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# Perceptions of Academic Success and Quality of Life Issues Among Undergraduate University Students

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Perceptions of Academic Success and Quality of Life Issues  
Among Undergraduate University Students

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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  
Educational Leadership, Higher Education Specialization

Heather Miller, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding about the experiences of undergraduate students regarding quality of life and academic success at a midsized Midwestern university. Two research questions drove the study: How do university students perceive quality of life issues as they relate to academic success, and what life experiences are identified as influencing college student's perception of a positive or negative quality of life? Purposeful sampling was used and 11 students volunteered for the study. All were undergraduates in a college of health professions. The data collection instruments were semistructured interviews, secondary semi structured interviews and voluntary journals. The typological analysis approach was used to analyze the data collected from interviews and journals. The key findings were that participants identified four major themes that guided their understanding of quality of life and academic success: (a) purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and quality of life, (b) stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to quality of life and success, (c) relationships with faculty are desired by participants and important to quality of life and academic success, and (d) technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and quality of life. The ability to manage and cope with issues related to the above themes seemed to be related to development of the student, and experience at the university.

*Keywords:* quality of life, academic success, self-determination, life satisfaction, happiness

## **Dedication**

The better you know others, the better you know yourself. Through the fullest sharing of experience, we learn the wisdom of the world. More important still, from the sharing of experience, we learn that every life is unique and precious, that no one is expendable, and with this discovery, we acquire the humility we must have to live our lives well, with grace and with gratitude for the gift of breath (Koontz, 2001, p. 678).

I am deeply grateful for people in my life who taught me to learn no matter what. They taught me I always have a choice in life, and the choice to learn, no matter the circumstances, is always a good bet. Positive and negative seasons in our lives come and go. People come and go, they teach us lessons, and we grow. Qualitative studies are stories and through these stories “we learn the wisdom of the world.” I am thankful for my family, friends, my teachers, and my students. Because of you, I keep learning and becoming. Through your stories, you have taught great lessons. You have taught me strength, openness, and kindness. I have learned about gratefulness and the value in always listening. Thank you teachers, family and students, Thank you friends and colleagues, there are so many people in my world to be thankful for, I am overcome with gratefulness, and urgently wish for more time with each of you.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Many university students are struggling because of academic pressures and novel and unexpected life transitions. Anxiety, lack of social supports, and major life changes can push students to their coping limits (Bucker, Nuraydin, Simonsmeier, Schneider, & Luhmann, 2018; Cavallo, Carpinelli, & Savarese, 2016; Chu, Xu, & Li, 2015). These demands add to stress levels in college students and compound life management abilities. In these tumultuous times, pressures often affect a university student's ability to achieve at the college level. These life changes are often cited as components of quality of life (QoL).

Quality of life, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.), is a broad multidimensional concept that usually includes subjective evaluations of both positive and negative aspects of life. Quality of life, life satisfaction, well-being, and perceived happiness are terms used interchangeably throughout the literature (Emery, Meier & Mortelmans, 2017; Gliilka, Ashby, Matheny, Chung, & Chang, 2015; Joseph, Royse, Benitez, & Pekmezi, 2014; O'Donnell, Chang, & Miller, 2013). Quality of life, happiness, and achievement among college students are linked (Bucker et al., 2018; Leppink, Odlaug, Lust, Christenson, & Grant, 2016; Mortiz, Pereira, de Borba, Clapis, & Gryczak, 2016). Flynn, Del Mar, Valle, Nunez, and Guillermo (2016) found that high levels of stress can negatively affect the quality of student learning and, even more importantly, students' physical and psychological well-being. Bucker et al. (2018) asserted that academic achievement that comes at the expense of a students' well-being is not a full accomplishment. Mortiz et al. (2016) asserted that full-time courses, combined with extracurricular and practical activities can lead to overload, fatigue, and exhaustion. On the other hand, positive physical health, meaningful leisure activities, reciprocal social relationships, and a positive learning environment, among others, contribute to a positive perceived QoL and positive

perspectives on academic achievement (O'Donnell et al., 2013; Oztasan, Ozyrek, & Ibrahim, 2016; Rubin, Evans & Wilkinson, 2016). Understanding the student perspective is critical to identifying both the supports and barriers on the path to academic success.

Understanding a student's perspective of his or her QoL can help faculty support the student's academic achievement. Edvy (2015) designed curriculum changes to support students' QoL in a higher education course; "The course proved that segments of life-coaching, and health education, were determinates in a target groups quality of life" (p. 73). Ideas related to life coaching might lead toward greater comfort, relationship building, and, eventually, academic accomplishment among students. By assessing a student's perspective in different aspects of overall life satisfaction, a faculty member may be able to formulate new strategies to facilitate student outcomes in more effective ways.

Understanding student experiences is also vital because, although numerous quantitative studies have examined measurable levels of anxiety, depression, or stress, few researchers have explored the related perspectives of college students. One student's experience as an undergraduate may be very different than another's, yet quantitative results could describe them similarly. A qualitative approach that details a student's unique perspective may assist educators make choices in academia which provide more supports for the student. For example, a traditional 18-year-old college student, newly graduated from high school and from a middle-class family, may seem to have a college experience frequently lived by other students. However this student may be first generation, suffer from depression, and be located far from home. Covarrubias, Romero, and Trivelli (2015) stated that first-generation students often report achievement guilt and anxiety for surpassing educational accomplishments of other family members. This same college student may suffer from anxiety, lack of supports, and loneliness.

He may describe his QoL as poor. By contrast, a middle-aged veteran, sitting in the same courses as the 18-year-old, managing the duties of a full-time job and parenting, may report less stress than the 18-year-old because her life experiences have helped her cope with life demands. Freire, Del Mar, Valle, Nunez, & Guillermo (2016) argued academic stress does not depend solely upon the existence of an environmental stressor but on how this stressor is perceived by the person and by what resources and strategies he or she uses to cope. Quantitative studies do little to describe the experiences that are unique to each student, whereas qualitative studies provide explanations of the natural and lived experiences of “real people in real settings” (Hatch, 2002, p. 6).

### **Context and Conceptual Framework**

**Context.** Traditional university students are plunged into a foreign and unfamiliar setting. Often this environment is the student’s first experience away from his or her family home, community, and lifelong support systems. This inexperience can often lead to a trial-and-error method of problem solving and coping with life demands. Stress is often high for older adolescents and young adults who leave home for the first extended length of time. Often, they have need for relaxation and relief (Hipp, Gulwadi, Alves, & Sequeira, 2016). A university can be an intimidating and overwhelming environment. The expectations that accompany this setting and the repercussions of failure are also alarming. Students imagine that failure may equal expulsion and then the daunting evaluation of life options ensues.

In addition, the student needs to learn to physically navigate the environment and new social contexts, and establish new relationships with people unlike those in the home setting. Garriot, Hudyma, Keene, and Santiago (2015), as well as Hipp et al. (2016), found loneliness, loss of social status, and unfamiliarity with customs of new places can cause stress. Garriot et al. (2015) reported perceived environmental supports contribute to academic success for new

students. Arslan and Akkas (2014) asserted that satisfaction and access to college academic resources, areas for social interaction, easy walking, and transportation all contribute to overall quality of college life. However, for young students, this community within a community is often poorly negotiated, with academic stress and failure frequently the outcome.

**Conceptual framework.** Social constructivism is often described as interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This worldview distinguishes a perspective where individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meaning is derived from an individual's own unique experiences, and these meanings are often varied and multiple. This leads a researcher toward several complex views, rather than one or two categories of responses. Subjective meaning is derived through interaction with others in a historical and social construct (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Stake, 1995). Meaning is not imprinted on others but formed through interaction with others, hence "social constructivism" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research paradigm is different from post positivism, wherein researchers test theories to find confirming or falsifying evidence. "Social constructivist approaches address the contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). The aim of this approach is to understand or interpret the meanings others have about their environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Social constructivism is a worldview by which to gain insight into the perspectives of undergraduate students. Participants in this study were asked to share opinions, experiences, and perspectives in order to make sense of their own worlds, and draw conclusions based upon their own understandings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In other words, each student has a unique experience, and constructs meaning differently regarding academic success and quality of life.

This perspective is based on interactions and experiences with peers, faculty, and the environment. In addition, university students express different perspectives regarding the attributes that either contribute to a positive, or negative interpretation of life satisfaction. For example, in a study by Pedisic, Greblo, Phongsavan, Milton, and Bauman (2015), alcohol use was seen as positive social support from males at an undergraduate university, while females of the same age at the same university interpreted it as negatively correlated with their quality of life. Because of the subjectivity of these and related topics, and the varied interpretations associated with each, social constructivism was the most appropriate approach for this study.

Social settings are unique, and college campuses often exist with their own culture, subculture, habits, and behaviors. College students often support themselves in an environment that is set apart from the typical community, and so they have an unusual perspective and living experience. Living in dormitories, eating in a central cafeteria, and holding down several part-time jobs are different from the typical experience of other working adults. In addition, there is a dichotomy of extending the school experience while being away from family and being expected to behave like an adult (Pedro, Leitao, & Alves, 2016). This environment affects the perceptions of success, stress, and quality of life, as it influences performance and intellectual development during the experience at that institution (Pedro et al., 2016).

Hatch (2002) stated qualitative studies start with the assumption that social settings are dynamic and complex. Constructivist studies are typically based in a researcher/participant relationship in a natural setting, in this case, their own university, and the methods are such that elicit the unique reality of each participant (Stake, 2005). Social constructivism was also appropriate because of my role as an assistant professor. Thus, understanding student perspectives is critical. According to Hatch (2002) researchers and participants are often drawn

together in the process of co-construction. The researcher and the participant should be mutually engaged in the investigation. My commitment to students and teaching, plus the students' commitment to study and success, binds us in the process of co-construction. This collaboration was strongly suited to social constructivism.

Semistructured interviews and voluntary journaling experiences are the data collection methods recommended for case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I worked with participating students in this study to understand their own perspectives and narratives regarding academic success and QoL I pursued both methods as data collection methods for this study. This approach ultimately informed myself and other educators about stressors, supports, and resources that influence college students, leading to strategies that can have an impact on academic success, retention, or graduation rates among university students. In other words, the participants and I now have a greater understanding of undergraduate experiences related to QoL, and we defined ways to encourage students to make choices toward academic success.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a lack of understanding regarding the perspectives of QoL among undergraduate college students and how QoL affects academic achievement. Numerous quantitative researchers have examined variables associated with QoL and undergraduate students, and some of these studies correlate variables of QoL with academic success (Akin & Akin, 2015; Arslan & Akkas, 2014; Bjelica & Jovanovic, 2016; Goodwin, Behan, Kelly, McCarthy & Horgan, 2016; Hawi, & Samaha, 2017). However, few researchers have explored the student's viewpoint, opinion, or perspective regarding this phenomenon. Identification of the positive attributes of QoL as they relate to supporting academic achievement is important for supporting students in their university endeavors. Conversely, understanding the negative impacts of QoL on academics is crucial so

higher education professionals may identify and assess ways to minimize negative impacts on academic success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding about the experiences of undergraduate students regarding QoL and academic success at the college of health professions at a public, Midwestern state university. QoL, also known as life satisfaction, can be broken into four distinct categories: physical health, social relationships, environmental surroundings, and psychological state (World Health Organization, n.d.). I focused on these four areas in terms of the experience of undergraduate students and how they perceive their own academic achievement.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do university students perceive QoL issues as they relate to academic success?
2. What life experiences are identified as influencing college students' perception of a positive or negative QoL?

### **Significance of the Study**

The ability of undergraduates to perform in the classroom is important to most professors, yet college students report more anxiety, stress, and overall discontent during the course of their undergraduate work. Many scholars (Leppink et al., 2016; Maynard, Rohrer, & Fulton, 2015; Mortiz et al., 2016) have suggested stress during late adolescence and early adulthood negatively affects perspectives of QoL. If negative and positive attributes regarding QoL issues are better understood, strategies to support students may lead toward greater academic success. The attainment of academic success (i.e., retention and graduation,) has the

potential to impact a participant's life in positive ways that affect all of the facets of life. The significance of this study is that by constructing meaning with regard to QoL and academic success, more students may understand their own abilities to make life-altering change.

In addition, an increasing number of students have reported the need for testing accommodations related to anxiety disorders, confessing ideation centered in frustration, mental health issues, and the need for counseling services. Indeed, counseling service requests at many universities have exponentially increased over the last five years (Western Michigan University, n.d.). Almost all of these students report that negative aspects of QoL impact their academic performance. Stress and anxiety are certainly barriers, but other barriers of performance in the classroom also include financial hardship, physical health, social relationships and supports, lack of leisure time, and cognitive status (Britt, Canale, Fernatt, Stutz, & Tibbets, 2015; Dinzeo, Thayasivam, & Sledjeski, 2014; Icaro et al., 2017). In addition, transitions in living, academic pressures, and independence issues present unique situations for the university student (Arslan & Akkas, 2014).

By understanding university students' perspective about their own QoL, administrators and faculty in higher education may be better able to support and eventually improve academic success. The value in this clarification could impact attrition and retention rates, because less anxious, more satisfied and contented students seem to be more confident, have more self-efficacy, and a positive quality of life (Bucker et al., 2018). This, in turn, translates to academic success and a tendency to stay enrolled. Barker, Howard, Galambos, and Wrosch (2016) found that generally happy students showed the greatest improvements in academic success over time. This positive QoL has been shown to have a confirming impact on academic success among university students.

## Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are provided as they apply to the purposes of this study:

*Quality of life:* A broad multidimensional concept that usually includes subjective evaluations of both positive and negative aspects of life. Quality of life is a complex issue, with multidimensional models and definitions. Most scholars do not offer common definitions, however physical, social, emotional and mental health domains are consistently cited, as well as essential domains of spirituality, gender identity, culture, self-care, occupation, and other components (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.; Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Payne, Ainsworth & Godbey, 2017; World Health Organization, n.d.).

*Academic success:* Progress toward a degree at the university level, attainment of entry into a desired program or school, avoiding of academic probation or expulsion, graduation, and/or any combination of the above. Further, success may be defined differently, depending on the student (White, 2015).

*Health-related quality of life:* The contexts of personality, the environment, and aspects of physical health and how they impact perception of life satisfaction (Anye, Gallien, Bian, & Moulton, 2013)

*Self-determination:* The ability to make choices, problem solve, and prioritize effectively and independently in one's life to achieve desired outcomes within one's own contexts (Payne et al., 2017).

*Perceived freedom:* The concept of own identity, where one belongs in the world, and how one feels empowered to seek to improve control of one's own life (Myers & Sweeney, 2004).

*Self-actualization:* The ability to achieve the highest state of self-awareness, behavior, and to fulfill one's potential as a human being (Maslow, 1954).

*Subjective well-being:* A state of variable emotional positivity, self-efficacy, and confidence. For some, sociability, social resources, esteem, and physical and mental health variables also play a role (Blank, Connor, Gray, & Tustin, 2016).

*College-aged student:* Students enrolled in a university, usually between 18 and 26 years-old (Slee, Campbell, & Spears, 2012).

*Subjective vitality:* A positive feeling of aliveness and energy. This energy represents psychological and social well-being and enhances the behaviors that promote one's quality of life (Uysal & Satici, 2014).

*Life satisfaction:* A state of contentment with life, quality of life, a state where one possesses energy, enthusiasm and aliveness. Related strongly to subjective happiness and subjective vitality (Uysal & Satici, 2014).

*Subjective happiness:* A balance of positive-negative affect and overall life satisfaction. A psychological state of well-being, joy, and contentment. It contains both an emotional and cognitive aspect, while the former is usually further divided into the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect, the latter is mentioned as life satisfaction (Akin & Akin, 2015).

### **Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations**

The scope of the study describes the hope, expectation, or intent of the research. Limitations are flaws within the study that are inherent in the design or out of a researcher's control. Delimitations are purposely set to limit the scope of the study. These factors of scope, limits, and delimits of the study follow.

**Scope.** I partnered with my participants to discover new perspectives, ideas, and meanings regarding their experiences of quality of life and academic success. I explored each participant's unique experience through in-depth case study interview and journaling techniques. I co-constructed meaning with each participant and documented important attributes that contributed to their lived experiences.

**Limitations.** Limits of the study may include a participant's ability to describe his or her own experiences accurately or with absolute honesty. For example, participants may have replied based upon what they thought I wanted them to say, or they may not have reply with clarity or detail. To minimize these types of responses, I conducted secondary interviews and member check interviews. Participants may have been fearful of answering because of anxiety that their identities may somehow become available. I reiterated that their identities would be protected with subject number codes, and that these codes were kept in a locked and encrypted computer. Journaling is notoriously fraught with disengagement over time (Hatch, 2002). To combat this, I reinforced the voluntary nature of the journal, provided journaling prompts, and provided a \$20 incentive card at the time of the second interview and when the journal was submitted.

