course, he does care and [he wants me] to come and talk with [him]. It was something that was really good for me.

When asked what specific academic supports in the dual-enrollment program helped her prepare for college, Student Four continued, "Again, the [DE instructors] and even just the level of writing that was expected was extremely high compared to other classes."

Theme 4: Difficulty of Coursework Within the DE Program

In the fourth core theme discovered in this research, all six participants reflected on the level of difficulty in their high school dual-enrollment programs. Three of the participants, or half, stated that prior to participating in DE, they felt the coursework would be "intimidating," "high speed," and a "jump" from their regular high school coursework requirements. Two of the six study participants expressed that their dual-enrollment program coursework was manageable, and three of the participants believed the workload might be too excessive.

Subtheme 1: DE participants were intimidated by the coursework. In the first subtheme of Theme 4, four of the six participants reflected on their experience and stated they were intimidated in some way by the DE program before they participated in it. In other words, they were unable to make meaning about DE coursework since they had no compass or previous experience with the program. However, after participating in the program and its required coursework, the participants were able to rise above their feelings of intimidation for their

educational benefit. Student Two talked about why she was intimidated by college and the DE program.

College was something like no one [in my family] had ever really experienced and so it was more like a fear of the unknown. I didn't know what to expect because no one had done it before me. My parents had gone to college but that was a long time ago and I knew that classes had changed since then and it would probably be more difficult than it was when they did it. I guess I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect from it yet.

Student Four reflected on the same question and had similar expectations about college and the DE program prior to actually participating.

I expected it to be a lot of work. Difficult work, not just busy work. So, work that you actually had to put a lot of effort into thinking about and understanding. You can't just look in the book and copy down what you saw, sort of.

Student Five stated, "I had an idea that it was going to be a huge jump from high school being so much harder. It was kind of scary."

Subtheme 2: DE coursework was manageable. In the second subtheme of Theme 4, four out of the six participants indicated that their coursework in the DE program was manageable. That is, after the students were able to reflect on their lived experience, they stated the work and requirements of the program were not burdensome. However, Student Four said she worked "really hard" in the program but it was manageable. She stated, "I expected to work really hard and, while I did, it wasn't like an overload of work. It was reasonable. And, they took into consideration that we were students and we had other stuff going on." Student Six also referred to the requirements of the program when he stated, "It was just part of my high school

class so it wasn't as much of an out of the way burden for me to go through." When asked about specific challenges he experienced while participating in his dual-enrollment program, Student Six continued, "There was nothing particularly difficulty...most things I had issues with were very minor."

Subtheme 3: DE coursework might be excessive. In the final subtheme related to the difficulty of coursework within the dual-enrollment program, two of the participants perceived that the workload might have been excessive. After these students were able to reflect upon their lived experiences on the requirements of the DE program, they stated the workload might have been too much. For example, Student Two stated,

While I was in the [dual enrollment] program, it did seem overwhelming at times. But looking back on it, now I see [the benefit], but not at the time. Maybe it was a little [too] intense? But, by senior year, it was totally doable and I was used to it by then.

As part of the probing process, Student Two was asked to elaborate the intensity of the program.

It's like pushing students to do [their] best work to make them succeed. For other students, [it] might have been overwhelming and might have been too much? I think for me, [however], that was the push that I needed. It made me realize I can do this but I need to work for it.

The initial findings for this research are listed below categorized by research questions:

R1. What academic successes did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module? The findings in this study relative to the academic success of students within the program related mostly to the teaching style of the dual-enrollment (DE) instructors. For example, the DE instructors linked real-world application in their lessons which helped the students think more about how to be

successful beyond the high school setting. Participants in this study also believed their DE instructors were more engaged than their non-DE instructors. That is, they were more committed to the teaching and learning process, which had an effect on students' academic success. The findings in this research also demonstrated that the DE instructors talked more about college, which fostered a college-bound mindset for students who participated in the program. Another conclusion related to the style of the DE instructors and how they cared more that students learn the material. In other words, they were more communicative and highly focused on specific learning outcomes. The initial findings of this research indicated that the DE instructors had an in-depth understanding of the content they were teaching, which may also promotes academic success for program participants. In the last initial finding reparative to academic success, participants believed the coursework was manageable; more specifically, the students who participated in this study believed the DE coursework was not too burdensome in regard to workload and/or time commitments.

R2. What academic challenges did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module? The initial findings relative to academic challenges within the program related to students' lack of program awareness. The first-year college students in this study believed that they should have been provided more information about the program, its coursework, and how the credits would be applied once courses were completed. The participants believed their academic preparation for college would have improved significantly provided they were given comprehensive information before and during the program. Two of the participants believed the coursework was too intense, which also resulted challenges to their academic success.

R3. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience positively impacted the first-year experiences of college students? The initial findings related to elements of the program that positively impacted students included the use of technology in the classroom. The use of computer technology was seen as a positive relative to preparing the students for their first year of college. Since college students are required to use computers throughout their postsecondary experience, participants in this study believed incorporating computer use in the DE program positively impacted their preparation. Further, participants corroborated other literature related to the positive impacts of reducing time to degree (Westcott, 2009), saving on the cost of tuition (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and building momentum (Robinson, 2011). Each of these factors was regarded as highly beneficial in preparing for college. In fact, Student One stated, “I thought it was cool to have the opportunity to get credit before going to college...Of course, saving time, saving money in the long run.”

R4. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience negatively impacted the first-year experiences of college students? The dual-enrollment (DE) program under the Oregon Transfer Module did not provide an opportunity for students to become acclimated in the use of hybrid-type learning environments. Participants believed that becoming familiar with programs such as Blackboard or Moodle during a DE program would be highly beneficial in preparing students for their first year of college. Blackboard and Moodle are virtual learning environments used at postsecondary institutions to enhance the learning experience for college students. College instructors who incorporate this type of learning environment use it for classroom assignments or quizzes that are completed outside the brick-and-mortar classroom environment. Participants in this research stated that learning Blackboard, for example, takes a great deal of

time. They stated that learning these systems during the DE program would positively impact students' college readiness.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how first-year college students, who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, derived meaning from their academic experience and to provide insight into their successes and/or challenges within the program. Within this chapter, I will discuss some of the formative literature and how it relates to this research project. There will also be a discussion of the methodology for this research and how the results related to the research questions. Further, there will be an examination and interpretation of the results discussed in Chapter 4. Near the conclusion of this chapter, I will discuss the limitations of this study, the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory, and the recommendations for further research. Finally, at the conclusion of the dissertation, I will summarize the research and answer the research questions.

Summary of the Results

The study was guided by the research question, “How do first-year college students, who participated in dual-enrollment while in high school, derive meaning from their academic experience under the Oregon Transfer Module?” This research question was expanded by the following subquestions:

- R1. What academic successes did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R2. What academic challenges did first-year college students experience in high school while enrolled in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module?
- R3. Which elements of the dual-enrollment experience positively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

R4. Which elements of a dual-enrollment experience negatively impacted the first-year experiences of college students?