Another limit of the study was that most of the participants were female, as the majority of the student body in the college studying health professions are female. I recruited in a nonbiased way in sections of the health management course, where all students enrolled were asked to participate in a way where no students were identified as male or female. Because this was a multiple case study with 11 participants, the results cannot be generalized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Stake, 1995). I supplied the results so the reader can decide to apply the findings according their own contexts (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995). This information was provided to understand the college students involved in this sample and to add to the number of qualitative

studies represented in the literature. The information generated in this study is reflective of only the participants in this study and not those of other college students.

**Delimitations.** The study was delimited to 11 students who were enrolled at the college studying health professions. No other participants were included. Data collection included interview, journaling, and member checking. The typological coding method and triangulation further described the data set.

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

University students are reporting unique stressors and anxieties specific to the experience and environment of college life. This transitional time is marked as one of personal stress and growth. Many physical, emotional, social, environmental, and financial attributes are identified as contributing to a life satisfaction or QoL (Connell, O’Cathain, & Brazier, 2014; Icaro et al., 2017; Shawver et al., 2015). Sometimes these attributes contribute to a positive QoL; sometimes they are negative. Most studies surrounding this topic indicated a link between academic success and QoL (Mortiz, et al., 2016; Osman & Aysegul, 2014; Pedro et al., 2016; Rezaei & Mousanezhad, 2018). This link is subjective and specific to the lived experiences of the participants. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding the perspectives of QoL among undergraduate college students and how QoL affects academic achievement. Observing these issues through a qualitative lens can help students, faculty and higher education professionals understand the perceptions, experiences and opinions related to QoL and academic success.

A social constructivist approach was an appropriate perspective in which to ground this qualitative case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018, Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995). This approach emphasizes a focus upon each individual’s unique perspective and the ability to derive meaning from their own lived experiences (Stake, 1995). Multiple cases were

recruited, and purposeful sampling techniques were applied. Eleven cases were pursued using two rounds of semistructured interviews and journaling techniques. This number ensured a broad sample of singular experiences that helped me discover new perspectives related to QoL and academic success. Typological analysis was used as the data analysis procedure.

The significance of this study is that it filled a qualitative gap in the research regarding QoL, and academic success among college-aged students. In addition, this research revealed the unique perspectives of college-aged students and how universities might use these perspectives as they seek to support students in positive ways. In addition, it supports the development of resources that eliminates stressors, or other negative attributes identified as barriers to academic success. Ideas from these perspectives may guide strategies for retention and graduation rates. Student life, residential staff, advising, teaching faculty, and counseling support staff, could further be informed from these experiences.

The following literature review audits the current state of study regarding QoL and academic success among university students. Dominant models describing QoL issues are explored and defined. Commonly accepted theories regarding QoL are presented. Positions related to the university student's unique perspective regarding each of the prevalent domains of QoL are summarized. The attributes of college students in general are described, and the domains of stress, physical health, psychological function, social relationship, and environmental surroundings are reviewed. These domains and their impact on academic success are presented. Methodological issues and data collection procedures are included.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of undergraduate university students regarding their quality of life (QoL) and how their perceived QoL affects their academic success. In this chapter I identify and analyze positive and negative components of QoL among university students as provided throughout the literature. This literature is important because as students perceive, assess, and react to their options for behavior, their decisions can determine achievement in the classroom. For many students, academic achievement is a vital step toward a desired career and profession, and their ability or inability to achieve in the classroom may determine their future professional success. Faculty members' understanding of these critical components can lead to new supports for students that help direct students toward success at the university. Furthermore, attrition and retention rates for higher education are important as most college and universities struggle with declining enrollment (Jaquette & Bradley, 2015; Stuart, 2015). Keeping students enrolled is a major concern of most higher education administrators.

The review of the literature begins with the conceptual framework of constructivism. Next, I justify why QoL should be a priority among university-aged students. In addition, I analyze the literature on life experiences related to the college student and QoL. These markers include physical health, psychological function, social relationships, and environmental surroundings. Each of these areas is critiqued, synthesized, and tightly linked to academic achievement.

### **Conceptual Framework: Constructivism**

Constructivism is a worldview that synthesizes meaning through multiple perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Social constructivists seek to find understanding in the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Individuals develop subjective meaning

through their experiences to create systems of knowledge and frames of reference, usually through social relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Liu & Matthews, 2005). Hatch (2002) argued that absolute realities are unknowable; the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality. Hatch suggested multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points.

Constructivist research is usually qualitative, given that knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Understanding of the world is based in convention; the truth is what we agree it is (Hatch, 2002). Researchers and subjects need to be in close proximity and joined in the process of construction. From this perspective, it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective. Only through mutual engagement can researchers and respondents construct the subjective reality that is under investigation (Mishler, 1986). Gay and Araisian (2000) argued this research approach is not satisfied with describing the way things are; instead, we seek insight into what people believe and feel about the way things are. Such an inquiry involves in-depth, in-context opportunities to understand relationships (Gay & Araisian, 2000).

University students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some students are first-generation college students and the university is a strange and foreign place. Others come from long lines of doctors and lawyers; university life is an expected step toward a typical life experience. Some students experience poverty; other students do not experience financial hardships. Some students are parents or veterans or are older or have a disability. All of these experiences affect university life, and, therefore, there is no “typical” experience. Examining QoL among this diverse population requires a researcher to become familiar with a

wide a collection of stories, students' own beliefs, opinions, histories, and habits. A constructionist worldview is an appropriate approach as this stance recognizes the differing experiences university students may encounter and how these experiences eventually are incorporated into students' realities. Incorporating information and experience helps the researcher understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. This interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Understanding QoL and academic achievement through a multiple narrative approach makes sense as it supports a constructivist stance to generate patterns of meaning from multiple impressions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Studies on quality of life and academic success among university students have been completed from the postpositivist worldview throughout the literature. Objective measurements of QoL among college students have been studied with hundreds of variables. However, a qualitative constructionist viewpoint is rarely provided. I found only four qualitative studies among the 76 articles I reviewed that examined QoL and academic success from such an approach. A constructionist viewpoint is important to provide information beyond objective measurements related to QoL and academic success. A constructionist viewpoint is important to understand human engagement based in experience, university student interpretation of culture, social history, and meaning, and to induce meaning from the collected field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Search of the Literature**

The review of the literature was conducted through the domains of QoL, university students, life satisfaction, happiness, and academic achievement. Four different variables were examined: physical health, social relationship, environmental surroundings, and psychological

function. Among these variables, subcategories were found repeated in the literature as specifically important to the college student. For example, alcohol and drug experimentation, sleep and nutrition, while not directly identified by WHO as a component impacting QoL, is prevalent in the literature regarding physical health and well-being among college students. These specific subcategories are identified in the literature as influencers of academic achievement. Concordia University and [redacted] University databases accessed included ERIC, Proquest, SAGE, EBSCOhost CINAHL Complete, Springer Link, and Taylor and Francis Social Science and Humanities Library. The World Health Organization, National Wellness Institute, and the Centers for Disease Control databases were also searched, as well as Google Scholar. Relevant books and texts were accessed from course materials that were listed on the Concordia University syllabi for doctoral candidates.

Keywords and phrases regarding QoL and the college student included life satisfaction, health related quality of life, happiness, quality of life, university student, college student, perceived freedom, self-actualization, and academic achievement. Search terms related to variables influencing QoL include but were not limited to *alcohol and drug use, college students, stress, sleep, nutrition, environment, vitality, financial hardship, family, support, and academic success*. Finally, 88 sources were included in the review of the literature, comprising 76 peer-reviewed articles and studies from scholarly journals, 10 published books, and two reports or working papers.

## **Review of Research Literature**

**Quality of life.** Most Americans seek a positive QoL throughout their lifespan. Quality of life, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.), is a broad multidimensional concept that usually includes subjective evaluations of both positive and

negative aspects of life. Quality of life is a complex issue, with multidimensional models and definitions. Although most scholars do not offer common definitions; physical, social, emotional and mental health domains are consistently cited, as well as essential domains of spirituality, gender identity, culture, self-care, occupation, and other components (Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Payne et al., 2017). Connell et al. (2014) reviewed 11 different approaches to QoL issues, all taking slightly different perspectives. Upon reviewing these 11 approaches, Connell et al. suggested domains for QoL should include employment, work, health, leisure, living situations, and relationships. Upon further study, however, Connell et al. suggested that subsets of these domains should further include well-being and ill-being, relationships, sense of belonging, activity, self-perception, autonomy, hope and hopelessness, and physical health. Dinzeo et al. (2014) found that higher scores in lifestyle domains of psychological health, physical health, exercise, and sense of purpose were the best predictors of positive quality of life. Among the many studies correlating college students, stress, and QoL, Holinka (2015) found that new experiences associated with the college experience are can be exciting but are also linked to a number of stressors, like developing a future career plan, finances, interpersonal relationships, personal appearance, goal setting, and personal academic achievement. The most frequently reported academic stressors were grades and competition, deadlines, issues related to taking classes, and selecting majors (Holinka, 2015).

**The college student.** Studying QoL among college-aged students raises many questions because of the unique developmental and transitional issues students experience at that time of life. Physical health, psychological functioning, social relationships, and environmental surroundings all combine to develop a QoL perspective singular to the college-aged student (Hipp et al., 2016; Shawver et al., 2015). College students, in particular, have their own

characteristics and needs that should be examined as they relate to attaining a high QoL. College-aged students may continue to be developmentally in adolescence. Slee et al. (2012) asserted that adolescence may last until 26 years of age. The idea that the decision making and executive function of most college students may still be underdeveloped contributes to their own abilities or challenges with regard to self-determination and QoL. College students may also be questioning their own identity, where they belong in the world, and seek to improve their control of their own lives. This is known as perceived freedom (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). College age is a time of transition, exploration, and almost constant change. Young adults aged 18–24 years are a relatively healthy group with few chronic diseases (Ridner, Newton, Staten, Crawford, & Hall, 2016). Health-related QoL (HRQoL) among college students can further be analyzed within the contexts of personality, the environment, and aspects of physical health (Anye, Gallien, Bian, & Moulton, 2013). Analyzing the college student, their perceptions, development and needs is paramount to understanding how they process QoL, and how this affects their performance in the classroom (Stirgy, Grezskowiack, & Rahtz, 2007). Understanding the perception of the QoL of the college student as he or she moves through course of work can help inform a professor's knowledge of the student's needs. That faculty member can better deliver impactful, relevant content and can make changes in educational processes that support student success.

**The college student and physical health.** Activities of daily living, dependence on medicinal substances/aids, energy/fatigue, mobility, pain/discomfort, sleep, rest, and work capacity make up the physical health QoL domain, according to the WHO QoL, BREF (World Health Organization, n.d.) Among these aspects, sleep, nutrition, and physical illness/fitness have been studied among university students and have been shown to have impact on academic

success. In addition, alcohol, drug use, and exercise can positively or negatively impact QoL and achievement among college students. The HRQoL is a major research component within the Centers for Disease Control and related studies (Maynard et al., 2015). The HRQoL is measured by an integrated set of questions regarding perceived health status and activity limitations. The HRQoL is arguably the best indicator of the impact of disease on an individual's life. It enables researchers to translate health status into socioeconomic and various subpopulations of society (Maynard et al. 2015). Traditional university students experience a major life transition as they move away from the family of origin. Often, this includes changes in sleep patterns and experimentation with alcohol and drugs, and many undergo a physical transformation: the dreaded "freshman 15." This is frequently associated with carb-heavy dining at university centers as well as a severe decline in physical activity. In this section, both positive and negative impacts of life change are examined as experienced by the college student. I next review the literature regarding sleep, nutrition, exercise, and alcohol and drug consumption among university-aged students. Finally, the effect of these variables on academic success will be analyzed.

*Sleep, sleep deprivation, and fatigue: Effects on academic achievement.* College students are notorious for making drastic choices regarding their own sleep patterns. Pulling an "all-nighter" seems to be a rite of passage in most university communities. Sleep deprivation and inconsistent sleep patterns harm students in the long run. Mortiz et al. (2016) reported that fatigue and exhaustion were major determinants in nursing student's dissatisfaction in academic life. "The student's dissatisfaction with lack of leisure time may have roots in the same justification for problems with sleep and lack of energy" (Mortiz et al., 2016, p. 570). Nursing and health students in another study report that short-term goals (better grades on an exam or

assignment) do not often outweigh the consequences of lost sleep. Steep decline in psychological function is often the effect of consistent lost sleep (Ridner et al., 2016). The goals of improved academic performance through late night study sessions, sometimes do not come to fruition, as sleep deprivation has been shown to decrease mental alertness, memory, organization and overall cognitive function (Baert, Omey, Verhaest, & Vermeir, 2015; Hershner & Chervin, 2014).

In contrast, Hershner and Chervin (2014) suggested that insufficient sleep may result in lower grade point averages, increased risk of academic failure, compromised learning, impaired mood, and increased risk of motor vehicle accidents. Icaro et al. (2017) found that burnout, associated with decreased sleep patterns among medical students, interact to negatively impact the academic performance and achievement of the student. Emotional exhaustion and sleep difficulties explained a full 21% of the physical health variance among this population in this study (Icaro et al. 2017). Quality of life and life satisfaction may indeed be at least partially improved in university students by prioritizing consistent sleep. Interventions that promote sleep quality among college students may be the most beneficial in improving well-being (Ridner et al., 2016).

***Nutrition and disordered eating among university students.*** Many college students report stress eating, bingeing, and periods of food deprivation related to university life. Eating habits for college students are a topic of interest because the greatest increase in overweight and obesity rates occurs between the ages of 18–29, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (Yu & Tan, 2016). “Additionally, data from the 1995 College Health Risk Behavior Survey suggests that diet and physical activity levels during college predispose this population to future health issues” (Yu & Tan, 2016, p. 675). Nutrition and weight gain seem to affect a student’s perception of QoL. A common lament among students is that they report eating

fast food or other cheap foods for weeks on end because of financial difficulty. Dietary intake is also related in response to daily stressors (Dinzeo et al., 2014). Women in adolescence and young adult hood are at the highest incidence of eating disorders, and a significant portion of college-aged students who do display disordered eating or eating disorders have not been diagnosed, nor do they seek treatment (Yu & Tan, 2016). Bingeing, food addiction, disordered eating, and eating disorders all have profoundly negative effects on HRQoL. Maintaining a healthy weight and body mass index (BMI) has been positively correlated with positive HRQoL and relatively strong physical self-esteem, which may improve QoL in young adults (Joseph et al., 2013). Dinzeo et al. (2014) also found that lifestyle behaviors linked with the consumption of vegetables and conscientious dietary behaviors seem to impact overall life satisfaction among college students.

*Exercise and fitness: Impacts on quality of life and academic success.* As mentioned previously, nutrition affects BMI and weight, which also affects a student's perception of his or her QoL. Exercise and fitness levels are additional contributing factors to BMI and healthy weight management. Maynard et al. (2015) discussed self-rated overall health (SRH) among college students. Health status was measured among 301 university-aged students. "Poor SRH was found for students with a BMI in the overweight and obese categories, and positive SRH for those who exercised 4 or more times per week as compared to those who exercised less" (Maynard et al., 2015, p. 49). Pedisic et al. (2015) reported that vigorous intensity physical activity was significantly associated with life satisfaction after adjustments for socio-demographic characteristics, lifestyle and self-rated general health. Ridner et al. (2016) asserted students who remained physically active scored better on subscales that measure vigor, tension,

and fatigue. The balance between overall energy (vitality), tension, and fatigue can be moderated through consistent exercise, and has been shown to have a positive impact on HRQoL.

In addition, vitality partially mediates the association between subjective happiness and life satisfaction. In other words, as life satisfaction increases, so does subjective happiness, and subjective vitality plays a role in mediating this increase (Uysal & Satici, 2014). Freshman who are physically active may have better physical and mental health in the short and longer term (Bray & Born, as cited in Ridner et al., 2016). In a study by Toyokawa and Toyokawa (as cited in Bjelica and Jovanovic, 2016), students who participated in several extracurricular activities were more satisfied with experience in school and overall life. Additionally, students who engaged in sports clubs demonstrated a higher level of satisfaction with academic activities and a decreased level of apathy comparing to nonparticipants (Bjelica & Jovanovic, 2016).

***Alcohol, drug use, and experimentation among university students.*** Students aged 18–24 often experiment with smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use, putting them at higher risk for decreased QoL and associated academic struggles. Maynard et al. (2015) reported poor SRH for smokers compared with nonsmokers. In one study, moderate frequency of alcohol intake (2–4 times per month or 2–3 times per week) was associated with higher life satisfaction when compared with no consumption. By contrast, Pedisic et al. (2015) found a negative relationship between alcohol consumption among females and no relationship among male students. Ridner et al. (2016) found that poor grades were associated with alcohol use and lower well-being. Bjelica and Jovanovic (2016) found male students tend to positively associate alcohol consumption with QoL, contrasting the negative association between the two experienced by women. Students who did not consume alcohol at all expressed a higher level of satisfaction with university and academic experiences.

Physical health among college students is also inextricably linked to psychological health and stress. In fact, all these domains affect one another. University students who scored high in spirituality were shown to have higher self-ratings of their physical health, were closer to their ideal body weight, and had lower blood pressure than those who scored lower in spiritual wellness (Ayne et al., 2013). In addition, those experiencing excess stress in their lives reported more occurrences of psychosomatic illness (Ayne et al., 2013). In addition, better physical health among university students has been associated with greater productivity, academic achievement, higher salaries, greater success at work, higher energy levels, happiness, and altruistic behavior (Flynn & MacLeod, 2015).

**The college student and psychological function.** The domain of psychological function according to the WHO includes body image and appearance, negative and positive feelings, self-esteem, spirituality, thinking learning, memory, and concentration (World Health Organization, n.d.). For university students, general stress, academic stress, achievement guilt, career indecision, and ideas related to autonomy and self-efficacy seem to dominate QoL evidence in the literature. In this section, these variables are reviewed, particularly in terms of academic achievement outcomes. Additionally, I explore the supports that assist university students in attaining a positive psychological QoL and academic balance.

**General and academic stress.** Lau et al. (2015) described the university years as some of the most stressful periods of a person's life. The transition to adulthood places high demands on individuals' emotion regulation capacity; adolescents are required to move from a position of dependence on one's family of origin to a position of self-reliance and adult forms of interdependence (Barker et al. 2016). This results in an increased amount of stress on the adolescent and young adult. Stress, a dynamic interaction process between the individual and his

or her environment, has a considerably negative effect on people's health and well-being (Freire et al., 2016). Perceived severe stress has been associated with worse academic achievement and higher rates of psychiatric and impulse disorders (Leppink et al., 2016). "Increased cognitive control and associated maturation of the prefrontal cortex between adolescence and the mid-20s support adaptive emotion regulation, and emotional well-being tends to improve" (Riediger & Klipker, as cited in Barker et al., 2016, p. 2022). University students may undergo an undue amount of stress, with negative outcomes in terms of academic results and personal, emotional, or health consequences (Cavallo et al., 2016). Friere et al. (2016) further supported this idea with their research on university students. High levels of stress appeared to negatively affect the QoL and student learning (Freire et al., 2016).

Different groups of students experience stress differently. Well-being factors are dependent on many variables, including stress and conflict. For some students, it may be that their better perceived health and well-being from a high stress group is because they have developed a culture or coping system of resilience. Additionally, a lower stress group may be undergoing a period of instability due to internal struggles and surrounding conflicts (Asi, Unruh, & Xinliang, 2018). Barker et al. (2016) similarly found that emotional regulation capacity, defined as the ability to flexibly coactivate, coordinate and direct/manage emotional states towards goals that arise, are key to predicting academic success. Patterns of positive or negative affect, or combinations of these, reflect adaptive emotion regulation capacity and mature during this transitional life period (Barker et al., 2016). Thus, the literature reveals that in response to stress, students employ both positive and negative coping responses (Asi et al., 2018; Barker et al., 2016; Friere et al., 2016). These include avoidance, alcohol and drug use, disordered eating, and lowered esteem, among others.

***Depression, anxiety, guilt, and academic pressure.*** Depression, anxiety, avoidance, and career indecision also affect university students and their ability to achieve academically. Chu et al. (2015) found that nearly half of the student nursing staff working in a general hospital may be regarded as having a minor mental disorder or depression. Avoidance, that is, procrastination, is a common coping strategy among students, but it can hinder them from doing those things that might ultimately enhance their QoL. It was, therefore, difficult for them to decide which was more important to QoL: a restricted life, free from anxiety and stress; or a fuller life which involved anxiety and stress (Connell et al., 2014). Goodwin et al. (2016) found that university students with low well-being scores were less likely to seek help than those with higher scores. These findings indicate the importance of enhancing public knowledge of mental health issues among college students.

Achievement guilt is another aspect of psychological stress specific to the college student, particularly common among first-generation students. Achievement guilt occurs when generally first-generation, low income, and minority students surpass the educational accomplishments of family members (Covarrubias et al., 2015). Career indecision is another academic stressor specific to the college student. Although a normal vocational developmental period associated with this age, indecision can lead to poor academic performance when multiple major or career changes are made (Jaensch, Hirschi, & Freund, 2015). Decreased or absent amounts of leisure time also impacts stress levels. This lack of rejuvenation negatively stresses all psychological domains and in particular, self-worth, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Kim, Junmo, Judah, & Dittmore, 2015).

***Coping and academic achievement.*** In the literature, students have identified specific strategies to promote positive psychological QoL, including identifying needs of students,

spirituality, and coping strategies that enhance life satisfaction. Paths to academic achievement are dependent upon these constructs. As discussed below, once students can cope successfully with stress, put into place resources and supports, and find balance in life, the literature reveals that academic success usually increases.

The need to feel calm, contented, and relaxed were priorities among students, which predominated over feelings of elation or happiness. Anxiety and depression should be treated as soon as possible among students and as separate components (Connell et al., 2014). Garriott et al. (2015) found support for participation in university club, and mentorship programs to assist the student in improving QoL, decreasing stress, increasing supports, and, ultimately, improving academic success. Glilka et al. (2015) found that different types of coping resources predicted life satisfaction. For example, while social support and financial freedom were significant predictors for both genders, personal acceptance, physical health, and stress monitoring were more likely to predict life satisfaction for U.S. females than for other groups. Another coping resource, self-directedness, was a significant predictor for male students. Goodwin et al. (2016) suggested universities could better inform students of available services, both online and face-to-face. They posited future research should be conducted on online help seeking and ways in which online help seeking behavior could be enhanced.

Spirituality is another supportive component of the psychological domain of QoL. In a study by Lau, Lam, Lau, and Shu-Fei (2015), spiritually-based therapeutic strategies were proven to enhance students QoL. Focus upon the enhancement of an individual's sense of membership in society, uniqueness, and purpose helped with the struggle during the transition from secondary school to university. Students with a higher sense of meaning reported higher self-esteem, self-acceptance, adaptive coping, and academic achievement (Shin & Steger 2016).

Osman and Aysegul (2014) examined lifelong learning tendencies among college students and found that QoL acts as a significant predictor of a student's self-perception of lifelong learning tendencies. Self-efficacy and autonomy are strengths and enhance academic achievement among university students (Ridner et al., 2016). Interestingly, academic satisfaction but not academic progress predicted life satisfaction. An interaction between academic satisfaction and intrinsic motivation for attending college was evident among first-generation college students on life satisfaction scales (Garriott et al., 2015).

**The college student and social relationships.** The WHO has defined the Social Relationship component of the QoL as having three different variables for the general population: personal relationships, social supports, and sexual activity (World Health Organization, n.d.). For the college student, much change and transition is evident in these areas during the period of late adolescence and young adulthood. Contact with family and peer groups can change in frequency and duration, and the supports offered by these groups often impact the student because of the decrease in contact. Relationships based in lifelong reciprocity change; other social contacts are sought in the new university environment, and new peer groups are attained. The literature shows much evidence where social relationship, QoL, and academic success are connected. The main components related to QoL, social constructs and academic success, include social environment and relationships, social intelligence and relationship to faculty, social media/Internet use, and relationship to academic environment.

***Social environment and relationships: Academic achievement.*** As traditional university students transition to a new environment, new social constructs are forced upon because of their move away from their families and communities of origin. Social and environmental variables of QoL often are cited together throughout the literature as influencing the university student during

this time. The issues of trust, social capital, and the concept of community were among the top-rated areas of QoL among college students (Yamaguchi, 2015). Work-life balance, communication with the family, and creating time for family and friends are cited as priorities (Emery et al., 2017). Among college students who work, wholly positive relationships have stress buffering effects while negative work-related variables impact mental health status (Vaughn, Drake & Haydock, 2016).

New friendships, either same-sex or opposite sex, influence QoL in both positive and negative ways. Same-sex peer relationships, opposite-sex peer relationships, family relationships, and faculty relationships are the source of stress and anger among students. They were also positively identified as areas of social support (Won & Gyungoo, 2017). Strengthening social supports and resources from peer and families were found to be helpful in improving academic achievement (Gliika et al., 2015; Mortiz et al., 2016; Won & Gyungoo, 2017). Adjustment to university, gender, and family supports can influence academic achievement (Rodriguez, Tinajero, & Paramo, 2017). The more the student feels supported, (through peer or family relationships) the more they believe they can achieve. This often results in outcomes-based true achievement. These are the basic constructs of self-efficacy, autonomy, belief in free will, and perceived freedom (Feldman, Chandrashekar, & Wong, 2015). Overall course performance and cumulative GPA were influenced by the choice to exert control and the ability to maintain self-control and direction. These variables were directly influenced by the college student's ability to direct independent action in complex social environments (Feldman et al., 2015).

Rubin et al. (2016) found that subjective social status positively predicted amount of social contact with university friends. Both of these variables predicted subsequent mental health

and well-being. Social contact with university friends acted as a significant mediator of the relations between social status, mental health, and well-being. Lower class and working-class students may be more depressed and less satisfied because of less social contact with university friends. An obvious remedy is to increase the amount of social contact, support, and decrease isolation among this group. Allen, Porter, and McFarland (as cited O'Donnell et al., 2013) found that QoL in college-aged students is linked to decreased susceptibility to negative peer influences, increased popularity, and decreases in depressive symptoms. This in turn, is related to increased school and academic achievement. The cognitive constructs that allow young adults to look back on or reframe both positive and negative experiences in their lives into learning experiences determines how socially active and happy they tend to be as young adults and adults. This feeling of control over one's destiny, autonomy or self-determination and perceived freedom is a large contributor over the university students perceived QoL. This is linked to further academic achievement over time (O'Donnell et al. 2013).

***Social intelligence, faculty, and academic achievement.*** The ability to maintain established relationships and develop new ones, are the foundational skills needed to enjoy social relationships. These are rooted in basic social skills learned as children and adolescents and are honed as social intelligence as adolescence develop into young adults. Rezaei, Jeddi, and Mousanezhad (2018) studied university students in the context of social intelligence and academic success. Social intelligence, comprised of social skills, humor, wisdom, social awareness, and perceived control, affect life satisfaction. Emotional regulation and humor had significant positive correlations with life satisfaction. Similarly, social intelligence and social awareness in the domains of openness, daring, and happiness were positively correlated with life satisfaction. The authors noted that academic professionals could assist students using the results

of these findings: students with low life satisfaction scores should be encouraged to seek help at counseling centers.

Additionally, the ability to seek help and establish relationships with faculty increase positive academic outcomes. The extent to which students can translate their motivation into high academic achievement may depend on their relationship and experiences with faculty (Roksa & Whitley, 2017). These students may improve life satisfaction and academic achievement if social skills, and overall social intelligence scores improve. Pedro et al. (2016) discussed the robust relationship between the academic experience on campus and satisfaction with life. This commingles the social and environmental aspects as described as measures of QoL by the WHO (World Health Organization, n.d.). Students who are most satisfied with their academic experiences, especially in aspects of self-esteem and emotional relationships, are most satisfied with life, showing student academic performance is positively correlated with academic experiences on campus and with degree of life satisfaction in general.

Student-faculty relationship have been cited as having both positive and negative correlation and influence on student's perception of academic success (Kim & Lundberg, 2015). Student-faculty interaction is related to greater levels of classroom engagement, which facilitates students' cognitive skills development and students' academic outcomes (Young & Lundberg, 2016). Students' successes and failures affect decisions to remain or leave the institution. These are influenced by the student's integration at the institution. In other words, the individual's identification with the normative part of the academic system, the better QoL perceived by the student at that institution of higher education (Young & Lundberg, 2016).

***Social media and academic success.*** Wang, Chua, and Stefanone (2015) identified social media and electronic communication as significant in positive and negative relationship building

among college students. Wang et al. noted that personal social networks were defined as having strong or weak ties among friends and acquaintances of students. Personal well-being was important to both of these variables. Weak ties function as ladders to social resources such as facilitating relationships with mentors (professors), Strong ties are identified as traditional (face-to-face) or within social media. Wang et al. noted relationships live within communication rather than the communication channel, and they are made, unmade, and remade within the practices of their participants.

The Internet also brings certain problems to students. A decline in academic performance and family relations or discord in family function has been shown to exist with increased use of social media (Kabaskal, 2017). Social media addictions have a direct impact on students' self-esteem and satisfaction with life. These have positive associations with stress, anxiety, depression relationships with employers, peers, faculty, family and a negative association with academic performance (Hawi & Smaha, 2016; Kabaskal, 2016; Kuss, Griffiths, Karila, & Billeux, 2014; Leppink et al., 2014; Hawi & Smaha, 2017).

**The college student and environmental surroundings.** According to the WHO (n.d.), components of Environmental QoL include financial resources, freedom, physical safety and security, health and social care, accessibility and quality, home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information and skills, participation in and opportunities for leisure and recreation activities, physical environment (pollution, noise, traffic, climate), and transportation. As mentioned earlier, social and environmental domains for QoL as they relate to academic achievement in university students are linked throughout the literature. For the college student the more critical and researched components of this domain include: financial concerns, physical environment and leisure.

*Financial influences, quality of life, and academic success.* Financial obligations, time pressures, change in environment, and living away from home can create stress among college students (Glilka et al.2015; Hipp et al., 2016). In many cases the typical university student experiences the stress of working one or multiple jobs, changing jobs, and taking shifts that disrupt sleep, family time, and other areas of support. The rates of tuition and demands of life expenses, like housing, food, and utilities, are often experienced for the first time when high school students move away to experience university life. The effects of financial stress are usually freshmen, those with low perceived mastery and net worth, and those with median student loan debt (Britt et al., 2015). The young traditional college student often finds great difficulty in balancing multiple academic, financial and life demands during this critical time of transition.

Parental support, financial aid, student loans, and employment help to offset financial demands but cause increased stress among college students because of looming debt, sense of guilt, and time devoted to employment (Hogan, Bryant, & Overmyer-Day, 2013). Academic success is directly impacted by the need for students to attend to the daily demands of financing their life and academic pursuits. The more a student is late on paying bills, the more a student reports undesirable academic behaviors; however, the more a student works to offset financial demands, the more undesirable academic behaviors and cognition he or she reports (Hogan et al., 2013). Kruse, Starobin, Chen, Baul, and Laanan (2015) also argued factors related to finances pull students away from their studies and academic achievement.

Students get into financial difficulty for a variety of reasons, and this leads to stress, which results in undesirable behaviors like drinking or shopping. This increases credit card balances and further heightens anxiety. Student may choose to increase hours of work to pay off

bills at the cost of less studying or worse attendance in classes. All of these behaviors and cognitions may affect grades and potentially result in academic dismissal or dropping out or increase time to graduation (Hogan et al., 2013). Financial freedom, counseling, and social support were positive mediators of these stressors at university (Britt et al., 2015; Glilka et al., 2015).

*Physical environment and academic satisfaction.* Having access to a supportive, positive, and stimulating learning environment is influential for university students and their academic achievement. Engaging in learning experiences with positive perceived environmental supports have been shown to predict higher subjective well-being among college students (Garriott et al., 2015). Having adequate environmental infrastructure is mandatory for academic success (Mortiz et al., 2016). Physical resources like libraries, lectures, and a positive campus environment predicted academic experience and satisfaction with life (Pedro et al., 2016). Environmental supports have been noted to be particularly beneficial to first-generation students and influence academic success (Garriott et al., 2015).

Environmental infrastructure and access seem to influence student satisfaction with their academic experience. More importantly, the proximity between the student and social and academic factors results in remaining or abandoning the institution and the higher education experience entirely (Pedro et al., 2016). Student access to these factors influences the decision to continue with the experience, transfer, or end the university experience. Students were most satisfied if access to wireless access was good in the library, public places, and dormitories. Students' wireless experience is associated with Maslow's hierarchy of needs; wireless is essentially equated with basic human needs (Skiba, 2018).

Many universities have green space integrated into their grounds including grassy fields and turf, wooded areas, and other landscaped spaces available to the student. Increased QoL and perceived greenness of a university are significantly associated (Hipp et al., 2016). These types of spaces have been shown to have restorative effects and relieve stress in college students. This improves perceived QoL (Hipp et al., 2016). McFarland and colleagues (2008) showed a link between frequency of using campus green space (e.g., walking to class) and self-reported affective and cognitive QOL. The content and greenness of the view from indoors on campus can influence the perceived restorativeness of indoor settings (Hipp et al., 2016; Speake, Edmondson, & Nawaz, 2013). There is mounting evidence that interacting with nature delivers a range of measurable human benefits including positive cognitive abilities, and social cohesion (Keniger, Gaston, Irvine, & Fuller, 2013). Students use and appreciate green spaces and consider them important and essential components of academic achievement (Speake et al., 2013). Students cite most frequent use of greenspace is to gather socially and decrease academic stressors (Speake et al., 2013).