Seminal Literature

The full conceptual framework of constructivism was detailed with evidence in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation. This study drew on the constructivist approach discussed by Schwandt (2000) in answering the research questions. Constructivism, as a philosophical assumption in this interpretive framework, is a worldview in which individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Schwandt (2000) referred to this approach as, “an ethic of closeness, of care, of proximity, or relatedness” (p. 204), which was appropriate in understanding the lived experiences of first-year college students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school.

When high school students participate in early college programs, the result is mostly favorable, with the literature showing a gain of momentum going into college, less time to earning one’s degree, and saving money through graduation (Robinson, 2011; Westcott, 2009; Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Understanding how high school students derived meaning from their dual-enrollment experience enables potential improvement in how these programs are administered.

Accelerated learning opportunities provide a way for high school students to earn both high school and college credit at the same time. Accelerated learning has been an available option in the United States since the 1950s with the introduction of the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) program (Russell, 2007). According to Kim (2006), there are nine accelerated options for high school students, which include Advanced Placement, Bridge Programs, the College Level Examination Program, Distance Learning or Virtual Schools, Dual

Credit and Dual Enrollment, the General Equivalency Diploma (GED), International Baccalaureate (IB), Early and Middle College High School, and Tech Prep or College Tech Prep. In this research, the emphasis was placed on Oregon students who participated in dual enrollment through an Oregon Transfer program. Highlighting individual early college opportunities may help educators and other stakeholders provide better delivery modes for recipients of the programs.

In the following section I will provide a brief overview of the seminal literature that helped frame the development of the literature review in this work and the methodology. The following conclusions on early college participation were among the most common found in the literature and were also noted by participants of the current study.

Less time to degree. In her research, Westcott (2009) was able to show that students who participated in dual enrollment earned their degree in less time than students who did not. Further, An (2013), Hofmann (2012), and Hughes (2010) all identified benefits of participation in a dual-enrollment program, which included a reduction of time to earning one's degree. As part of an evaluation of the Concurrent Courses Initiative through the James Irvine Foundation (2008), Hughes (2010) examined initiative participants who were considered an underrepresented group for attending college. The result for the lower-income youth after participation in a dual-enrollment program was the potential reduction of time to earning a degree. Hughes (2010) stated, "On average, Concurrent Courses dual enrollees nearly doubled their accumulated credits from year one to year two..." (p. 20). In a more recent study, Lee (2014) concluded that regardless of ethnicity, high school students who participated in a dual-credit program reduced their total time to earning a degree over students who had not enrolled in a dual-credit program.

Saving money on the overall cost of tuition. The literature also demonstrated that students who participated in dual enrollment were able to save on the overall costs of attending college by earning some of their required college credits while still attending high school (An, 2013, Hoffman et al, 2008; Hofmann, 2012; Lewis & Overman, 2008; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). It is well established that the cost of attending a college or university in the United States has risen in recent years. In fact, Abel and Deitz (2014) stated, “College tuition has risen sharply, reaching record highs, and college graduates are increasingly finding themselves saddled with debt from student loans used to finance their education” (p. 1).

The cost considerations of attending a college or university highlights another potential benefit of participation in dual enrollment in an early college dual-enrollment program. According to An (2012), many of these programs offer early college courses that are often free or dramatically discounted from normal tuition costs. Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2008) also referred to the cost-saving benefits of dual enrollment in their research on the impact of DE and degree attainment for low SES students. As the high cost of attending a college or university continues to rise, participation in dual enrollment can potentially help students alleviate some of the financial burden through savings in tuition.

Increased college persistence. A review of the literature also demonstrated that students who participated in dual-enrollment programs were able to increase persistence going into college. Increased college persistence is viewed by some as a way to gain momentum from high school through graduation from an accredited associates or bachelor’s program. In his research, Robinson (2011) studied dual enrollment as a means to increase college preparedness and persistence for high school students at an urban charter school. Robinson (2011) concluded that there are many ways that participation in dual-enrollment programs can benefit a high school

student preparing for college. Particularly, the researcher summarized that dual-enrollment programs do have a positive effect on college readiness and persistence, even among marginalized students.

According to Davis' (2014) research, there was a highly significant correlation between students' credits earned in an early college program and his or her college persistence. In their research, Struhl and Vargas (2012) completed a study of 32,908 high school graduates from Texas in 2004 with about half of the students participating in a dual-enrollment program and the other half did not. Struhl and Vargas (2012) followed the students through June of 2011. Their findings on college persistence showed that dual enrollments students "who completed at least one DE course while in high school were 1.79 to 2.07 times more likely to persist to the second year" (p. 12) than students who did not participate in dual enrollment.

In consideration of college persistence and how the individual dual-enrollment (DE) student seeks understanding of his or her experience, increased preparedness (Robinson, 2011), success in earning college credits (Davis, 2014), and having familiarity with coursework expectations (Struhl and Vargas, 2012) are significant factors in the successful pursuit of a college degree or certificate.

Dual enrollment and degree attainment. The literature on dual enrollment has also demonstrated that participation in an early college program such as dual enrollment (DE) can have an effect on degree attainment. Participation in a dual-enrollment program, as described by the Rennie Center for Education & Research Policy (2015), paves the way for college students to complete a post-secondary degree or technical credential of some sort. It is the simultaneous earning of high school and college credit, according to the Rennie Center (2015), that reduces the time and cost of actually earning one's degree. In a similar comment, Hoffman, Vargas, and

Santos (2009) stated, “If credit accumulation is indicative of eventual degree attainment, then early college school have put many graduates on a promising path toward a degree” (p. 55).

Hoffman et al., (2009) emphasized that an emerging body of research is suggesting that participation in DE programs will actually benefit a wide range of students, including students who do not necessarily plan on attending college after high school. In fact, some of the benefits of participation in college-level coursework, according to Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009), include:

- Increase the pool of historically underserved students who are ready for college.
- Provide realistic information to high school students about the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Improve motivation through high expectations and the promise of free courses.
- Decrease the cost of postsecondary education by compressing the years of financial support needed. (Hoffman et al., 2009, p. 44)

Each of the benefits discussed in the research study by Hoffman et al., (2009) plays a role in increasing participation in college, and ultimately, the goal of obtaining one’s college degree. Research has demonstrated throughout the past several years that participation in a dual-enrollment program while attending high school has several benefits which include taking less time to earning one’s degree, saving money on the overall cost of college tuition, and increased college persistence and/or momentum. However, the goal of obtaining one’s college degree is the ultimate benefit of participating in a dual-enrollment program with ancillary benefits that follow the college graduate throughout his or her life (An, 2015; Bailey et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2008; Hoffman et al., 2009; Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012; Kim, 2006; Richardson, 2007).