***Leisure and academic achievement.*** Leisure time, seen by students as time away from work, academics, and sleep, is often sacrificed and seen as dispensable (Chesser, 2015). Leisure, however, is an integral and critical component of life in general. It is the basis for family relationships, cultural significance, stress relief, and supports. Leisure is the presence of freedom of choice, a state of mind, a time away, and a state of rejuvenation (Payne et al., 2017). Leisure and positive perceived well-being is linked throughout the literature (Liu & Yu, 2015; Tercan, 2015; Zhang & Zheng, 2017). Life satisfaction is higher in students who participated in leisure longer and more frequently than other students (Tercan, 2015). Meaningful leisure is also linked to academic achievement among students. A balance of work and leisure or study and leisure is

commonly cited among scholars has having significant impacts on academic success (Liu & Yu, 2015).

Subjective well-being, QoL, and leisure are linked heavily throughout the literature. Serious leisure, as identified by Liu and Yu (2015), has a significant effect on QoL. Students who experience serious, committed, and constructive leisure activities have the most leisure satisfaction and well-being when compared with those who participate in casual or social leisure that is less consistent (Liu & Yu, 2015). They report being more satisfied with life as a whole and satisfaction in safety, community connectedness, and spirituality. Shared interests, personal relationships, social activities, and increased friendships found in leisure also contribute to a higher QoL (Liu & Yu, 2015).

Exhaustion, overload, and burnout among college students is related to decreased awareness of self, mastery, and leisure time. Conversely, positive leisure protects from burnout-related exhaustion and enhances engagement with studies (Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack & Sabiston, 2015). Lack of leisure time, lack of social areas on campus, transportation, and poor facilities and services impacts satisfaction with academic and social life on campus (Arslan & Akkas, 2014; Mortiz et al., 2016). Leisure activities are identified as reducing academic stress and promoting and enhancing daily emotional well-being (Zhang & Zheng, 2017).

Ongoing engagement in leisure throughout the duration of university enrollment is recommended to enhance QoL and academic achievement. A myth exists throughout the literature that increased “free time” among college students is detrimental to academic progress or success. Often these studies cite alcohol use and misuse, mischievousness, and criminal activity as pastimes of college students noted during leisure. Parents, administrators, and law enforcement are particularly concerned with this type of behavior (Fehmi et al., 2014; Zhang &

Zheng, 2017). However, positive leisure pursuits and the resulting rejuvenation support students as they pursue higher education success. The educational process must include leisure education, satisfaction, and motivation to increase academic productivity (Fehmi et al., 2014). Fehmi et al. (2014) argued extracurricular, social, leisure, and sports activities have a positive effect on overall GPA, time spent on homework, and academic achievement in classes. Teamwork, motivation, and character building attained while engaged in leisure, recreation, and sports also have a direct effect on academic motivation (Fehmi et al., 2014).

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

As stated previously, the literature presents an obvious presence of post positivist worldview constructs and quantitative research design. This is evident from the numbers of descriptive, correlational, and experimental studies that present objective data focused upon variable comparisons related to university students, and their QoL. Of the 76 studies I reviewed, only four were qualitative. Inferences in the quantitative literature are made in most discussions regarding how QoL affects academic achievement, progress, and university supports.

This quantitative approach paired with subjective topic matter seems counterintuitive from a research perspective. However, as one delves into the literature, there are numerous tools which take this distinct approach. The Life Satisfaction Survey, Perceived Stress Survey, Happiness Survey, Quality of College Life Scale, World Health Organization Quality of Life Scale; BREF, and Coping Scale of Academic Stress (among others) are examples of quantitative, descriptive, and correlational tools that measure variables associated with quality of students' lives at university (Arslan & Aklas, 2014; Cavallo et al., 2016; Freire et al., 2016; Gliilka et al., 2015; Shin & Steger, 2016; Uysal & Satici, 2014). Most researchers seem to desire to quantify specific variables that affect either a significant positive or negative relationship to QoL. For

example, Leppink et al. (2016) measured physical health and emotional stress as variables of QoL among college students. They linked this descriptive survey through the Perceived Stress Scale and found that severe perceived stress was associated with worse academic achievement and worse physical health (Leppink et al., 2016). Most studies reviewed in the literature were found to follow this same construct. Researchers seem to find one variable within the various QoL definitions that exist, that interests them, and then attach a tool which describes (at least in part) that variable. Reporting from a statistical standpoint becomes straightforward and highly objective.

What is significantly underrepresented in the relevant literature is the qualitative and constructivist approach regarding university students, QoL, and academic achievement. Three approaches among four studies have been used: interview, diary, and open-ended questionnaires (Connell et al., 2014; Edvy, 2015; Emery et al., 2017; Yamaguchi, 2015). These studies were focused upon changes of factors in HRQoL and enhancement of physical activity (Edvy, 2015), work, family and community balance (Emery et al., 2017), and the impact of stress, depression, and anxiety on QoL (Connell et al., 2014). Yamaguchi (2015) examined QoL among college students in general, given a specific cultural background, and was not linked to academic success. Many of the issues identified in the literature review (environment, leisure, finances, alcohol and drug use, sleep, nutrition, social supports, spirituality, social media, and faculty relationships) that are important to college students have not been explored adequately using a qualitative approach, lending itself to additional qualitative research on the topic. Such research could assist scholars, student life professionals, faculty, and higher education administrators in endeavors related to student academic achievement, resident life, attrition and retention, graduation rates, and financial issues.

## **Synthesis of Research Findings**

QoL is an individual's positive perception of his or her own life based on the criteria s/he determines. In other words, it is the result of the comparison of one's expectations with the facts in her or his life (Topaloglu, 2015). Life satisfaction generally covers the whole life of an individual and the various dimensions in it. Thus, it is not just the satisfaction of a specific subject but the whole experiences of an individual. Research shows that individual and sociocultural variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational background, work, personal characteristics, and family can affect the level of life satisfaction in individuals (Ozgun et al., 2010).

College students, in particular, have specific variables related to QoL that influence their own perceptions. Sleep, alcohol and drug consumption, diet, and physical exercise and fitness make up the physical domain components most important for university students (Baert et al., 2015; Bjelica & Janovic, 2016; Dinzeo et al., 2014; Hershner & Chervin, 2014; Icaro et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2013, Maynard et al., 2015, Mortiz et al., 2016; Ridner et al., 2016; Yu & Tan, 2016). General and academic stress, depression, anxiety, spirituality, and the ability to cope are critical components within the psychological domain of QoL (Asietal, 2016; Aysegul, 2014; Barker et al., 2016; Cavello et al., 2016; Chu, Xu & Li, 2015; Connell et al., 2014; Covarrubias et al., 2015; Freire et al., 2016; Goodwin, et al., 2016; Jaensch et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Shin & Steger, 2016). Social relationships, friendships, faculty relationships, social intelligence, and social media make up the social variable most important for university students (Kabaskal, 2017; Pedro et al., 2016; Rezaei et al., 2018; Roksa & Whitley, 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Young & Lundberg, 2016). Finances, leisure, and environmental infrastructure/supports are the variables most important in the environmental domain for university students (Britt et al., 2015; Chesser,

2015; Fehmi et al., 2014; Garriott et al., 2015; Glilka et al., 2015; Hipp et al., 2016; Hogan et al., 2013; Kruse et al., 2015; Liu & Yu, 2015; Payne et al., 2017, Pedro et al., 2016; Tercan, 2015; Zhang & Zheng, 2017). All of these factors seem to influence academic achievement in negative or positive ways according to a full review of the literature.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

The main construct found in the literature presents QoL regarding university students in a measured, objective way. There is general consensus within the studies that link variables like adequate sleep, nutrition, leisure, physical exercise, and coping to reports of positive QoL among university students (Pedisic et al., 2015; Ridner et al., 2016; Rubin et al., 2016). Negative coping, alcohol and drug misuse, lack of sleep, lack of sense of meaning, depression, stress and anxiety seem to impact students QoL and academic achievement in a negative way (Lancaster & Carlson, 2015; Leppink et al., 2016; Mortiz, et al., 2016).

There are inferred links to academic achievement within the discussion of most pieces of literature; however, strategies to improve academic achievement through QoL indices are not heavily explored. The results of the literature review made a strong case for moving forward with a qualitative study approach as it pertained to university students, QoL, and academic achievement. This approach informed university teaching, student satisfaction, and approaches in retention. In addition, linking QoL issues and ideas from university students themselves, to strategies for academic achievement, added to the research literature in ways not explored before. The current research is helpful for faculty, student life staff, and administrators in higher education as they examine effective approaches in teaching, QoL, residence life issues, and graduation, attrition, and retention rates so critical to academic success and longevity.

## Chapter 2 Summary

The first components of this literature review were focused upon defining QoL, the formal approach of constructivism, and the characteristics of college students. I also reviewed the transitional, familial, and environmental changes university students encounter reviewed, which were impactful in both positive and challenging ways. Next, the four core domains of QoL as determined by the World Health Organization (n.d.) were researched, with particular attention given to college students and the research linking academic success with related QoL issues. Important to academic achievement are physical health of the student, social relationships, environmental surroundings, and psychological well-being. Within these four domains, specific and unique issues became evident within the research for the university student. Some of these include sleep, alcohol and drug use, nutrition, family, friends, and faculty relationships, academic and infrastructure, environmental surroundings, leisure, and finances. In addition, academic and general stress, ability to cope, depression, and anxiety all impacted university student QoL and academic achievement. Related ideas became evident in the literature. Health-related QoL, self-determination, perceived freedom, wellness, and self-actualization were all reviewed as having relationship to QoL and academic success among college students.

In this review of the literatures I developed a unique conceptual framework using social constructivism to understand the QoL among college students and how QoL affects academic achievement. The review suggested that studying qualitatively the perceptions, opinions, and stories of students would yield socially significant findings. Specifically, the following relevant research question arose: What are the perceptions of undergraduate university students related to QoL and its effects on academic success?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perspectives and experiences of college-aged students regarding QoL and their perception of academic success at a midsized Midwestern university, within a health professions school. Positive quality of life is a goal humans have pursued throughout the millennia, but college-aged students seem to be a particular subgroup that requires further inquiry (Anye et al., 2013). Much attention has been provided consistently within the research regarding quantitative measurement of QoL issues among college-aged students, but little research has been qualitative. Faculty can benefit by further understanding the individual perspectives of specific students, further insight into QoL and its links to academic success. The study was intended to discover helpful academic strategies and to inform higher education professionals in student life and administration about how QoL in residence and living centers affect overall student perceptions. These, in turn, could affect retention and attrition rates.

The design was a qualitative case study, with semistructured interviews as the primary means of data collection. A secondary source of data was included via a participant journal. This was added to the meager qualitative body of work found in the literature regarding this topic. Hatch (2002) asserted that the “power of qualitative works is that it provides careful description and analysis of social phenomena in particular contexts” (p. 43). This type of approach is particularly lacking in the areas of QoL, academic success, and college-aged students. The research question that drove the study, and the purpose and design of the study, are further described in Chapter 3, along with the research population, sampling method, instrumentation, data collection, attributes, data analysis, limitations and validation, expected findings, ethical issues, and a summary conclude the chapter.

## **Research Questions**

The study was guided by two research questions: How do university students perceive quality of life issues as they relate to their own perceptions of academic success? What life experiences are identified as influencing college student's perception of a positive or negative QoL?

## **Purpose and Design of the Study**

**Purpose.** The purpose of the study was to understand how college students in a Midwestern university perceive their own QoL and how they perceive positive and negative aspects of QoL effect their own academic success. The study was qualitative, using multiple case study and interview techniques. The study was designed to provide insight into what QoL components college students believe both hinder and help them in their academic careers. In addition, participant journaling informed faculty members of the supports, strategies, and resources that assist students throughout their degree completion.

University students enter the most stressed time of their lives during the transition and into university life (Barker et al., 2016). During this time, physical, social, psychological and environmental impacts threaten to negatively affect their success during their studies. Conversely, positive perceptions of resources and supports in these areas inform students and faculty of strategies that make students successful. This critical period can be further understood by exposing the researcher to individual student insights, perceptions, and experiences from case study and interview examples.

**Design.** A qualitative case study, interview, and journaling approach was selected to focus on differing perspectives and human experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The conceptual framework was social constructivism. In social constructivism individuals seek understanding of

the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivist science argues that multiple realities exist and are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points (Hatch, 2002). This view asserts that knowledge is symbolically constructed, not objective, and understandings of the world are based on convention (Hatch, 2002). Interview, narrative, and case study are the means constructionists use to guide interpretive constructs which inform meaning (Hatch, 2002).

A qualitative case study design was appropriate for this topic and population group because each student's perspective regarding QoL and his or her academic success is unique. Indeed, the definitions of QoL and academic success differ between most students. No two students are alike in their experiences through college, and depending on their psychological, physical, social, and environmental context, each student perceives university life through a unique lens. As Creswell (2018) asserted, social constructivists develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings that are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow categories or ideas. As mentioned earlier, there is a lack of qualitative research within this topic, and this underrepresentation further supported this type of interpretive framework.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

**Site description.** The site was a midsized university located in the Midwest. The students were enrolled in a college of health professions. The school population is about 26,000. The Health Professions campus is located in an urban setting, within walking distance from major hospital, rehabilitation, and clinic sites where students complete placement requirements. This locale is 20 miles from the main campus, which houses traditional undergraduate and graduate curricula. It is about two miles from another university hub, where business,

engineering, and education coursework is offered. The site for this study included academic classrooms within two buildings that house various health-centered departments.

**Population.** The participants were undergraduate students studying a variety of health-related professions. All socioeconomic classes were represented. The students ranged in age from 18–28, and were disproportionately female, as with most health professions colleges. The culture of the surrounding area and of enrollment are mostly White, Protestant (Christian Reformed denomination is highly dominant in the area), and conservative. I had no prior relationship with the students.

**Sampling method and size.** Typical cases provide specific information about a problem, and include individuals who represent what is considered to be usual for the experience being studied (Hatch, 2002). I used purposeful sampling in this study to explore the participants, types of strategies, and sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eleven participants volunteered for this case study. This sampling procedure is consistent with the case study approach, and added needed content to the body of qualitative work that is underrepresented in the literature. In addition, this procedure lends itself well to the research questions at hand.

### **Instrumentation**

I conducted a multiple case study approach with semistructured interview utilized as the primary instrument avenue. This is a multiple case study because each person is a case. Stake (1995) supported interview approaches for case studies: “The case will not be seen as the same for everyone. . . . Interviewers take pride in discovering and portraying multiple views of the case and the interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Multiple forms of data collection are also recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Hatch (2002). Information rich case studies help to convey the depth of inquiry one must attain for qualitative research.

Member-checking interviews after interview analysis ensures that the participants are informed about the research findings.

**Semistructured interviews.** The semistructured interview uses structured questions but the interviewer may seek additional information through other questions (Hatch, 2002). I went in-depth regarding the information collected, as I was interested in understanding the world from a subject's point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semistructured interviews provide opinion, history, and experiences that inform the researcher about individual perspectives (Stake, 1995). Semistructured interviews provide an open-ended format so that participants are encouraged to explore their own ideas about the topic (see Appendix B). Structured interviews were not sought as this limits the ability of the interviewer and interviewee to freely explore the subject matter and individual perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002) These interviews were sought as close as possible to the beginning of the 12–15 week semester session. They were completed within three weeks of the start of the session.

**Secondary semistructured interviews.** Secondary semistructured interviews were sought to further elaborate on the patterns and themes of the first round of interviews. The questions were generated using the data and primary perspectives that emerged from the initial interview sessions. Secondary interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and halfway through the 12–15 week session. Secondary interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

**Participant journaling.** Journaling is also included and supported as instrumentation in qualitative and case study research as a way to inquire and use the language and words of the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Journaling can be accessed at convenient times and reflects written evidence obtained without undue pressure from the researcher (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Almost every qualitative study has a need to examine documents (Stake, 1995). They provide valuable information from the participant, equal to observation and interviewing (Stake, 1995). Journaling, as part of documentation review, is best when the topics follow closely but do not match the interview topics. Encouraging participants to explore their own perspectives when journaling is part of the qualitative process (Hatch, 2002). Journaling was encouraged but not mandatory. Participants were encouraged to write as much, or as little as they chose. Participants could choose to use the writing prompts provided, or not.

**Member check interviews.** Member checking includes asking the participant to review the data to check if the information is an accurate depiction of the intent of their own messages. Collaborating with participants is often viewed as among the most potent of validation procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process included a review of the semistructured interviews and analysis procedures with the participant. Participants also received any part of the research report or write-up that was relevant to the information they provided. They were also asked to verify the accuracy of the transcription and provide alternative language as necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking interviews are essential for validation of the data. Member checking is considered to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

I sought institutional review board (IRB) approval through Concordia University–Portland and the university research site before collecting any data. Permission letters were sent to professors and instructors so I could recruit participants from undergraduate health courses (see Appendix I). I sent a recruitment script at the same time so professors were able to review what I read to the students in order to recruit participants (see Appendix J). After I read the

recruitment script to students, the students were offered a Yes/No card (Appendix K), wherein they accepted or declined to participate. Every student responded so that no student was identified as having agreed or declined. In addition, the instructor was asked to leave the room to mitigate the possibility of coercion. If a student agreed to participate, informed consent was sought (see Appendix H). Triangulation is a method of combining methodological approaches so as to compare different data collection processes related to the same subject (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation of the data occurred through two rounds of semistructured interviews and a participant journal. Interviews and journaling documented thoughts, ideas, and experiences related to QoL, academic progress and success, and strategies employed by the students. Member checking interviews were used to validate the data and add credibility.