Discussion of the Results

This phenomenological study aligned with much of the research on dual-enrollment (DE) programs, concerning the positive benefits of participation through an early college program. Specifically, after reflecting on their experiences in a DE program under the Oregon Transfer Module, participants perceived that DE can reduce time to earning one's degree, save tuition costs by graduation, and improve momentum going into college. Each of these perceptions was born out in the literature of other research (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2000; Robinson, 2011; and Westcott, 2009). However, the participants in this study identified themes that were specific to DE under the Oregon Transfer Module. The themes that emerged in this research included the lack of program awareness among the general student body at the high school; a need for hybrid coursework in high school; the style of instructors teaching the DE courses; and the difficulty of coursework within the program.

The objective of this study was to collect data from first-year college students in regard to their perceptions on their academic experience in dual enrollment (DE) under the Oregon Transfer Module. The study's purposeful design was meant to provide a safe place for participants to share their lived experience and perceptions while participating in the program. This investigative study on how first-year college students derived meaning from their academic experience within DE was meant to highlight their successes and/or challenges within the program. Data were readily available that indicated that students who participated in a DE program tended to be more successful than students who did not participate in a DE program (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2015; Hofmann & Voloch, 2012; Hughes, 2010; Karp & Hughes, 2008; Kim, 2014; Overman, 2008; Ozmun, 2013; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011). However, research was not discovered that included the perceptions of first-year

college students who participated in DE under the OTM. Themes emerged from my sample of six students, which indicated that participants perceived the program to be highly valuable needing only minor modifications. For example, the findings from my data analysis of the transcripts indicated that students would have preferred hybrid-type training during the DE program.

Interpretations and Implications

In Piaget's view of constructivism, the theory from which this research was founded, participants have different stages of interest and achievement in a matter dependent on their thinking which evolves over time (Ackermann, 2001). Stated another way, all humans have worldviews that can be influenced, depending on circumstances and how those conditions influence their current ideologies. Ackermann (2001) stated, "To Piaget, knowledge is not information to be delivered at one end, and encoded, memorized, retrieved, and applied at the other end. Instead, knowledge is experience that is acquired through interaction with the world, people and things" (p. 3). In this research, capturing what was common among the experiences of students who participated in dual enrollment provided a window into the DE program and its efficacy as a college-preparatory process. While discussing Vygotsky interpretation of consciousness, Liu and Matthews (2005) stated, "Consciousness is not the ability of an individual to know all the ontological answers to the universe, rather, it is the ability to perceive meaningfully" (p. 394). In this study, the participants brought their own prior knowledge into the DE program and made new meaning based on their experiences. All of these factors played a role in the conceptual framework of this study. Using the constructivist theory as a conceptual framework (Ackermann, 2001), this study incorporated the phenomenological approach to research.

Theme 1: Lack of Program Awareness

The first core theme that emerged among participant statements was a lack of program awareness. There were four invariant constituents or subthemes that were identified and fundamental to the first theme. The subthemes included: (a) Fear of the unknown (2 of 6 participants); (b) Lack of information on DE coursework (4 of 6 participants); (c); Dual-enrollment program was not advertised enough (5 of 6 participants); and (d) Improved understanding of credits (3 of 6 participants). Although participants in this study were enrolled in dual enrollment during their final year(s) of high school, they perceived that information about the program was not readily available regarding its coursework, associated credits, and/or its plausibility as a path to college. Student Five described her dual-enrollment program in high school as an “amazing opportunity,” but upon reflection, she would have preferred more information. She stated, “It wasn’t like a secret but it wasn’t broadcasted. Since this was such a cool opportunity, it wasn’t emphasized enough.” The following subthemes highlight areas participants of this research believe would improve the DE program. Participants perceived that the dual-enrollment program helped them gain the critical skills, support, and level of knowledge they needed to prepare for college; however, these subthemes represent ideas for improved delivery systems.

Subtheme 1: Fear of the unknown. Students who plan to attend a post-secondary institution are curious about what the college environment will be like. There is a natural curiosity that builds as students work through their senior year in high school, drawing ever closer to college. That said, it makes sense that many of these students rely on the best data available to hopefully assuage some of their concerns about the unknowns. Shanley and Johnston (2008) stated, “There’s this little secret college-bound and first-year college students outwardly

deny: They are scared sick about going off to college” (p. 3). Upon reflection of their own lived experiences in high school, some of my study participants expressed similar emotions about preparation for college. When asked to describe how she derived meaning from her college-level coursework after participating in the dual-enrollment program, Student Four paused for a moment then responded by stating, “I went in thinking it was going to be really difficult and sort of thrown at you.” However, Student Four’s perception about the program changed after she spent some time in the program. In Student Four’s case, her change in perception happened through her DE instructors. She stated, “The [dual-enrollment] classes I took, the teachers were always willing to help and explain everything. They didn’t just throw things at you and expect you to understand.” Student Two also expressed some *fear of the unknown* in her perception of the DE program prior to participation. She stated, “I think I was probably pretty intimidated by it or I thought it was going to be a big jump from high school to college. I thought there was going to be a big difference, maybe?”

In research similar to this study, Lewis (2009) interviewed twenty-one first-time college students as part of a purposeful sampling of student experience in a dual-enrollment (DE) program. In her phenomenological study, Lewis (2009) wanted to ascertain the impact of dual enrollment participation on transition into a state university. She stated that many students were able to gain confidence in their ability to navigate college. Lewis’s (2009) participants expressed specific DE outcomes, such as “confidence in their ability to handle the workload, participate in more classes, and communicate more effectively with the professors” (p. 75). The responses indicated that Lewis’s study participants were concerned about these issues prior to enrollment in a dual-enrollment program. However, some of Lewis’s participants perceived that DE did not prepare them for college in a meaningful way. For example, one student stated, “Dual enrollment

did not really prepare me for coming to a university. It only prepared me with staying organized and learning how to budget my time with college courses” (Lewis, 2009, p. 73).

Subtheme 2: Lack of information on DE coursework. High school students should be fully informed about programs or courses in which they participate. The Oregon Transfer Degree (OTM) program is one such educational program that requires a comprehensive understanding of its courses and requirements. The OTM is available to high school and college students throughout much of Oregon and provides a one-year curriculum for students who want to transfer to another Oregon community college or university prior to completing a two-year degree (Rogue Community College, n.d.). The program is also available to some Oregon high school students who participate in a dual-enrollment program and want to get a head start on college. Students who participated in this research while they were dually enrolled in high school did so under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella. However, four of the respondents perceived that more information was needed on the dual-enrollment program, and its association with the OTM, prior to enrollment. More specifically, participants felt that they needed more information about dual enrollment prior to taking coursework within the program. For example, Student One in this study stated, “Maybe to have some [college] people to come in and talk more specifically about these programs. Whether it’s talking about the courses or just talking about the dual-enrollment program making sure it’s better understood.” Nearly all of the subjects in this research (4 of 6 participants) perceived that information about the program was minimal prior to participation. With a sharp view on the conceptual framework of constructivism, this research held in high regard the experiences and perceptions of its participants. For Piaget, “knowledge and the world are both constructed and reconstructed through personal experience. Each gains existence and form through the construction of the other” (Ackerman, 2001, p. 7). In the case of

high school students who participated in dual enrollment (under the OTM), as the students enrolled, participated, and graduated from DE, they constructed meaning about the program through their own learned experience. Their personal *meaning* about the dual-enrollment program evolved with each passing day in regard to its coursework and associated expectations.