**Semistructured interviews.** Semistructured interviews were conducted in two rounds with the same participants. The students discussed the multiple attributes that contribute to QoL and academic success. Interview questions were open-ended to provide the participants the freedom to interpret and express their own experiences in a face-to-face conversational format. Interviews occurred in the students' own classroom buildings. The first interview lasted 45 minutes to 1-hour (see Appendix B for the initial interview questions). All four attributes of QoL as described by WHO (World Health Organization, n.d.) were explored, that is, physical, social, environmental, and psychological functioning. I constructed questions that linked these attributes to the topic of academic success. The second interview was conducted face to face as well and explored the data generated from the first interview (see Appendix C). Again, academic success was linked to these ideas and questions. I used voice recording with immediate transcription. IRB policy was followed regarding protection and deletion of information related to recordings and transcriptions.

**Participant journal.** The participant journal was introduced during the first interview. A few writing prompts (see Appendix D) were given within the journal, but these were broad, open-ended, with invitations to the writers to expound about their own experiences (Hatch, 2002). The participants were free to explore their own experiences without constriction or pressure from many writing guidelines. The participant was instructed to use one, many, or none of the writing prompts and to choose to write in a “free write” style, commenting on the subject at hand within their own contexts. (Writing prompts for the participant journal are included in Appendix D.) Hatch (2002) stated that some individuals have problems focusing on global or abstract concepts. The QoL topic is broad, abstract, and may be a topic that students find difficult to be specific about. Writing prompts related to the attributes listed below were provided for participants who may require additional focus when journaling.

Participants were given instruction that writing was expected, preferably, daily, for the purposes of increased reflection and processing of their experiences (Hatch, 2002). I explained that grammar, structure, and organization were unimportant; the ideas themselves were the desired outcomes. Participants were encouraged to begin the journal after the first interview and throughout the duration of the study. Because journaling participation is notoriously fraught with disengagement over time, incentives were built into the study by way of a \$20 gift card provided at the end of the study with the submission of the journal. As computer-based formats are by-and-large not secure sites in which to deposit journaling entries, one handwritten bluebook type journal was provided to each participant. It was provided at the beginning of the study, at the first interview meeting. Writing prompts were included within the journal as reminders for participants. A log identification system was used to maintain an anonymous list of participants, to protect confidentiality of the data, and to connect each interviewee with their journal.

**Member checking.** No more than one week after each interview ended, I held a member check meeting with each participant, who had time to change, edit, correct, or add information that may have provided more perspective to the researcher. Transcripts were emailed for the participant to read before and during the member check meeting. Participants could elect to change any or no part of the transcript. Edits, corrections and additions were added immediately to the information as the participant finalized each change.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The attributes of the study were linked to the research questions. Since the study was based on the perspective of the WHO definition of QoL, the attributes were the identification of both physical, social, psychological, and environmental aspects of QoL as experienced by undergraduate students. Appendix A describes the WHO and QoL definitions. Additionally, the link between these attributes and academic success were pursued. Finally, ideas regarding strategies for academic success and the impact for faculty and administrative paradigm shifts in teaching, residence life, mentoring, and retention were explored.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Making sense and deriving meaning of data is the objective of data analysis (Hatch, 2002). The process includes “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data base, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 181). Interviews and participant journals are frequently used in case study strategies and lend themselves toward this approach. When reviewing documents, researchers search for meaning by looking for patterns. After identifying patterns, coding of the records can take place (Stake, 1995). Typological analysis is used when attributes are known or easy to distinguish (Hatch, 2002). Because the WHO has completed a comprehensive list of

attributes related to QoL, and the literature review substantiated categories in these areas related to academic success among undergraduates, the typological approach was appropriate to pursue for interviews and journaling involved in this research. The process of typological analysis is detailed in Appendix G.

**Interview analysis.** Seeking patterns through typological analysis is a strategy that helps researchers divide everything observed into groups or categories for disaggregating the whole phenomenon (Hatch, 2002). The typological approach, (Hatch 2002) was used to generate categorical groups based on the WHO attributes linked to QoL and perceptions of academic success among undergraduate students. The four main categories included (a) physical health (PH), (b) environmental health (EH), (c) social health (SH), and (d) psychological function (PF) (WHO, n.d.). The typological approach required me to set typologies to sequester the findings. For PH, the three typologies were exercise and fitness, sleep and fatigue, and drug/alcohol use. For EH, the three typologies were financial issues, living arrangements, and leisure. For SH, the four typologies were relationships with friends, supports from family, relationships and academic support from faculty, and social media. For PSF, the three typologies were academic stress and anxiety, coping with academic pressure, and spirituality. A table that details the typologies related to these four main categories are listed in Appendix L.

Upon review of the data, additional codes did not need to be added because of emerging typologies. In addition, I color coded the data for efficient and effective coordination of information. A code bank related to each category and related typology is detailed in Appendix L.

**Journal analysis.** The analysis of documents, including journals, is important in qualitative studies. Journals can be analyzed to establish data that the researcher could not detect

in person, or in this case, during an interview (Stake, 1995). Hatch (2002) suggested optional processing journal entries in an ongoing way to encourage participants to keep up with the journal, provide the researcher a way to monitor progress, and help the participant with planning and to make time for journaling. Typological analysis, as described above, was the approach to interpret journaling data (Hatch, 2002). The same four categories, typologies, and codes were applied to the journal documents as with the interviews (see Appendix L).

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

Delimitations include boundary choices elected by the researcher. The participants in the study were 11 undergraduate health professions students. Most were women. No generalization of outcome information can occur with this type of case sampling model. The limitations of the study included the data search engines located within [redacted] University and Concordia Universities; the interview itself, which can produce filtered and limited perspectives; and participant journaling. Participant journaling can be problematic because not all subjects can provide articulate and perceptive insight at an in-depth and reflective level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, some journaling materials were incomplete or inconsistently written. Other limits included the time allotted to implement and finish the study.

Further research and differing outcomes might be possible given a longer amount of time to interview additional participants and analyze journaling efforts. Conversely, useful information may be gleaned from analyzing fewer critical cases, over a longer amount of time, instead of numerous typical cases over a shorter period. Similarly, the journaling process described here could be pursued over more time to provide richer perspectives regarding QoL experiences. Much may be learned from this study by other researchers regarding the perspectives, opinions, experiences, and strategies used by college-aged students. Replication of

this study could yield differing results if located in a different community, region, or part of the world. This type of case study has been rarely pursued. Because of the lack of qualitative studies in this topic area, the transferability of the process of this study could be useful to others seeking to pursue qualitative outcomes in this area.

### **Validation**

The inherent and strong relativity of case study design makes credibility and dependability of data interpretation challenging for the qualitative researcher. Reliable data and trustworthiness of information are the measures to which the scholar must aspire. Hatch (2002) recommended multiple forms of validation to minimize misrepresentation of collected data. Trustworthiness of the data is assured by the willingness of the participants to engage in the study. In this study, participants were informed about the topic, process, and expected findings. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), strategies for validation occur through the lens of a researcher, the participants, and the readers. Creswell and Poth asserted that at least three measures should be employed to assure credibility and dependability of data.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation of the data is a safeguard for ensuring the phenomenon within the cases remain the same at other times and in other spaces (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995). Data source triangulation occurred within this study in the form of two rounds of interviews and journaling activity. This protocol provided multiple ways of reviewing the same topics within the QoL attributes. Data were collected through these interviews, and journaling activities were coded with the same typological format.

**Prolonged engagement.** Persistent observation and committed relationship building is the crux of constructivist theory (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Participants and researcher in this study were engaged over an extended period of time and through multiple contacts in order to

establish relationship, collect data, and reflect upon findings. Member checking during this time helped to produce dependable data. Member checking questions were based in the findings of the first interview; samples are included in Appendix F. The approach included the researcher seeking the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was accomplished through review of the interviews, analysis, and the researcher sought input for changes, edits or additions from the participant so as to clarify and further detail responses.

**Rich and thick description.** A commitment to rich and thick descriptions and reflexivity from the researcher rounded out the credibility and dependability checks. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted that thick description means the researcher provides details when describing the case, and rich description means abundant interconnected details are provided. Validation is attained when the researcher returns to his raw data to add further description that may be helpful during analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researcher reflexivity, or becoming aware of one's own biases, values, and experiences, ensures clarification and position understanding of the reader (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Comments about experiences and orientations help to shape interpretation and discussion for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Expected Findings**

I expected to hear many unique experiences, perspectives, and opinions regarding QoL and academic success among these 11 college-aged students. I also expected to uncover a variety of opinions regarding physical, psychological, social, and environmental attributes. Participants will express differing ideas about the understanding of these attributes, and may identify strong descriptions of what attributes were important to them, depending on their own life experience. What one student experiences as hugely positive may not even be identified by another student

as an important experience. These interpretations may provide insights for faculty members as they seek to support students in the classroom, residence, and within the overall university experience. This information may also help other students and higher education professionals as they endeavor to assist future students with greater understanding of QoL, which may lead to academic success. Finally, a gap will be filled in the literature regarding qualitative research and QoL issues among college students. Past research on QoL was predominantly quantitative; this study addressed the qualitative gap.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues should be considered not only during the data collection phase but throughout the duration of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative studies in particular have an “ever expanding scope as inquirers become more sensitive to the needs of the participants , sites, stakeholders and publishers of research” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54). Conflict of interest issues, the researcher’s position, and other ethical considerations are examined in this section.

**Conflict of interest.** Conflicts of interest occur when an individual derives personal benefits from actions or decisions made in his or her official capacity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For a researcher, this may include situations that may take advantage of a site or relationship in ways that harm or disrupt the inherent nature of the study or participants. I had no prior relationship with the participants involved. The intent and purpose of the study was provided to the participants, and informed consent was sought from all participants (see Appendix H). All findings of the study were shared with interviewees. Confidential data were not shared or distributed for personal or monetary gain but only for the benefit of scholarship.

**Researcher's position.** At the time of the research I had a professional relationship with a health professions school at this research site. I had no personal gains by conducting this study; my intention was to better understand QoL issues. Interviewing and review of journal writing as described in this chapter was my role through the data collection procedures described.

Reflexivity was addressed to confront my own biases regarding college-students, academics, and QoL issues. I recorded my own ideas, analyze and reconcile my own biases in a journal (Hatch, 2002). By seeking definition and separation of my own biases, I decreased the tendency of “going native” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), or inserting my own beliefs into the study.

**Protection of the student.** Students are at risk of being taken advantage of during research studies because of their convenient sampling and “captive audience” location within schools (Hatch, 2002, p. 67). To avoid this kind of exploitation, a clear purpose of the study was provided, voluntary participation was sought, and minimizing the disruption of the site or physical setting was attempted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Again, informed consent was sought prior to the beginning of the study. Individuals were involved collaboratively, through member checking, sharing of findings, and fair benefit distribution. My consistent presence helped with reciprocity issues. IRB permissions were sought and attained through Concordia University–Portland and [redacted] University before any data collection procedures were initiated. Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) (CITI Program, n.d.) and Epigeum (Epigeum, n.d.) trainings were sought and attained. These trainings provide certification to ensure research ethics standards and compliance in human subject's studies. Data is stored in a locked drawer within a secured office with no other access. Electronic data is password protected. Raw data and other identifying materials will be discarded seven years after publication, per approval from the research institution's IRB.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Methodological constructs were explored in Chapter 3. Social constructivism was the justified conceptual framework for this study. The purpose of the study and research questions were analyzed and supported through the selection of typical qualitative case study design. Case studies are supported throughout the literature as appropriate and useful when researchers seek qualitative understanding of experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview and journaling techniques were described in full. Typological coding and analysis techniques were described. The description of the research site and purposeful sampling procedures were discussed. Ethical considerations and bias issues were explored and addressed according to multiple sources and were specifically applied to this study.

An analysis of the data and results will be reviewed in Chapter 4. The sample, research methodology and analysis are examined. An overall critique of the results and findings are also evaluated.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

In this chapter I present the findings of this multiple case study designed to understand how undergraduate students perceive their own QoL and how it may influence their own academic success. In this chapter I describe individuals' lived experiences and develop themes that represent the responses of the individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two questions guided the study: How do university students perceive quality of life issues as they relate to their own perceptions of academic success? What life experiences are identified as influencing college students' perception of a positive or negative QoL?

The sample, research methodology, and analysis are discussed. Semistructured interviews, secondary semistructured interviews, and journaling are described, as well as how the typological analysis approach was used to analyze the data. The findings and presentation of the data and results are included.

### **Description of the Sample**

I invited 70 undergraduate health students to participate in this multiple case study. From the 35 "yes" responses, 15 were selected to participate. Thirty-five responses was well above the suggested amount for a purposeful sample for multiple case study research (Hatch 2002). The 35 "yes" cards were placed in an envelope, mixed, and 15 were drawn blindly. This procedure stays within the purposeful sampling technique, as all of the potential participants met the inclusion criterion. Of the 15, seven responded to the confirmation email, six withdrew, and two did not respond. I then selected another seven participants, using the same technique as described above, from the remaining 20 potential participants. From these, four elected to participate. This provided a sample of 11 participants, well within the guidelines for multiple case study. All of

the participants were undergraduate health students, ages 19–28. Two were males and nine were females.

### **Description of the Participants**

All participants were given pseudonyms. See Appendix M for an overview of the participants.

**Ashley.** This 19-year-old sophomore was a sonography major who applied to, but was denied entrance to the sonography program that year. She was a quiet, contemplative young woman who lived with other female students in on-campus, apartment-style housing. She was originally from the Detroit area, about three hours from the university. She required much coaxing and encouragement to expand upon her original thoughts and seemed unsure of her answers at times. She enjoyed her volunteer experience working in a hospice center with a woman she visited one or two times per week. She did not participate in sports, clubs, or other campus-related activities. She worked part-time when she visited home on weekends but did not work while attending the university. She described herself as alone much of the time and spent a lot of time in her bedroom.

**Meg.** This speech-pathology major was currently applying to graduate school and stated she carried anxiety because of the pressures associated with that process. She worked two part-time jobs, one in a daycare center and another babysitting for a local family. She was currently seeking to earn enough money to go on a mission trip to Uganda. She was motivated by her strong Christian faith and relationships. She lived with three other female roommates in an apartment within the urban center that surrounded the health campus. She described her anxiety as occurring among her friend groups as well as when she approached faculty.

**Abbey.** Abbey was one of the oldest (age 28) involved in the study. She was working fulltime as a surgical assistant before entering the university and earned a good wage with company benefits. She chose to quit her full-time job and return to school to pursue an allied health degree to become a medical sales representative. She was forthright and directed in her career and decisions. She broke up with her longtime boyfriend and had planned to be in a different stage of her life by now. She became tearful in both interviews, yet at the same time she was determined with her plans. She stated she did “not want to be married to her job” and that balance in life drove her forward.

**Kyle.** One of the two males in the study, Kyle completed only the first round of interviews and did not submit a journal. He sustained a significant brain injury as a teen, which, he stated, had driven him to become successful in school. He hoped to become a physician’s assistant and stated he experienced significant academic stress because of the pressure to be accepted into graduate school. Kyle was an athlete and participated in intramural sports as well as in sports as leisure. He described a strong relationship with family and faith in his religion.

**Cole.** Cole, the other male involved in the study, was 25 years old, a bit older than most of the participants. Cole was a transfer student, had changed majors at least four times, and spoke about trying to find the right fit for himself, which would include a balance between leisure and career. This pre-physical therapy major was considering yet another major change, as he realized his cumulative grade-point average may not be high enough to be eligible for acceptance into the physical therapy graduate program. He worked as a waiter and carried a heavy credit load. Cole stated he tried to balance his life and values relationships.

**Amanda.** Amanda, a sophomore, wanted to go to graduate school in speech-pathology. She was an allied health sciences major. She had struggled with a chronic disease since

childhood and stated that managing this situation had given her resilience, strength, and purpose in her life. She embraced a strong Christian faith and stated she coped with academic stress through this faith. She felt supported by her family and had close relationships with her roommates. She enjoyed mission trips through her church, as well as music and vacationing with her family on an island in the middle of Lake Erie.

**Eileen.** Eileen was an allied health sciences major, with a goal of being accepted into the accelerated nursing program as a graduate student. She was the vice-president of a sorority and active at the state level within this organization. She was outgoing, talkative, and willing to share many aspects of her life. She was socially oriented and spoke often about the relationships between herself, her roommates, and her sorority sisters. These social relationships seemed to influence how she viewed her academic stress levels. She stated, “I have stress surrounding my roommates, and it affects how I perform academically.”