Subtheme 3: Dual-enrollment program not advertised enough. In the third subtheme of Theme 1, nearly all of the study participants (5 of 6 participants) believed the program was not advertised sufficiently. More specifically, prior to participating in the dual-enrollment (DE) program, students felt they did not have enough information about the DE program, its courses, or anything else related to it. Research is available that demonstrates the establishment of support systems for students prior to and during participation in a dual-enrollment course (Piontek, Kannapel, Flory, & Stewart, 2016; Barnett & Stamm, 2010) helps to contribute to the success of students.

In her phenomenological study, Smith (2015) found that accelerated learning opportunities, such as participation in a dual-enrollment (DE) program, could be beneficial as a preparatory path for college. The purpose of Smith's (2015) study was to investigate student perceptions about their preparation for college because of participation in a DE program. Similar to this study, participants of Smith's (2015) research were college students who were asked to share their perspectives about their experience and how the DE program helped them prepare for college. The majority of students, or five out of six of the participants, considered their experience in dual enrollment as "very good" (p. 46). Among other benefits, respondents believed the program gave them, "better college preparation" (p. 46) than students who did not participate in the program. Lerner and Brand (2006) indicated that through participation in dual-enrollment programs, students experience a clearer vision on the expectations of college

academics. As part of the broader vision on the requirements of college, Oregon high school students should have the information they need about participation in dual enrollment.

Communication of the DE program and its benefits to all students at the local high school could be done through homeroom teachers, intercom announcements, flyers, the student newspaper, and any other viable resource to help inform students about the benefits of taking college courses early.

Subtheme 4: Improved understanding of DE credits. In the fourth subtheme of Theme 1, three of the participants expressed concern that they did not understand how the dual credits were actually earned. For example, Student Six stated about the college credits, “But [I] didn’t really get the grasp of what it [was] we were getting [with the college credits] until it was like farther down the road and it was like this is amazing!” The idea of earning dual credit seems like an obtainable concept; however, many high school students do not get the gist of what is at stake. Piontek, Kannapel, Flory, and Stewart (2016) defined a dual-credit program as, “A type of dual enrollment [*sic*] program in which a student receives course credit from both the high school and postsecondary institution for the same course” (p. 2). As a subtheme of lack of program awareness, students simply expressed a desire to know more about how these credits are distributed and applied through an appropriate communication process.

Theme 2: A need for Hybrid Coursework

In the second core theme discovered during the in-depth interviews of first-year college students, some participants expressed concern about the need for hybrid-type coursework within the dual-enrollment (DE) program. Enrolling in a hybrid class at a postsecondary institution means that students enroll in a specific course that is both in-class and online. For example, a student might enroll in an Introduction to Business course, which requires that he or she attend a

brick-and-mortar classroom twice a week. However, that same course may require students to take a weekly online quiz. Therefore, the course is referred to as hybrid. The move to offer hybrid-type classes has become increasingly common at colleges and universities around the United States (Palmer et al., 2014). One advantage for students who participate in online learning within the hybrid context is that students can fulfill class requirements at their own convenience since online requirements are usually asynchronous. That is, students may fulfill their away-from-class requirements at their own pace and convenience (El Mansour & Mupinga, 2007). Since these types of classes have become increasingly common (Davies, Cotton, & Korte, 2016), it stands to reason that high school students become acclimated to this type of academic learning opportunity prior to entering college. Early college administrators, such as those individuals who lead the DE program under the Oregon Transfer Module, have options to help prepare students in this regard for college. One example is to implement hybrid training during orientation sessions. Administrators might also consider including a hybrid component in the dual-enrollment program itself. If that is the case, students would also be able to create a *community of scholars* so that students can stay in touch after high school to answer each other's questions. This process would be accomplished through the Blackboard Learn Collaboration option, in one example.

Subtheme 1: Hybrid platforms used in college. Online learning opportunities have continued to grow as colleges and universities increasingly rely on the Internet to make courses available to a wide range of student populations. Post-secondary institutions in the United States have been transitioning from the brick-and-mortar classroom environment to provide additional learning options such as fully online or a combination of online and in the classroom (hybrid) in order to maintain a competitive edge in a changing educational environment (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017), in the fall of

2014, there were 5,750,417 students enrolled in online courses at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. From that population, 2,824,334 of the students were considered in a *hybrid* program since they were taking courses both online and in the traditional classroom. Increasingly, many students are favoring the hybrid-learning scenario above the face-to-face or online-only options for attending college (Olson, 2003). While discussing her results on student perceptions of hybrid classes, Olson (2003) stated that the majority of students now prefer taking classes that are designed with a hybrid component, rather than the traditional face-to-face class. Olsen (2003) cited convenience, increased time for other activities, and not having to meet in classroom regularly.

After reflecting on their lived experiences in a dual-enrollment program, participants in this study identified a need for some type of hybrid learning environment at the high school level to help students be better prepared for college. Two of the participants in the research, stated that hybrid courses are commonplace at the college level. The same two students also indicated that while they participated in their dual-enrollment program in high school, computer technology was integrated into the process. Student Three, specifically, articulated the need for improve college preparation through learning the hybrid environment while in high school.

Definitely create hybrid classes in high school...in high school; everything was paper, paper, paper. I would recommend setting up the college website, we did Blackboard [a virtual course management system] so set up Blackboard in local high schools so they learn how to use it or a form of it.

Student Six expressed a similar concern about going into college without having some hybrid-type learning experience by stating, "That was a little tricky to figure out." Since two of participants in this research expressed some concern about hybrid learning environments during

their first year of college, it makes sense that dual-enrollment administrators consider incorporating that type of learning environment into the dual-enrollment process. For high schools that have not already incorporated a hybrid component into their dual-enrollment program, the implication of this study is that they should consider implementing this type of learning opportunity so their dual-enrollment students would be even better prepared for the academic challenges of college.

Subtheme 2: Using technology in the DE classroom. During the individual interviews of this research, four of six of the participants referred to their dual-enrollment program as technology-based. More specifically, four of the first-year college students who participated in this study referred to how computers were integrated into their dual-enrollment program. Student One stated:

It was a strange classroom setup in that everyone was at [his or her] own computer in this big classroom and then they would talk about the work we are doing for the day and they let you do it. It was very independent but they ran it and made sure everything was running smoothly and had a big impact.

In their research on meaningful integration of technology into the classroom, Baker and Willis (2016) stated, “Simply putting technologies in classrooms is not a guarantee that those technologies will be effectively integrated into transformative teaching and learning processes” (p. 57). In the high school dual-enrollment classroom, technology exists for students working their way through the dual-enrollment program. An integration of a virtual course management system, such as Blackboard, Moodle, or some other similar online learning technological environment, would be one effective way to transform dual enrollment students’ preparation for the college environment.

Theme 3: Teaching Style of DE Instructors.

The third core theme identified from common participant statements related to the teaching style of dual-enrollment (DE) instructors. In total, 5 of the 6 participants referred to their DE instructors after reflecting on their lived experience in the program. Participants in this research were impressed by the dedication of their DE instructors and how they engaged in the process. In her research about the lived experiences of high school instructors teaching dual-enrollment courses, Exby (2014) discussed the *duty* and *honor* of being a concurrent-enrollment instructor. She stated that the teachers believed they had a “duty to meet the instructional quality expectations of the college curriculum and the college’s academic department” (p. 105). The author also stated that participants in her research took *pride* in their role as instructors of dual-enrollment courses. According to the participants of my study, it is the same type of commitment they discovered of instructors in their program under the Oregon Transfer Module. Several subthemes were identified related to the teaching style of DE instructors which included: (a) DE Instructors Linked Real-World Application; (b) DE Instructors were More Engaged than Non-DE Instructors; (c) DE Instructors Talked More About College; (d) DE Instructors Cared More That Students Learn Material; and (e) DE Instructors had In-Depth Understanding of Content.

Subtheme 1: DE instructors linked real-world application. Two of the participants in my study posited that their dual-enrollment (DE) instructors linked real-world application in their personal teaching style. In their article on task-centered learning, Francom and Gardner (2014) discussed the significance of centering learning on real-world tasks. Drawing partly on the constructivist epistemology, Francom and Gardner (2014) suggested that learners ultimately “construct their own knowledge based on their experiences solving complex tasks” (p. 28). In other words, the current learning process should involve an opportunity for students to construct

new meaning, while relying on what has already become known to them through specific experiences. While discussing his DE instructors, Student Six in my research stated, “They knew these were skills that were actually going to stick with [students] post graduation. There was a lot more fulfillment for them and I feel like they got more personal joy for being good at it.”

Participants in my research stated DE environment at high school made them think more about college and its purpose in preparing them for the *real world*. In one sense, through comparing his DE instructors with his non-DE instructors, Student Six was intimating that non-DE instructors would benefit their students’ long-term success a great deal by adopting the same type of real-world teaching approach and philosophy.

Subtheme 2: DE instructors more engaged than non-DE instructors. In the second subtheme of Theme 3, a large percentage of participants (5 of 6) believed that their dual-enrollment (DE) instructors were more engaged than their non-DE instructors. That is, the participants believed their DE instructors were fully committed to the long-term success of their students in helping them prepare for college and its academic challenges. Student Four, for example, was asked to describe her experiences in the dual-enrollment program. The question was open-ended and provided an opportunity for the participant to share anything significant she remembered about the program. Similar to other questions posed to her during the interview, she immediately drew my attention to her DE instructors’ level of commitment with their students. She stated that her teachers were “very passionate” about what they were doing and wanted their students to fully understand the material. However, Student Four’s experience with her non-dual enrollment was different. She stated that they would “kind of shove you along and expect you to keep going.”

According to Kelly and Zhang (2016), the supportive student-teacher relationship fosters increased levels of engagement and ultimately improved student-achievement levels. The participants in this study overwhelmingly indicated positive experiences related to their DE instructors over their non-DE instructors. This researcher does not presuppose that non-DE instructors are less caring about their students' success and should thereby remodel their teaching approach to mimic the styles of DE-instructors. However, there is evidence that including real-world application as an integrated approach can help in preparing students for college (Walters, Green, Goldsby, Walters, & Wang, 2016).

Subtheme 3: DE instructors talked more about college. Two of the six participants in this study stated that their early college instructors talked more about college than their non-DE instructors. College was not only emphasized as an important *next step* on students' educational journey, the DE instructors integrated lessons to teach specific skill sets appropriate to life beyond high school. In their presentation, McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) talked about a template for creating a high school environment where college is a reasonable goal for students. McClafferty et al., (2002) stated that many families with high school-aged children do not emphasize attending college because they simply do not know much about it or why it is important. In 1997, UCLA partnered with The Achievement Council, and a group of 24 local schools, to launch the Creating a College Culture Project. The primary goal of the group was to make certain that schools "devote energy, time, and resources toward college preparation so that all students are prepared for a full range of postsecondary options upon graduation" (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Especially since some parents and guardians do not talk about college to their children, it seems important that high school teachers bring up the subject whenever reasonable. Upon reflection, participants in this study remembered that their

DE instructors talked a lot about college. One implication of this subtheme, at least according to the McClafferty et al. (2002) logic, is that all high school teachers should consider broaching the postsecondary conversation on a regular basis if they are not already doing so.

Subtheme 4: DE instructors cared more that students learn material. Three of the six participants in this research study indicated that their dual-enrollment (DE) instructors cared more that they learned the material than their non-DE instructors. One participant in particular, Student Four, talked a great deal about her DE instructors and made it very clear during the interview that they were the “big difference” in her success throughout the dual-enrollment program. She stated that her DE instructors were very focused on their students and that they learned the course material well. Brophy (2013) stated, “When the new learning is complex, the construction of meaning required to develop clear understanding of it takes time and is facilitated by the interactive discourse that occurs during lessons and activities” (p. 33). Brophy’s (2013) constructivist approach provides an interpretation of ideas for students as they interact in their world and environment. According to participants in this research, DE instructors cared deeply that their students learn the material and provided an atmosphere conducive to the interactive learning process. The implication for this subtheme is that non-DE instructors should care as much as the DE instructors about their students learning the material thereby better preparing them for college. However, since *caring more that students learn material* is difficult to quantify, perhaps non-DE instructors could begin by incorporating certain DE practices, such as connecting lessons with real-world application, if they have not already done so.

Subtheme 5: DE instructors had in-depth understanding of the content. In the last subtheme of teaching style of the DE instructors, four of six participants stated that their dual-enrollment instructors had an in-depth understanding of the content. That is, they were diligent in

their presentation of the coursework and provided details on content that was meaningful to the students. In Smith's (2015) research, she studied the impact of dual enrollment experiences on high school students in a summer residency program. In the research, high school students evaluated their experiences completing college courses in a 2-week long program. According to Smith (2015), the program was meant to provide academic rigor where students were expected to learn at higher levels compared to their regular classroom experiences. Further, administrators hoped that the program would give the students a sense that they were better prepared to navigate the postsecondary environment and the rigors of college. In their responses, 16 participants in the research (over half) stated they had a very positive experience related to the program's academic component. One participant stated, "I liked most of the hard work." Another participant said, "They saw our true potential and made sure we knew we could reach that potential." A third participant stated, "The program also let us discover our strengths and weaknesses, but more importantly the program helped us strengthen our weaknesses." One possible implication of this subtheme to the *teaching style of DE instructors* is that regular classroom teachers (non-DE instructors) not only know the material they are teaching very well, but also provide rigorous and challenging learning opportunities for their students in a way that connects to real-world themes.