**Lori.** Lori was a speech-language pathology major. She planned to apply to graduate school in two years and was stressed about keeping a high grade-point average. She had changed her major a couple of times and admitted she “does not have it all figured out” when thinking about her career, QoL, and life in general. She worked two jobs and felt pressured to make responsible decisions regarding money and school. She supported herself financially and lived with roommates who she perceived as not having to struggle as much as she did.

**Tess.** This female student was a sophomore majoring in ultrasound and sonography. She was worried about being accepted into the program next year and was working on a parallel plan “in case I don’t get in.” She was one of the youngest students in the study, at 19. She stated she was searching and asking God “what my gift is” and “what I should do with my life.” She did not feel supported by any particular friend group and yet sought assurance through relationships.

“I don’t feel like I’m part of any cohesive group,” Tess said. “I don’t feel like I’m part of anything.” She felt distant from her roommates with whom she shared an apartment on campus. She stated her family was pressuring her into finding a job and admitted she needed one, but she said she not handle money well.

**Donna.** This student was one of the oldest at 28 years. She had a good job as a paraprofessional in a school, which she quit to come back to major in speech-pathology. She had a nephew who was born with special needs, and that motivated her to work in the schools. She found her talent while working as a paraprofessional, and she observed a speech-pathologist who encouraged her to pursue her goal. Donna was first-generation, as well as a minority student, of Latina descent. She mentions both of these issues in her interviews with me, which she said were significant to her journey. She lived with her boyfriend, who worked fulltime.

**Kara.** Kara was a sophomore with an allied health science major. She worked two jobs and lived in an on-campus apartment with three other women. Her family was scattered across the country, and she stated she struggled with the distance between them sometimes. She had suffered from chronic migraines since childhood, which impeded her ability to study and attended class. This physical health problem caused stress and anxiety as she moved through courses. Kara enjoyed photography and described herself as a creative person. She had a kitten and a steady boyfriend whom she identified as being a strong and caring support.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

I used semistructured interviews, secondary semistructured interviews, and journal entries to collect data. I used Hatch’s (2002) typological approach to analyze the data. I asked each participant to review his or her interview transcript and make changes, additions, or edits to more fully describe their experiences. Meg elected to make revisions, and these were

permanently added to her transcript. This method of member checking ensured that all participants had opportunities to be sure their experiences were reported accurately (Stake, 1995).

**Data collection.** I collected data in three phases: semistructured interviews, secondary semistructured interviews, and participants' submitted journals where they recorded thoughts, ideas, and experiences that reflected their understanding of QoL and academic success.

*Semistructured interviews.* The first round of semistructured interviews with each of the 11 participants occurred over a period of four weeks. Each interview was conducted at a time and place convenient, familiar, and comfortable for the participants. The location was on-campus, within the college of health professions, where the students had classes.

In the first round of interviews, I asked each participant 10 interview questions I had generated in advance (see Appendix B). The questions reflected the WHO (n.d) attributes for QoL. Questions were developed because of information discovered in the literature review regarding college students and their specific characteristics. The literature review also guided me to include questions that merged QoL issues and academic success—for example, how does stress and anxiety influence your academic experience? Stress and anxiety were found in many past studies to influence quality of life and academic success.

The 10 questions reflected the four domains of the WHO (n.d.), which included questions based in physical health, environmental health, psychological functioning, and social health. These four areas were further broken down to reflect specific issues found in the literature regarding college students. Exercise/fitness, sleep/fatigue, and illness were central ideas related to the attribute of physical health and were reflected in Interview Questions 1–3. Questions 4, 9, and 10 reflected the attribute of environmental health and explored ideas related to finances,

leisure, and living environment. Psychological function was reflected in Interview Questions 5, 6 and 7, which addressed stress, coping, and spirituality. Question 8 reviewed the area of social health, and explored relationships between friends, family, and faculty (see Table 1). All questions had academic success embedded as a core component that drove the research questions. I voice-recorded each interview and transcribed each recording verbatim.

*Secondary semistructured interviews.* After the first round of semistructured interviews were concluded, I crafted four more questions that I asked of each participant during the secondary semistructured interviews (see Appendix C). The content of the four questions were determined by a preliminary analysis of the data collected by the first round of interviews. I wanted clarification of some emerging themes between participants, and in addition, multiple participants seemed to want to talk about certain areas that were not originally included within the first set of data. Triangulation, using information from a variety of sources can be powerful (Hatch, 2002). By triangulating this preliminary data, I could see where elaboration needed to take place.

I generated the second set of questions in advance and asked all four questions to 10 of the 11 participants. At this point, one participant (Kyle), elected to drop out of the study. His information from the first semistructured interview was still used as per my IRB approved consent letter. The second semistructured interview occurred approximately six weeks after the first interview was conducted. All secondary semistructured interviews occurred over a period of two weeks. All of the interviews took place at times and locations convenient, familiar and comfortable for participants. All were conducted within the school of health professions.

Table 1

*An Overview of the First Interview Questions and Typology*

WHO typology	Attribute	Question numbers
Physical health	Exercise, fitness, sleep/fatigue and illness	1. Tell me about your experiences with fitness or exercise and your life as a college student.  2. Describe your experiences with sleep or fatigue and how that might be linked to academic success.  3. Explain the role of illness in your life as a college student.
Environmental health	Finances, leisure, and living environments	4. Tell me about your financial situation and its impact on your QoL.  9. Explain your living environment, and how it influences your QoL and academic success.  10. Tell me about your leisure and academic success?
Psychological functioning	Stress, coping and spirituality	5. How does stress or anxiety influence your academic experience?  6. Tell me about your spirituality and college life?  7. How do you relieve academic or other pressures? How do you cope?
Social health	Relationships between friends, family and faculty	8. Describe your relationships with friends, family and faculty and the benefits and challenges associated with QoL and academic success?

Questions 1 and 2 combined the major attribute of psychological functioning, stress, coping, spirituality and academics. Questions 3 and 4 were constructed to reflect the social health attribute (see Table 2). In particular, purpose and meaning, academic success, social media, and

relationships with faculty, were explored. I voice recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim.

**Journals.** At the beginning of the second semistructured interview, I asked for journals to be submitted. Journals were hard copy and hand written (Hatch 2002). Journals were voluntary and included writing prompts that the participants could use or not (see Appendix D). Writing prompts included attributes of the WHO, and reflected all four areas as described above. Eight journals were submitted. Abbey and Amanda stated that they lost their journal. Kyle (cited above) dropped out of the study and therefore did not submit a journal. I accepted all journals, no matter how much or how little each participant had written.

**Data analysis.** I used typological analysis to analyze the data I collected (Hatch, 2002). Typological analysis is used most frequently when the typologies are known before the data are collected (Hatch, 2002). Because of the WHO (n.d.) definition of attributes regarding QoL, the typologies for coding were known (see Figure 1). I used this method to analyze all forms of data collected.

Table 2

*An Overview of the Second Interview Questions and Typology*

WHO typology	Attribute	Question numbers
Psychological functioning	Stress, coping, academics and spirituality	Tell me about how your understanding of purpose in meaning in your life helps you to understand Quality of life and your academic success.  How has your understanding of QoL and academic success changed over time?
Social health	Social media, relationships with faculty, and academic success	What about social media and/or technology helps/hinders your QoL and learning? Tell me how faculty and/or staff could be more helpful as you pursue academic success.

*Semistructured interviews.* I voice-recorded and transcribed each recording within 48 hours of the interview. I emailed each participant with their transcriptions. Participants checked the transcriptions for accuracy and made corrections, additions, or edits. They emailed the member-checked documents back to me within approximately three days. None of the participants made changes to the first-round of interviews. These were the documents I analyzed. I read each transcription and marked participant's answers by noting the main typology of each response. In many instances, responses could fit into more than one typology. For example, when one student began talking about media and technology-based activities, her responses could be coded by social media, leisure and friends/relationships, because she stated she participated in social media for leisure and to maintain relationships. For a sample of coding and responses that fit into more than one typology, see Appendix N.

Next, I reviewed the data and made notes in the margins where I saw relationships or themes beginning to emerge within the same interview and between interviews. I also made notes if I noticed supporting ideas emerge that I did not necessarily ask about during the initial interview. I wrote all of these notes on individual summary sheets for each participant. See Appendix N for a sample summary sheet. I compared these summary sheets and noted similarities, relationships, and emerging themes. I used an additional master summary sheet (see Appendix O) to identify a preliminary frame of analysis and guide my thinking toward developing secondary interview questions. From this analysis, I established four additional questions surrounding psychological function and social health (see Appendix C). These frames of analysis allowed me to develop questions for the second interview that would help clarify and suggest other ways to analyze each student's lived experience.

*Secondary semistructured interviews.* I voice-recorded and transcribed each recording within 48 hours of the interview. I emailed each participant with their transcriptions. Participants checked the transcriptions for accuracy and made corrections, additions, or edits to the documents they thought were appropriate. They emailed the member-checked documents back to me within approximately three days. One participant had additions to her transcript, and these were added to the transcription for that participant. Kyle declined to continue the study at this point, so only his first interview was used in analysis.

I once again used the typological model as outlined by Hatch (2002). Because of the focused questions in the psychological and social typology areas, most of the typological coding was found to be within these areas; however, some responses again could be coded by many typologies. I reread all the transcripts and again noted relationships and themes that occurred within each transcript and between transcripts.

*Journal.* I received journals at the time of the second semistructured interview. Journals were coded per the typological approach used for the first interview. Journals were read a second time, and notes were added that identified similarities, relationships, and themes. This information was included on the summary sheet for the corresponding secondary semistructured interview for each participant.

I generated a summary sheet for each secondary semistructured interview transcript and journal. I developed a secondary master summary sheet (see Appendix P) where I identified four emerging themes of analysis: (a) stress, coping and academics; (b) purpose, meaning, and career decisions, (c) social relationships and faculty, and (d) technology and social media. These typologies were supported by the interview data and journal entries and were analyzed to identify any relationship between the themes (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Generalizations and Support*

One-sentence generalizations	Support
Academic stress is understood as coming from a variety of sources.	<p>Lori: “I have constant anxiety about getting into grad school, I’m worried about how I’m going to finish the semester.”</p> <p>Tess: “I have friends, but very few, I don’t feel like I’m a part of anything, I want to be,... to find it, this would help me with school too.”</p> <p>Donna: “Running out of time, being sick, having to cancel appointments in order to get studying or coursework done causes stress. I’ve also skipped class to study for a different class.”</p>
Developmental status of each student seems to influence how stress is perceived and how it is managed over time.	<p>Kara: Finding the right supports and friend groups over time helps me stay connected, it helps me through the bad spots.”</p> <p>Abbey: “I feel like I’ve backtracked a little, but I’ve learned through growing up that you roll with the punches, you persevere.”</p> <p>Cole: “I’ve learned I need to be willing to adapt or adjust in this journey through life in order to cope.”</p>
Purpose and meaning in life is understood differently by participants.	<p>Meg: “Praise God, I’ve raised enough money to go to Uganda. I feel called to my major.”</p> <p>Ashley: “Helping with that lady in hospice, just looking at her pictures and listening helps me to see my own purpose.”</p> <p>Lori: “To be a mom, to have a career, that’s the academic and life thing.”</p>
Purpose and meaning in life changes over time.	<p>Eileen: “Helping people is my purpose, this has changed due to maturity. Through getting older you figure it out.”</p> <p>Donna: “When I was 18 I was lost. I wanted something to motivate me, but I had no idea what it was, now I do.”</p> <p>Abbey: “I was a surgical tech person, I gave up a full time job with benefits to come back to school, I want a different career and lifestyle now, I don’t want to be married to my job, I want a balance.”</p>

Table 3 (continued)

One-sentence generalizations	Support
<p>When purpose is identified, often through struggle, students report decreased academic stress and increased positivity and coping.</p>	<p>Tess: We talked about God last time, I'm trying to figure out what my gift is, I want to know what God wants me to do...my major was set, but not now, I'm more willing to explore the alternatives, but it's unsettling."</p> <p>Amanda: "Through my diagnosis of POTS, it was a time of isolation, without purpose...I wasn't sick enough to die, but not strong enough to live...I'm getting stronger through that."</p> <p>Kyle: "I sustained a traumatic brain injury, it impacted my mom so much, it changed relationships in my family, it changed how I value them, I try to have the best attitude I can, show the utmost respect...and now I want to be a physician's assistant."</p> <p>Abbey: "I went through a bad breakup, I thought I would be married and thinking about kids by now...I went from owning a house to not owning a house, so I'm looking at a different picture and a different track, a happy balance between work and emotional well-being, that's why I'm back to school."</p>
<p>Students want relationships with faculty.</p>	<p>Kara: "Everyone should be required to go see someone (faculty) their first semester for an hour, to form a relationship with someone, like halfway through the semester."</p> <p>Tess: "I am currently wanting to find a faculty to be my mentor, that I can ask questions to...about school and life, I wish it was more acceptable to have ...a deeper relationship with a faculty member."</p> <p>Eileen: "I need a relationship with a faculty member, when I was a freshman I was at a loss...I needed something, someone ...you don't know how to create a relationship with someone older than you, it's a maturity thing."</p>

Table 3 (continued)

One-sentence generalizations	Support
Students understand faculty relationship as beneficial for academic success.	<p>Kyle: “When they have energy, enthusiasm, and dedication to get to know me. I like to see that commitment and positive attitude; it helps me achieve.”</p> <p>Cole: “I’ve never been one to reach out to a faculty, but I will say one professor can change everything.”</p> <p>Lori: “We need to give the freshman professors some slack...they have like 80 people in there, per section...how do you have a relationship with that many people?”</p>
Students can describe their perceptions of positive and negative attributes of faculty.	<p>Ashley: “Organized, accessible and fun faculty are better.”</p> <p>Kyle: “This one chemistry professor, asked a question and started dancing! She was waiting a long time and she started dancing! She said, ‘I’m here all night’, and people started laughing and someone blurted out an answer...that kind of energy and dedication...is great.”</p> <p>Meg: Faculty can set up adversarial and competitive situations, which impacts and puts stress on my learning, and purpose and meaning in my life...it makes the school experience not so positive.”</p> <p>Amanda: “When faculty make you feel like you are a number, or are dumb, it’s frustrating.”</p> <p>Abbey: “I am hugely impacted by unfair practices, when I’m held to something not included in the syllabus.”</p>
Academic technology is understood as supportive and beneficial for student academic success.	<p>Cole: “At school t is pretty imperative, but a double edged sword. You have the world at your fingertips, you can YouTube a thousand different professors lecturing on your exact topic in physiology, on your same topic. . . It’s hugely beneficial.”</p> <p>Abbey: “It can be a tool. It fosters communication and community when you belong to an online group.”</p> <p>Ashley: “Of course it helps...the Blackboard platform is a must. It helps so much with school.”</p>

Table 3 (continued)

One-sentence generalizations	Support
Social media is understood as having positive and negative influences on academic success and Quality of life.	<p>Eileen: “I grew out of it. I use it as an escape now. I don’t text nonstop anymore.”</p> <p>Tess: “There are comparisons all the time, like, ‘I got a scholarship, or I’m dating so and so,’ and I think, I wish I was doing that.”</p> <p>Donna: “It distracts me from my work, I’m trying to limit myself on the phone...I have an app where you grow a tree the longer you stay off the phone. On the positive side, it connects me with my family.”</p> <p>Lori: “People are so addicted to their phones, Instagram bothers me. I see all these beautiful women, they are fit and gorgeous, and it can hinder your self-confidence. Somebody always looks better.” “Thank God I don’t have a MacBook because I know you can text off those, I wouldn’t get anything done.”</p> <p>Amanda: “I try to be happy for other people when they post but it is hard. Envy is the thief of joy. How can you be happy for others if you envy them? It’s confusing, everyone wants to be a kind person.”</p> <p>Meg: “I love beauty tutorials...I can destress watching them. Also the painter. . . . Bob Ross, his voice, so soothing.”</p>

I used color coding and sticky notes to identify and create themes and relationships between typologies. I recorded the main ideas that emerged. I identified an attribute, student development, and this seems to have relationship with existing typologies. I identified relationships between (a) lifespan development and stress, coping/academics; and (b) lifespan development and purpose, meaning/career decisions. I revisited the documents and looked for evidence that supported the patterns and relationships identified. I reviewed the collected data again, and sought out evidence that did not support the themes and relationships identified. I

wrote one-sentence generalizations and finally selected excerpts that supported the generalization.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The findings suggested the participants understood QoL to be influenced by many attributes. These attributes described how these college students perceived their own academic success. Perceptions of QoL changed over time. Individual student development was found to influence students' own understanding of QoL and academic success. Four main themes described students' QoL and academic success: (a) Purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL, (b) Stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success, (c) Relationships with faculty are desired by students and important to QoL and academic success, and (d) Technology and Social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL (see Figure 1 for a typological analysis).