Theme 4: Difficulty of Coursework Within the DE Program

In the fourth core theme discovered during the in-depth interviews of first-year college students, some participants discussed the difficulty of coursework within the dual-enrollment (DE) program. Three of the participants in this research stated that prior to taking part in dual enrollment they were "intimidated" by the academic challenges of the college-level coursework within the program. For example, participants felt the coursework would be a "jump" from what they were used to at the high school level. Hecklau (2017) stated that anxiety about the

unknowns is common among students who are preparing for college. According to Hecklau's (2017) logic, high school students preparing to take post-secondary coursework would be especially prone to intimidation about whether they would be able to handle the academic requirements. The implication for students of future dual-enrollment opportunities is that a process of remediation should be in place to help students be encouraged about their participation in the program. The subthemes related to difficulty of coursework within the DE program included: (a) DE Participants were Intimidated by the Coursework; (b) DE Coursework was Manageable; and (c) DE Coursework Might be Excessive.

Subtheme 1: DE participants were intimidated by the coursework. In the first subtheme of Theme 4, difficulty of coursework within the DE program, four of the six participants indicated that they were intimidated in some way with the DE program, and its coursework requirements, prior to enrolling. The students were unable to make their own personal meaning about the program prior to participating. Adler stated that students often experience high levels of stress related to their studies at the college level (Gateway, 2017). One can only imagine that high school students have similar types of physiological responses when they consider participating in a dual-enrollment program and its corresponding coursework requirements.

The crux of this subtheme is that students were simply concerned about what the college-level coursework would be like and whether they would be able to handle it. However, once the students were enrolled in the program, their concerns were alleviated through "focused instructors" (Student Four) who cared deeply that they learned the material. One consideration is that these same DE instructors convey the program and its benefits to future DE students prior to their participation. Student One stated, "Maybe to have some RCC people to come in and talk

more specifically about these programs. Whether it's talking about the courses or just talking about the dual enrollment program making sure it's better understood." One aspect of this program overview from DE instructors should cover detail about the coursework, itself. Mosely (2016) discovered in her research the significance of personal relationships between students and college-level faculty and how those relationships played a key role in students' success at college.

Subtheme 2: DE coursework was manageable. In the second subtheme of Theme 4, difficulty of coursework within the DE program, four of the six participants stated after reflecting on their lived experience that the coursework was manageable. In fact, Student Six confidently stated, "There was nothing particularly difficulty [*sic*]...most things I had issues with were very minor." In a similar response, Student Four stated, "I expected to work really hard and, while I did, it wasn't an overload of work. It was reasonable." Finding the right balance in an early college program that provides both rigor and acceptable success rates for student participants is not always an easy task. While discussing the challenges of college-level coursework, Walsh (2016) stated, "High school graduates expect college to be challenging and interesting, and we have an obligation to offer experiences...that will serve them well in an unknown future" (p. 40). The implication in this study is that the right balance may have been met in regard to how challenging the coursework was for students. More specifically, some of the participants in this research study (4 of 6 students) believed the coursework was manageable. However, other participants (2 of 6 students) stated the coursework might have been excessive. If the responses were inverse, four of six students stating the coursework might have been excessive, then perhaps that would have been the case.

Subtheme 3: DE coursework might be excessive. In the third, and final, subtheme of Theme 4, difficulty of coursework within the DE program, two of the participants stated after reflecting on their experience that the coursework might have been excessive. That is, in their responses, the students indicated that the coursework seemed “overwhelming” and “maybe it was a little too intense.” However, given that academic rigor is a significant factor in successful educational programs (Saultz & Saultz, 2017), one might consider the coursework completed by participants of this study to be about right. In other words, since most of the participants of this research (4 out of 6) believed the coursework to be manageable, then perhaps its rigor is applied correctly.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

College-preparatory-programs, such as dual enrollment, are meant to provide high school students the best possible path to academic success as they prepare for college. As the number of high school students who participate in early college coursework continues to grow (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2015; An & Taylor, 2015), statistics show that, if designed well, dual-enrollment (DE) programs can help students better prepare for college (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009).

This study sought to understand the perceptions of first-year college students who participated in a dual-enrollment (DE) program under the Oregon Transfer Module. I investigated how these students derived meaning prior to, during, and after their academic experience in the program and how that meaning affected their preparation for college. I chose the phenomenological research design because it fit well with my desire to gain first-hand accounts from students on their lived experience in the program.

Common themes emerged from this phenomenological study that aligned with conclusions found in other research on participation in dual enrollment (DE). Participants stated that DE would reduce the amount of time it would take them to earn their degree (Westcott, 2009). They also discussed how DE would save money on the overall cost of tuition (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and would improve their momentum going into college (Robinson, 2011). In this section, I will discuss how the results of my study relate to the community of practice (educational community), to other literature, and to the community of scholars.

Relationship to the Community of Practice

The K-12 educational community, along with parents and other stakeholders in the process, have a responsibility to ensure that students are academically prepared for college when they graduate from high school. Dual enrollment (DE) is one program that has shown promise in helping high school students prepare for the postsecondary environment and its challenges. This study demonstrated that a dual-enrollment program, under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM), was not only an effective preparatory mechanism for students' academic success, but also a means for acquiring the critical skills, support, and level of knowledge necessary for that success. The implication for educators, leaders of the dual-enrollment program under the OTM, is that it is possible to improve upon an already successful early-college preparatory program. This research project demonstrated that improved communications strategies can prove beneficial in further preparing students for the challenges of college. Conley (2010) stated that schools with successful DE programs should have an orientation process in place that appropriately outlines all expectations and structure of college courses, how to take notes in a college-type setting, and additional study strategies. This study also demonstrated that additional considerations might provide even more improvement on an already successful program.

This research demonstrated that although dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) is an effective way for high school students to prepare for college, there are specific strategies that can be incorporated into the program, which can help students become even better prepared. The findings in this study had similar outcomes to other research on how participating in a dual-enrollment (DE) program can help students reduce time to earning their degree (Westcott, 2009), provide a savings on overall tuition costs (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and improve momentum going into college (Robinson, 2011).

This research also revealed specific mechanisms for improving coursework delivery systems, which would contribute to the academic success of students in the program. Barnett (2016) stated, “We propose that high schools and colleges co-design, co-deliver, and co-validate a series of interventions to help students in the transition from high school to college” (p. 16). This research provided at least some intervention strategies, through communication and course-delivery methods that might help high school students become more prepared for the postsecondary environment and its academic challenges. To that end, it is essential the administrators at both the high school and college levels work in concert to provide the best possible opportunities for students as they move forward in their educational pursuits (Conley, 2010).

Relationship to the Literature

The literature was mostly focused on how to better prepare high school students for the college environment as an early intervention strategy. As early as 1991, Congress considered how to incorporate an early intervention effort as part of several programs being analyzed in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (DeLoughry, 1991). Early college programs had already been available; however, educators and policy makers wanted to facilitate programs that

would increase synergy for students moving from high school to the postsecondary environment. They wanted to make sure students were prepared for the academic challenges of college (Conley, 2010).

Dual-enrollment (DE) programs have expanded to serve more student populations, such as minority students or those at risk of dropping out of high school (Kim, Kirby, & Bragg, 2006). Since the late 1990s, DE programs have evolved and are now available, in one form or another, in each of the fifty states. The scholarly literature on dual enrollment has increased exponentially since the early part of the 21st century. Most of the current literature corroborated by this study showed the benefits of DE participation, such as less time to earn one's degree (Hughes, 2016; Westcott, 2009), saving money on the overall cost of tuition (An, 2013, Hoffman et al, 2008; Hofmann, 2012; Lewis & Overman, 2008; Hughes, 2016; and Venezia & Jaeger, 2013), and increased college persistence/momentum (Formen, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Wang, Chan, Phelps, & Washbon, 2015). Additional common themes found in the literature included participants being more likely to enter college and more likely to enter college full time (Karp & Hughes, 2008). Further, participants of DE program were more likely to graduate from high school and earn higher grades in college (An, 2012).

This study was rooted in extant literature and the findings corroborated evidence found in previous work, as stated above. However, additional themes emerged that specifically highlighted approaches participants believed could enhance the program and potentially provide improved academic success for recipients as they progress into college. In this study, the unique themes that emerged were specific to a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer module umbrella. However, other early college programs may benefit from the participants' statements in seeking ways to improve upon their own early college delivery methods. Subjects

in this research believed that students eligible to participate in specific early college programs should be made completely aware of those programs and their benefits. Participants were also highly impressed by the teaching methods of their dual-enrollment instructors compared with their non-dual enrollment instructors. Lastly, participants in this study recommended an additional learning tool by way of technology. That is, two of the six participants believed it would be helpful to institute a hybrid course at some point during the program.

Relationship to the Community of Scholars

Academic studies related to dual-enrollment participation and how it affects students' preparation for college have been readily available in recent years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), by the turn of the 21st century, during the 2001-02 academic school year, there were an estimated 1.2 million students enrolled in dual-credit courses. That enrollment number increased to about 1.8 million by 2005, and swelled to over 2 million by 2013 (NCES, 2013). Zalaznick (2015) referred to dual-credit opportunities as “a taste of college” (p. 46) by means of earning college credits during the high school years. That *taste of college*, referred to by Zalaznick (2015), helps define what college will actually be like for high school students wondering about their academic future. Dual-credit opportunities in high school enlighten students on how college-level courses are constructed, the expectations of postsecondary instructors, and help create persistence/momentum moving forward (Formen, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Wang, Chan, Phelps, & Washbon, 2015).

Dual-credit course opportunities have existed for several years (Andrews & Marshall, 1991; Mokher & McLendon, 2009) and are generally viewed as a viable strategy for college readiness. A growing body of literature has emerged, especially since the turn of the 21st century, that shows students who participate in dual enrollment outperform students who do not

participate in dual enrollment as a means for college preparation (Giani, Alexander & Reyes, 2014). Some of the key findings related to participation in dual enrollment (DE) include:

- More likely to be successful in college, including completing a bachelor's degree in a more timely manner.
- As likely to earn a grade of B or higher in subsequent courses taken in college.
- Those entering college with a greater number of dual-credit hours are more likely to progress toward a degree and complete a bachelor's degree in a timely manner, and they do so without accumulating a substantially greater number of credit hours by graduation. (Radunzel, Noble, & Wheeler, 2014)

Further, Radunzel et al., (2014) concluded that students who obtain more dual-credit hours seem to have a higher bachelor's degree completion rate. The overall consensus of the Radunzel et al. (2014) research was that college success rates were higher for students entering college with dual credit.

The results of this study interconnect with other research since they demonstrated that students who participate in dual enrollment may reap the benefits of reducing time to degree (Hughes, 2016; Westcott, 2009), saving on tuition costs through college (An, 2013, Hoffman et al, 2008; Hofmann, 2012; Lewis & Overman, 2008; Hughes, 2016; and Venezia & Jaeger, 2013), and gaining persistence/momentum in the long run (Formen, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Wang, Chan, Phelps, & Washbon, 2015). The emergent themes of this phenomenological work may provide additional ideas for the community of educators, researchers, and scholars, about how best to approach DE program communication strategies. Further, inherent within the findings of this study are specific DE instructor approaches, which may serve as a reference for non-DE

instructor methodologies. Lastly, this research may serve as a reference in determining additional strategies for course delivery systems, such as Blackboard Learn.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a community college in Oregon with a total annual enrollment of 16,420 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Within the total population of students, 4,559 were considered full-time equivalent during the 2015–16 academic school year. The partnering high schools in this study worked in cooperation with the study site, a community college in Oregon, in order to help prepare their students for academic success in college. In order to qualify for participation in this study, participants had to be first-year college students (35 credits or less) who participated in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module (OTM) program during the 2014–15 academic school year. As an integral part of this phenomenological study, a purposeful sampling of students was selected from an early college credit database at the study site. According to Creswell (2013) purposeful sampling can “inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). Along with the director of educational partnerships at the study site, I was able to identify 700 potential candidates in the research who qualified with the parameters stated above.

From the list of 700 students who qualified as first-year college students, who were enrolled in dual-enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module, six students agreed to participate in this study. Although four attempts were made to increase the sample size, including an offer of a 20-dollar coffee gift card for taking part in the study, the participation was six students out of the potential 700 participants. In a phenomenological study, Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that between 5 and 25 individuals, who have all experienced the phenomenon, take part on the study. Although permission was given by the Vice President of Education at the study site to

include up to 10 participants, the low end of Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation (6 participants) was the final outcome.

The scope of this investigation was narrow, since data were gathered primarily through in-depth interviews of participants. However, the open-ended nature of the interview questions allowed for themes to emerge from among participants in the study. During each of the individual interviews with participants, I incorporated Rubin and Rubin's (2005) approach, which involved follow up questions, or *probe questions*, related to elaboration and clarification, following each primary question. Since this was a phenomenological study, triangulation, or a corroborating of evidence, was accomplished through having two interviews with each participant. The potential for bias in this research was present in that the study included the professional role of the researcher. That is, as a community college instructor, one who is familiar with the basic constructs of the dual enrollment process, and one who has had dually enrolled students in his courses, I had the potential for bias. To that end, the researcher took steps to enhance credibility through the process of *bracketing* to reduce bias and any prejudgments that might have existed (Creswell, 2013).