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

I analyzed the data I collected from the initial and secondary interviews, plus the journal entries, by applying the typological analysis method (Hatch, 2002). Two research questions were posed: How do university students perceive QoL issues as they relate to their own perceptions of academic success? What life experiences are identified as influencing college students' perception of a positive or negative QoL? Four main themes were found that answered these questions: (a) Purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL; (b) Stress, coping, and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success; (c) Relationships with faculty are desired by students and important to QoL and academic success; and (d)

Technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL. These themes are further reviewed below.

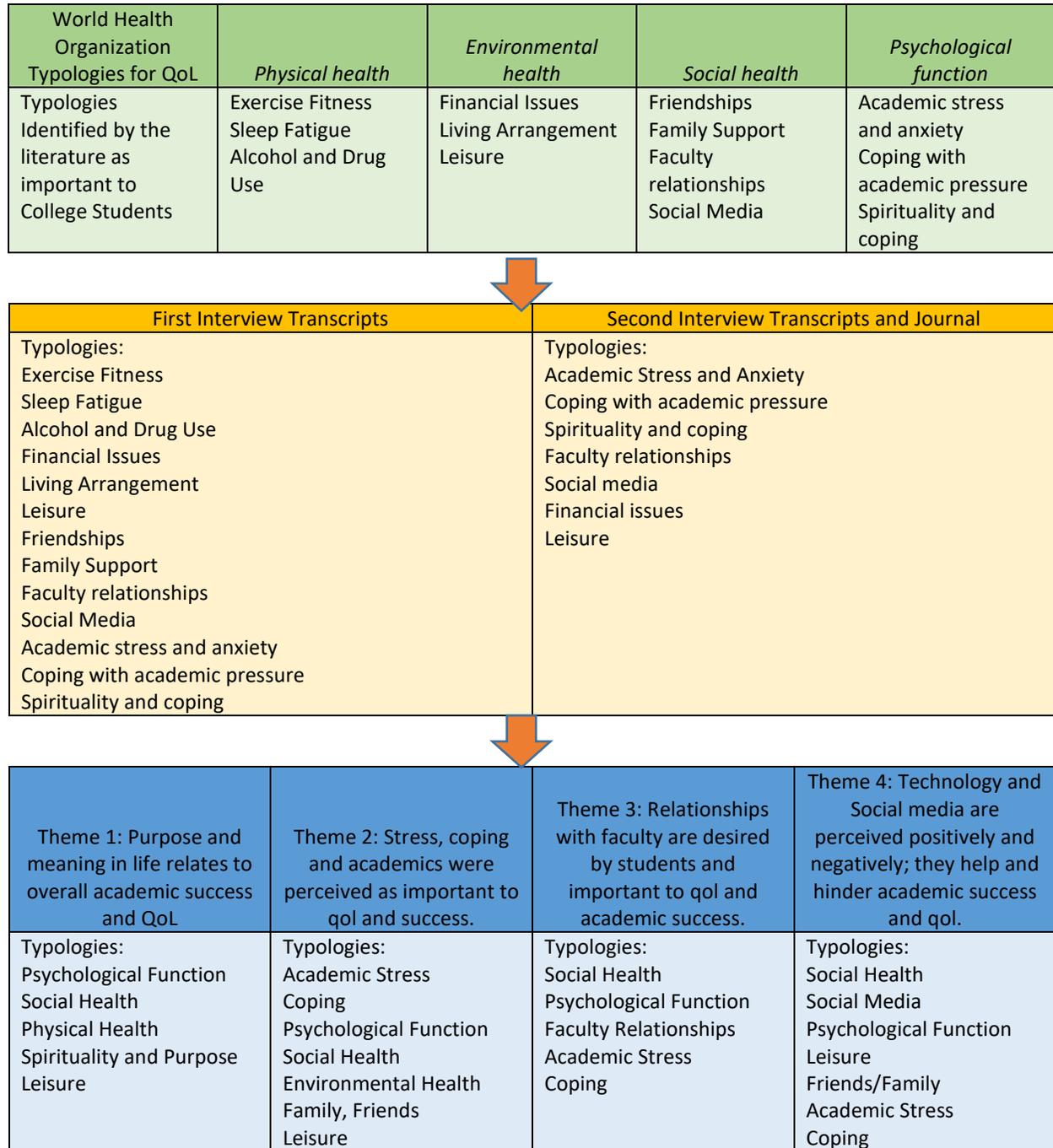


Figure 1. Typological analysis.

**Question 1: How do university students perceive quality of life issues as they relate to their own perception of academic success?**

*Theme 1: Purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL.*

Purpose, meaning, and career decisions were discussed in a variety of ways as impacting QoL and academic success. Some participants revealed that purpose and meaning in life was found through an epiphany, or hardship and struggle. Three participants said that a physical illness or disabling condition put them through a process of struggle, and this process helped them identify their purpose in life. Kyle said, “Having a traumatic brain injury affected my life, but it put it into focus. It’s why I want to be a physician’s assistant.” Kara stated, “Going through constant migraines and now with my mother’s stage four uterine cancer, puts purpose, health, and relationships into perspective.” Amanda said,

I have learned to cope over time through my Post Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. When I was first diagnosed, it was a time without purpose and meaning, but I keep getting stronger through that. I had to sit in a dark room. No sound, no music, no stimulation. Just a strip of light under the door. I realized I was in a hard season of life. It was ok, because of that strip of light. It was hope. I could choose what to focus on. If you choose not to focus on the best parts, you won’t have a good quality of life.

Many students reported that once a purpose in life was discovered, their QoL increased. Others identified moments of clarity or meaning that led them toward a greater understanding of their purpose. Kyle said,

Bonaroo, you know, that music festival in Tennessee? Everyone was so positive there. Fulfilling is a great word! It does not feel like you are on earth. You are at a place that is a part of this planet and country, but at the same time, you are away, like for five days. It

was freedom, it was a retreat. You could express yourself in any way you want. I want more of that.

Cole said leisure, sports, and then a flow experience associated with those activities helped put more meaning into his life.

It's amazing when you find that thing . . . that thing that hits all the buttons. The thing that makes you tick. What an unbelievable change in our life that can be. It sets a burning passion underneath you. I remember when I was pre-med. I was thinking I was going to be in school another eight years. I wasn't thrilled. I tried relating snowboarding to my life somehow. Keeping it in my life so I can escape into something I love. It keeps me going.

Most students said when purpose and meaning were identified in their lives, academic stress lessened, and positivity improved. A student's own development may influence the understanding of purpose and meaning and then the perception of quality of life. Many students remembered that when they were younger, they were searching for a career (associated with purpose), or a friend group, or meaning through religion. They also remember feeling "lost, isolated, and lonely." Donna said,

When I was 18 I was lost. I wanted something to motivate me, but I had no idea what it was, then my nephew was born with special needs. I was working as a paraprofessional at the time, and got to help with a speech-language pathologist. I knew then what I wanted

Tess stated, "I'm 19. We talked about God last time. I'm trying to figure out what my gift is. I want to know what God wants me to do." Lori described her own understanding of purpose and meaning when she was younger: "Being without direction." When participants identified a career or meaning through some other avenue, they identified more ambition, drive, and academic success. Abbey said,

I was a surgical tech with a good salary, benefits and the whole thing. I quit that, went back to school. This degree is the way to apply for jobs I want. I don't want to be married to my job. I want a balance.

Some students directly connect their own struggle with career choice. For example, the students with disability or chronic disease stated the reason they chose health professions were to help others like themselves. Kyle, Kara, and Amanda struggled with a debilitating illness or disability. All chose health professions: physician's assistant, prosthetics, and orthotics, because their perspective of purpose changed through their experiences. Participants who identified with religion as part of their purpose stated that they chose their professions or academic major so they could serve others. Amanda stated:

Jesus Christ is my savior and Lord. What he has done in my life... that gives me purpose. I can use my gifts and abilities to serve others. This is a huge testimony to my faith and what I'm doing in my life.

Meg said,

Praise God, I've raised enough money to fund my trip to Uganda. I feel called by God to my major. The thought of being able to work is like a light at the end of a tunnel. As challenging as this is all now, it will be worth it.

Others found meaning when becoming more aware of themselves as time went by. Abbey said,

Life is short and beautiful. I think I have backtracked in my life a little. I thought I would have kids by now, but you roll with the punches. You persevere. I want to be able to have the type of life I want. I've changed that over time.

The awareness of one's own strengths and abilities and how those might suit a certain major or career were patterns found among the data. Eileen stated, "I'm a helper, a nurturer. I always have been." Donna said "I'm a great listener. This will help me when I become a speech-pathologist."

***Theme 2: Stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success.*** Participants described many sources of stress. Some students described stressors as directly relating to the pressures of academia, like when attempting to attain high grades, anxiety related to testing, or when applying to a program or graduate school. Lori said, "I'm worried about getting into graduate school for speech language pathology. There is constant anxiety about homework, tests and grades. I wonder how I'm going to finish the semester." Donna said, "I'm anxious about running out of time, being sick, having to cancel appointments in order to get studying or coursework done." Eileen summarized what many others expressed:

I think the stressful thing is that I want to go to graduate school and I want to do accelerated nursing. I love the classes in allied health sciences, but you really can't do a lot with it. It will get me into graduate school, into nursing, but there is a lot of stress associated with application, money. . . . I feel like I could have done better my freshman year with grades. It's my fault. *That's* stressing me out.

Others discussed stress that pulled them away from studies, like the need to work a job, thinking about finances, or family responsibilities. Kara stated, "Finances are stressful. I am a planner and I work two jobs. I have loans and financial aid. I have to plan for groceries, oil changes . . . and then balance my schoolwork with all of that." Others said bad choices like procrastination, choosing friends or leisure over study time, or getting distracted by social media caused them to experience academic stress. Eileen said, "Having friendships is a priority.

Spending time with them pulls me away from concentrating on academics, I'm very aware of this stress." Participants said they coped with this stress by getting organized, having healthy relationships with family and friends, good study habits, healthy coping techniques, and healthy leisure. Cole said he got into a rut: "Work, school, sleep, work school, sleep. I'm trying to get on a one of those beach volleyball leagues, but it's tricky. I need to work, I have school Monday through Thursday, and work Tuesday through Saturday." Meg stated, "I love talking to my sister and mom. I am super close to them. It feels more like a friendship, I love that, It makes me feel so much better about my life."

Relationships and leisure were identified as attributes that caused participants' own stress because of time away from studies and their perception of healthy coping with stress. The balance of these two contradictory perspectives was a struggle most all participants experienced. Tess stated, "I made bad decisions about my own finances. I don't have a job, but I made a trip to Chicago on a shopping trip. I mean, I needed it, but we were Uber-ing everywhere, and shopping." Almost all participants identified the anxiety of getting into a program or graduate school as important and potentially life changing. They identified the particular stress associated with the "what-ifs"—for example, "What if I don't get in to the program and what will I do then?"

***Theme 3: Relationships with faculty are desired by students and are important to QoL and academic success.*** Faculty relationships with students were perceived as complex. Students wanted relationships with faculty but some seemed not to know how to initiate these. Eileen said, "I need a relationship with faculty. When I was a freshman I was at a loss, I needed someone . . . you don't know how to make a relationship with someone older. It's a maturity thing." Meg stated,

I don't like my hybrid class. What is the point of doing this? You can't see the professor face-to-face, I don't know who they are, they don't know who I am. I want them to know me. . . . We are a bunch of faceless numbers. I don't think that is good for anybody.

Some students reported feeling intimidated or lost early in their college careers, and would have liked a mentor or deep relationship with a professor. Tess, for example, said:

I am currently wanting to find a person that I want to be my mentor, someone I can ask questions about life. I wish it was more acceptable to have a deeper relationship with a faculty member. Once you get into a program, that happens more frequently, but when you are a freshman or a sophomore, it is so hard. There was one professor last year, a sociology professor, who I connected with, but he ended up leaving, wouldn't you know it?

Students want a guide and helper to assist them as they move through this transitional parts of their lives. Participants said they wanted fun and to organized and have accessible, approachable, down-to-earth, and friendly professors. Kyle said,

This first class I had, right off the bat, she had high energy. She was moving around, smiling, talking very loud. It was very clear she was interested. She cares and wants us to know that. And instead of doing what all professors do: ask a question, no one answers and then they answer it themselves, she would just start dancing! So I'm thinking: what are you doing? She says 'I've got you guys from 6-9 p.m., and I'm in no rush.' So it made me more engaged! In addition to that, 9 p.m. rolls around and the janitorial staff want to come in and clean, except we are not done. So my professor says, 'Go outside in the hall', and she brings all her stuff out, chemistry beakers, everything. She is with us until 9 or 9:30. I think that is incredible! For a professor to stay with us all that time, after

a three hour lab, and dancing! I thought, you really care about my learning. This helped me. It stuck to me.

Professors who were knowledgeable, fair, and consistent were seen as positive. On the other hand, professors who seemed to “talked down” to students or who were inconsistent or unfair caused stress. Amanda stated,

When faculty make me feel dumb for asking questions, even in office hours, it’s frustrating. Also when you feel like a number . . . before you get into a program, its bad. It’s also frustrating because I really liked my biology teacher, my freshman year. But I know for a fact she would not remember me because there are so many people. How do you ask for a letter of recommendation from someone like that? It’s hard to conceptualize you are not a priority, just one of the students.

Meg said:

This one professor set us up to be adversarial. She emphasized the competition to get into the speech program. That put stress on all of us, and then set us up to be competitors. We had a hard time forming relationships. It also put stress on the most important thing in my life, my purpose. . . . It became not so positive then. Why would she do that?

Lori said: “I have my advisor. He makes resources available and very easy to get. He includes us in schedule changes, and puts on workshops like resume development, he is also accessible, every Tuesday and Thursday. I feel very supported.” Professors who were not motivated or who taught another professor’s material without changes were perceived as not interesting. Lori continued,

There is this other professor I wish was out of the speech program. She does not teach from her own material and just reads, verbatim, the PowerPoint slides from another

professor. There is no listening to her. There is no organization. It's like we are a class of kindergarteners and she is reading a book. It is awful. I hope to God she does not teach any of the other sections. It's been so bad. We don't have a relationship with her. Ugh. It's just I go to school six straight hours on that day, and ending my day with that! Some people are online shopping, I looked up what I was going to get my boyfriend for his birthday. There is just no learning there. We teach ourselves. We are resigned to it.

Many students said they do not go to office hours or seek relationships with professors unless there is a problem in a particular course. But the student conceded that a willingness on the professors' part to get to know them beyond just a number was prized. Cole said, "I've never been one to reach out to a professor, but I will say that one professor can change everything."

Abbey stated,

I don't really need to talk to them. But if they would have coffee with me, that would be good. I also liked to see their kids in the office, running around . . . and they were just like any other dad or mom. They were more real.

Students seemed primed for adult mentorship relationships with faculty. The younger students especially seemed to want and need this guidance. Healthy relationships with faculty were also associated with coping and those persons identified in the relationships were often held in high esteem, as essential to positive coping and managing multiple stressors.

***Theme 4: Technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL.*** Technology and social media among students were perceived as a double-edged sword. Academic technology such as BlackBoard platforms were seen as essential and even mandatory to the modern-day college student. Lori said,

You have so many academic resources, like databases. It's fantastic. Academics in general have flourished. Like when my parents had to dig through libraries and textbooks all the time. It's so much more efficient.

Cole said, "It's imperative. You have the world at your fingertips. You can YouTube a thousand video's on physiology, a ton of other professors telling you about the same topic, which is pretty amazing." Ashely stated, "Of course Blackboard helps me stay organized. You can't be a college student without it." Many cited their appreciation for school databases, being able to attain resources quickly, and for being able to access professors through efficient communication avenues; email, text, phone, or messaging. Kara said, "I FaceTime and use my laptop, and will be sitting there doing my homework at the same time. It's really nice to have both aspects. . . . Internet to use for homework, and Facetime for social connections." All of these were understood as being important as students progressed toward academic success. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook were viewed as having both positive and negative attributes. Abbey stated,

Social media is a tool. It fosters communication and community when you belong to a group, but on the other hand people can be so mean. You think, when you see someone's Instagram site, "Wow, they are living their best life." But in hindsight everyone is fighting their own battle. It is hard when people always look happy, but if you post negative stuff, people will say "why is she going off like that?"

Comparisons and the feeling of being judged was prevalent among many students interviewed. This stress was viewed as a distractor from academics and was perceived as decreasing academic achievement among participants. Tess stated, "I see people posting about

being in a relationship, or that they got a scholarship and I think ‘I wish I was doing that.’”

Amanda said,

I was always comparing myself. They have such beautiful pictures. Looking at all these people who had wonderful things going on in their lives. Lots of people post about getting into their programs, and it’s impacting me recently because I’m in college and I’m trying to get into those, and I’m fighting for good grades and it’s a stressful season. And I think, I should be happy for people. They have worked so hard, and they are finally in the program. I need to learn how to be happy for other people, and not to compare myself. Because comparison is like a thief. A thief of joy. You can’t feel good for yourself and you can’t feel good for another person. This is the biggest problem I have with Instagram and Facebook and social media in general.