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

In this phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of six individuals who participated in an early college program in Oregon. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to find out what students had in common in regard to their participation in a dual-enrollment (DE) program and how that effort may have prepared them for college. This research was founded in the philosophical tradition of constructivism referred to by Schwandt (2000) as "an ethic of closeness, of care, of proximity, or of relatedness" (p. 204). To that end, an investigation into how first-year college students derived meaning from their experience in dual-enrollment

was appropriate in providing information on any successes and/or challenges of the program. As I developed the conceptual framework for this dissertation, I was mindful of how this research might produce a “grasp of the very nature of a thing,” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177) or a specific phenomenon, related to student experience in the DE program. Constructivism, as an interpretive framework for this study, provided a schema from which themes were allowed to emerge from among participants, incorporating a complexity of views (Creswell, 2013).

The implications of the results in this research provide an opportunity for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers, to review its outcomes and determine if they will provide sensible options to improve on the long-term academic success of students. One of the most important aspects of this research is that it deals with student perceptions about their experience in dual enrollment. Among the emerging themes during the data collection process in this study were that some students (4 of 6 participants) believed that administrators did not provide enough information on coursework, did not advertise the program enough, and did not explain sufficiently the implications of earning dual credit. Dual-enrollment administrators have significant influence on the success of students within their programs. Students who participate in a dual-enrollment program are recipients of how that program operates, the academic requirements of individual courses, and all other expectations of its administrators. Moreover, dual-enrollment participants, such as those individuals in the current study, provide an excellent resource on how to improve program delivery methods. Thiessen (2006) discussed the significance of student perspective and how they are increasingly being called upon because they are credible as part of the conversation on school policies and practices. In this research, the dual-enrollment participants were *called upon* due to their unique perspective and experience in the program under the Oregon transfer Module.

The intention of dual-enrollment courses is multi-faceted, with a major goal that students are prepared for the postsecondary environment (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). This study sought to find out if students who participated in a dual-enrollment program (under the Oregon Transfer Module umbrella) were academically prepared with the critical skills, support, and level of knowledge they needed to be successful at their first year of college. The resounding answer from students in this research was that they believed they were academically prepared for college by participating in their program. In summary, the findings of this research appear to align with conclusions found in other research (An, 2015; Hofman, 2012; Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2013). That is, participants in dual-enrollment programs are more likely to earn their degree sooner (Westcott, 2009), save money on the overall cost of tuition (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009), and gain momentum going into college (Robinson, 2011). Participants of this research also indicated that an aspect of hybrid coursework within a dual-enrollment program would also be beneficial in helping students be better prepared for college. However, according to the current study, practitioners, policy makers, and researchers, may discover improved avenues for conveying the whole of their program.

Recommendations for Further Research

Early college programs, such as dual enrollment (DE), have been an emerging field of study since the turn of the 21st century (Marken, Gray & Lewis, 2013). Although research has become increasingly available about early college programs, educators, legislators, and other stakeholders, might benefit from further studies that help improve programs and make students even more college ready than they might have been. The findings of this phenomenological study demonstrated that high school students were highly satisfied with their participation in a dual-enrollment program under the Oregon Transfer Module, and how that experience affected

their academic preparation for college. Future projects that include a larger sample size could provide even more credibility in the findings. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that phenomenological studies be comprised of between 5 and 25 participants who have all experienced a phenomenon. While the current study lies within Polkinghorne's recommendation, it falls at the minimal side of the spectrum. Research that includes more participants might be helpful in investigating how students derived meaning from their early college program, and the successes and/or challenges associated with it. This study provided meaningful data on student perspectives and demonstrated that participants were willing to share their thoughts and ideas on how to improve upon a successful dual-enrollment program. Further research on how to promote and create awareness about dual enrollment participation, courses within this type of program, and how all students might benefit seems appropriate. Additional research that takes into consideration specific course delivery methods, such as hybrid-type course environments might also prove helpful in making students college ready.

Conclusion

This doctoral research study at a community college in Oregon proved successful in identifying the following attributes: it demonstrated that participation in a current dual-enrollment program (under the Oregon Transfer Module) can be highly beneficial in academically preparing high school students for college; that the teaching style of dual enrollment instructors is preferred over non-dual enrollment instructors; that greater awareness about the overall program and its course requirements is essential; and that early exposure to hybrid-type coursework would prove beneficial. Because the methodology of this research took into account the common meaning of several individuals on their lived experiences in dual enrollment, the identification of phenomenon took place through emerging themes (Creswell,

2013). This study was unique because it incorporated a specific Oregon program with the full cooperation of administrators desirous of the best possible outcomes for their dual enrollment participants. In fact, due to the nature of the phenomenological approach to research, administrators at the Oregon community college where this study took place now have a credible resource on how they might provide even more synchronicity in their program. The participants of this research study overwhelmingly concluded (6 of 6 participants) that their dual-enrollment (DE) program helped them prepare with the critical skills, support, and level of knowledge that they needed to be successful during their first year at college. However, they were able to identify specific challenges in communication and course delivery methods that slightly inhibited their preparation. Those specific challenges were laid out earlier in this chapter.

I was honored that former high school students in this study agreed to give *voice* to the experiences they had within the dual-enrollment program. Their contribution to helping administrators provide an excellent early college program is incalculable.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT 1
Student Interview

Q1. Interviewer

Primary Question: Please describe how you derived meaning about college-level coursework prior to participating in dual enrollment under the Oregon Transfer Module.

Q2. Interviewer

Primary Question: What specific experiences influenced your initial perceptions about college-level coursework?

Q3. Interviewer

Primary Question: Please share why you decided to participate in the dual- enrollment program.

Q4. Interviewer

Primary Question: What were you hoping to gain from the dual-enrollment program?

Q5. Interviewer

Primary Question: Did you glean from the program what you expected?

Q6. Interviewer

Primary question: Please describe how you derived meaning from college-level coursework after participating in the dual-enrollment program.

Q7. Interviewer

Primary question: If your perceptions about college-level coursework changed after participating in the dual enrollment program, what specifically influenced your change in perception?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT 2

Student Interview

Q1. Interviewer

Primary Question: Please describe your experiences in the dual-enrollment program.

Q2. Interviewer

Primary question: What specific academic supports in the dual-enrollment program helped you prepare for college?

Q3. Interviewer

Primary question: What specific academic challenges did you experience while you were enrolled in the dual-enrollment program?

Q4. Interviewer

Primary question: Now that you are in your first year at college, describe any adjustments you had to make that may not have been addressed while you were enrolled in the dual-enrollment program.

Q5. Interviewer

Primary question: What recommendations would you make to improve the dual-enrollment program in which you participated?

Exit Script:

Thank you for your participation in this research project. Your responses will be kept confidential. You can email me if you have any questions or concerns about this study: mkarthur@roguecc.edu.

APPENDIX C:

Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

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Date: April 7, 2017