Meg stated,

I definitely see myself as addicted to social media and I also see how it is a hindrance. I see the harmfulness of social media. I look at people’s Instagram’s and I will say, oh my gosh, they are so beautiful. And they can do this and this and this and here I am stuck in my house. It’s a comparison and when I am talking to them, I am like, it is so cool you got to do that, but when you see the pictures, or the statements, you really compare . . . and judge. Constant pictures of like, their spring break trip, and I think, “Oh I’m stuck in [Michigan]. and this person is in Cabo, living their best life. Sometimes I take myself off Instagram for like two weeks, but then go right back on.

Lori said,

Instagram bothers me. You can see so many beautiful women and they are fit and gorgeous, it can hinder your self-confidence. There is always someone who looks better,

is richer, is smarter. I don't mean to sound like I see myself as inferior, or less than, but people look like supermodels all the time! I think, I wish I had that hair, I wish . . . that's the hardest thing about social media, just seeing . . . other people.

Cole stated,

I think social media is discouraging because of jealousy. It's very easy to have a different life on social media than in real life. It's easier to enjoy that life more. Everyone compares: trips, beauty . . . the humble brag. Quality of life and my best self can be utterly phony, a façade.

Many students identified the ability to instantly connect with other students, or a community of students, friends or family as one of the single most positive thing associated with social media. The ability to initiate, nurture, and maintain important relationships through social media was a viewed as an attribute that contributed to positive QoL. Donna stated, "It keeps me in contact with my family, we schedule outings, talk, socialize, when we never could before. It bridges the distance." Ashley said, "I use Snapchat to talk to friends. It keeps me in contact with my friends across the state." Kara said,

It's a great way to reach people you wouldn't imagine talking to. I have made friendships over finding people on social media. You can find them if they post something about where you live, or if you are near there. You can be like, "You seem pretty cool, what you are doing is something I like also . . . would you be interested in getting coffee?" Or if they post something on Twitter, you can respond. People vent sometimes . . . and if I see something very sad, I will say, "How are you doing, how are things?" So it is a great way to reach out and support someone. You can positively impact their day. You can build relationships.

It also helped to alleviate academic stress as a leisure pursuit. Ashley said, “I will scroll through Instagram at night before going to bed. It’s a relaxation thing.” Eileen stated, “I use Instagram as an escape now. I kind of grew out of it. I don’t text nonstop anymore, but use it to view beauty tutorials. . . . YouTube videos.” Lori said,

I watch YouTube to divert my attention. I’ll watch a painting tutorial [featuring Bob Ross.] My generation dug him up. His voice is amazing. He is fantastic to fall asleep to. There are like 30 minutes and I can’t make it through!

**Question 2: What life experiences are identified as influencing college student’s perception of a positive or negative QoL?**

***Theme 1: Purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL.***

After analysis, life experiences of the participants can be broken into two perspectives as they relate to purpose and meaning in life. Students identified a time before and during a search for purpose and meaning, which was viewed more negatively, and after a purpose or meaning was found, which was viewed more positively.

Many students reported a struggle for direction or feeling lost and alone during their search for meaning. Isolation, loneliness, or being without meaningful relationships was prevalent among the students at this time. Eileen said, “I heard a quote today, ‘Everyone is in your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime.’ I really love this. I have been struggling lately with deciding if people are in my life for the right reason.” Some students cited that choosing the wrong peer group was detrimental because at the time part of their purpose was to form relationship among their peers/others as they first entered college. Kara said,

My freshman year I got into the wrong group. You know you want to be accepted, and you don’t know anyone. My roommates and their friends were into things I didn’t want.

It took me a while to realize I could choose. I could choose to not be with them. But then you have to go out and insert yourself into another, sometimes already established groups. It's super hard.

Other students said their living arrangements were difficult for the same reason. Eileen said,

I have realized something about myself. I carry the people I care about with me, their emotions. [For example], my one roommate has been a hot mess lately, and it is stressing me out. She does not realize the impact she has on the rest of us. I realized that I have to stop putting in so much thought into the people who don't put thought into me.

Multiple participants said choosing a difficult major and the potential of not getting into that program meant a different career choice, and this thwarted their original perspective of their purpose in life. Career choice, which is sometimes bound tightly to purpose of life, might be threatened or lost. Lori stated,

[My] anxiety is high this week. I'm worrying about exams and how I'll do on them, then how I'm going to finish the semester. I'm very worried about grad school, more than usual. However, when I have a bunch of exams in a row, I tend to worry about the results and then [my] not getting into grad school because of my bad scores. My mind is jumping everywhere! I'm trying to remain calm. Self-doubt sucks.

In many instances, participants spent countless hours, days, months, and years preparing for acceptance into a major or program that supported their own belief in their own purpose, meaning, or calling. Tess stated,

I'm feeling better about my future plans with my major, my future job, my future husband. I'm just feeling stable in knowing what I want, which is so nice. I'm still

stressed though because the sonography program is very competitive and I really want to get in. I have a rough draft of my life and I don't mind little changes here and there, but I don't want large things to change. Those need to line up otherwise I start to freak out. I don't like not knowing what's going to happen, so I need structure and to work on a goal.

The potential of not attaining this goal was viewed as a negative experience. Their perception of not having the knowledge, skills, or abilities to succeed in their chosen career was a viewpoint held as very negative.

On the other hand, many students said moving through this time of adversity or struggle, was the very experience that let them to some of the best experiences of their lives. The struggle of "Who am I?" was a frequent perspective that participants linked to purpose and career choice. Many students cited physical illness, or disability as part of this struggle. Lori said, "I had migraines all week this week. I couldn't go to class. This is terrible. It stresses me out, I worry about all the class I miss, and catching up. But I always do. I have faith in myself." Others said that experiences in spirituality or religion helped them identify meaning in their lives. Meg stated,

I went to church today. It was really nice to escape thinking about school and just dive into my faith more. Sometimes I have to remind myself that the stress of school is for a greater purpose too. This will all be worth it in my future profession.

Epiphany or flow experiences helped others identify their purpose. Still others said that experiences in relationships or leisure were the catalyst that helped them identify purpose and meaning. Kara stated,

I've been thinking about it and my purpose is to be here for my family. Being there for them and then helping them out. I've always wanted to help people and this is what I've

done all my life. It's about helping others like people I know like my family, and people I don't know. I grew up in Chicago, and there are a lot of homeless people. I give back any way I can, like buying food or a jacket in the winter. . . . It's the little things. That is what my life purpose and meaning is.

Cole said, "I thought the snow days we experienced would really impact my scholarly motivation, but it allowed me to refuel my social relationships which in turn prompted a better quality of life." Ashley stated,

I volunteered today for my hospice organization. We put together puzzles. She would mostly point to the piece and I'd actually place it for her. At one point she was able to do herself, and her face lit up. Hanging out with her helps me forget about everything else. It's my favorite part of my week, my life. I can't wait to go again.

No matter what participants identified as the source of purpose and meaning in their lives, a change toward positivity and empowerment was the outcome. The discovery of strengths, abilities, and talents in many areas of life also contributed to a feeling of positivity, being able, and self-determination. Meg said,

All of my speech classes are so important! Like how to work with hearing aids. . . . I love being in this environment right now. I have to remember it's all going to work out. This is where I'm meant to be.

Amanda stated, "I'm going into healthcare and it gives me the opportunity to use my gifts and abilities to serve others. This is a huge testimony to my faith and what I'm doing with my life."

***Theme 2: Stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success.*** Participants experiencing academic stress and their ability to cope with that stress were

examined. Life experiences concerning fear of failure were prevalent. Many students cited experiences of studying hard and failing an assignment, test, or course as one of the major negative experiences of college life. Donna stated,

I overslept because the power went out. I was freaking out because I realized I had a quiz that morning. I thought I was not going to make it. My boyfriend drove me to class, but I still felt anxious because I really studied for it. I ended up making it the last 30 minutes of class.

The fear of not getting into a desired program or graduate school was another experience where participants experienced anxiety. Ashley said,

Today I found out I'm being considered for an interview for my program. This is great news. but I'm very nervous. My interview is on Friday. and I have no idea what to expect. My stomach is in knots. I honestly didn't think I'd get an interview, even after working so hard. I'm thrilled, but also so nervous. I feel like I can't breathe. Actually not getting in to the program was another negatively viewed stressor.

Kyle stated,

I'm not sure my roommates have the same stress load as me. They are not pre-physician's assistant. . . . It takes a lot more to get into my program. I'm constantly trying to get A's because I know there is some other kid studying right now, while I may not be studying, and he's going to get an A. You have to keep up.

Students saw rearranging their own perceptions of themselves and self-identity as negative. Financial concerns, including their worry about debt also influenced participants, as they found themselves torn between time spent working to pay for tuition, rent, food, transportation, and other life expenditures and actual time spent in school. Donna said, "My

partner does not have insurance and his medications are starting to get expensive. I hate that I can't work full time. I'm glad that I am almost graduating and will be able to start making money again." Lori said,

Well, I picked up a second job, and I have no free time. I was worried I wasn't going to have enough to pay rent. I was \$700 short. Luckily, the date got extended until later in March so I can pay my rent then. I filed my tax return on literally a 36-hour stay at my parents' house, and I have enough to cover it. I like my second job. It's child care. So I'm keeping it; however, I maybe saw my roommates three times last week, and my boyfriend only once.

When students found coping mechanisms to offset the anxiety and stress they encountered, this was viewed as very positive. Experiences in exercise and fitness were an avenue of coping that many participants found helpful. Donna stated,

Today I woke up with a lot of energy and decided to exercise in the morning. It felt so good and I was in a good mood the whole day. I was also thinking about getting into graduate school. I became excited as I exercised!

Leisure activities like photography, watersports, music and creative arts were also found to be positive coping mechanisms. Tess states, "I started doing karate again! I missed it so much and it's something I'm passionate about so I'm glad I have that in my life again!" Kyle said,

I'm really outdoorsy, so whatever the sport, baseball, softball, soccer, whatever it is, I like to do it! In summer I wakeboard and skate, so I like to be outside a lot. It helps. I'm a high energy person. I have to get rid of the stress somehow.

Other participants found that relationships provided supports which were positive. Talking with friends, family and loved ones assisted participants in problem solving, coping, and putting life and school demands into perspective. Ashley stated,

I went to my downtown class today, and we had a guest speaker. He talked about saying thank you to our friends and family, and basically said to enjoy them right now. I think that is what I needed to hear, because I've been unmotivated and moody lately. I called my mom after class. I felt better.

***Theme 3: Relationships with faculty are desired by students and are important to QoL and academic success.*** Positive and negative life experiences with faculty are counted by all participants as important to their perspectives of QoL. As stated earlier, most students desired a relationship with faculty; however, faculty behavior shaped student ideas about how those relationships might or might not occur. Negative life experiences with faculty, include faculty behaving in an unprofessional way, or treating students with disrespect. Lori said,

I had this one prof who got so mad at a student he started yelling. Then he slammed down a beaker, and it broke all over the place! A couple of my friends decided to go get someone. . . . We left class and went and got another professor, who relieved that first one. She taught the rest of the class. I was relieved when I heard that that person was let go. I don't want anyone else to go through that! I felt so bad for the person who asked the question! He was only a freshman!

Other negative life experiences with faculty include faculty not being prepared or not being a skilled instructor. Ashley said,

My physics professor said our exam will be tomorrow, because of the snow days, and that does not feel fair to me at all given we had no time to review or ask questions ahead of time. I don't think I'm going to do well at all.

Eileen stated, "I realized something today in class. When class structures are unorganized or rushed it really stresses me out. In class today I couldn't focus because the schedule for the semester didn't make sense to me." Faculty that behave in a superior or inaccessible way also left students feeling like their experiences were negative. Kara stated, "Sometimes even when you go to office hours, they just repeat the question, slower. I'm like, I get the question. . . . I need help with the answer." Other factors included the students' own behavior toward faculty. Some cited that they did not have the social skills to approach faculty and felt insecure about interacting with them. This led them to avoid direct interchanges with faculty. Donna stated, "I'm a first-gen student and my parents didn't set me up to really have the confidence or skills to know what to do. I've kind of felt my way along. As a result I don't approach faculty that much." Meg said,

I'm afraid to go to office hours. Every time I've gone I've almost cried. I don't know. . . . I just don't know what is going to happen. I don't know what they will ask. I'm afraid the questions I'm going to ask will be, well, dumb. What is the point of coming all the way out there for a dumb question? Every time they talk about office hours it's like a pit appears in my stomach. I get all hot. Something about the close proximity with them, with this person I view as way up here (holds hand above head). They are very smart, this person . . . intimidating. This has been going on since freshman year, and I hope it does not continue because I need to know how to make relationships.

Cole said, “I only approach faculty when I have a problem or an issue. I’m very mindful of staying present in the class, so I am pretty on top of things. I don’t go to office hours, I don’t ask questions in class.”

Positive faculty behavior was perceived as fostering relationship between faculty and student. This perspective was viewed as very helpful with students reporting improvement on academic performance. Positive experiences from students came from faculty who expressed interest in them, not only from an academic perspective but from a personal perspective. Amanda stated,

I have a professor who is really good at saying . . . you can come in, even if you don’t want to talk about class, and you just need to talk about other stuff. It’s nice to know that this person has the understanding that we are more than just students, we are friends, daughters, sons. . . It makes it so much easier!

Experiences where faculty were energetic, lively, and enthusiastic were also perceived as positive. Meg said,

I’ve definitely had professors who were proactive. . . . They said ‘Hey!’ when they see me now, and I’m not even in their class anymore. And I’m like ‘hey!’ and it makes me feel so good because they actually remembered me. I think the really good professors that I’ve had helped me solidify that I’m meant to be here, that this is the career I’m supposed to have,

Faculty who were knowledgeable, resourceful, and assisted students with solutions were also seen as positive. Approachable and down-to-earth faculty behaviors also were seen as positive life experiences for students. Abbey stated,

I was dreading this semester because I have back-to-back 3-hour classes, but this one prof is really good, and I really like her. . . . I do like going to her and just talking. . . . I could see her developing into a mentor for me.

***Theme 4: Technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL.*** Technology and social media were perceived as having very distinct positive and negative life experiences for students. Phone or media addiction was seen as prevalent among participants. Cole said,

I might have a mild addiction to playing video games competitively. I can square up against someone and have the chance to win keeps me coming back for more. I find myself staying up until three or four in the morning instead of sleeping or studying. Some nights I lose more games than I win, and I end up not even caring about schoolwork.

This experience was identified as negative and difficult to battle. Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and other platforms were identified as having addictive properties, and most participants admitted they impacted their life experiences in a negative way. Lori said,

My cousin just deleted Twitter because she noticed how much she has been using that app lately. I have four exams coming up, so I'm strongly considering deleting the app so there isn't the distraction while studying. I'm on Twitter a lot, too, during the day.

Kyle stated,

I work in a bar. In summer I go golfing with an 85-year-old and 82-year-old married couple. Sometimes my brother and Dad come along too. And being able to hold a conversation, to go golfing with them . . . and listen to them. And not be on Instagram and Twitter . . .and getting all that shit out of here. Just to talk with someone, and let them

talk . . . and me do the listening. Their stories are so much better than my generation's are going to be. I want to respect that as much as I can.

Problems associated with phone or media addiction was difficulty with time management, procrastination, distraction, and fatigue; both physical and mental. All of these experiences contributed to negative participant life experiences. Comparison and judgment, as described earlier, was also a major component of negative life experience.

Social connection, relationship initiation, and maintenance, and community were among the positive life experiences found among participants. Kara said,

I've made friendships over time on social media. You can look up anyone if they are on Instagram. Instagram is where you can see pictures. Twitter is the one where people express their feelings. Some people text. On Snapchat people can tell stories, and anyone who are your friends can view it. It's on there for 24 hours and then it disappears. It's a great way to reach people you know, and those you wouldn't imagine talking to. You can vent. Also, technology to manage coursework is great.

Technological tools that facilitated communication with faculty, and scheduling academic and work life were found helpful. Lori said, "Having a news source all of the time, in an instant, its important, we need to know what is going on." Abbey stated, "Sitting in a coffee shop with someone in your same class and being able to study . . . because of Google docs, or the internet. Even when we are sitting and doing our own work, you can do that!" Academic supports through university constructs, which included Blackboard, were seen as positive experiences for students participating in this study.

## **Chapter 4 Summary**

The data analysis of this study revealed that the participants in this qualitative case study perceived QoL issues as central to their academic success. Their viewpoint was that multiple QoL issues specific to each student helped shape their perceptions of their academic success and future. Some participants valued different typologies and weighed them differently within their own lives, but all students identified the four themes that emerged: purpose and meaning in life, academic stress and coping, relationships with faculty, and technology and social media. The findings revealed that participants seemed to move through a progression of understanding based in time, experience, and maturity that influenced their perceptions and positive or negative outlook on life and their own potential for success. This perception influences their own ideas of self-determination, positivity, and efficacy. Relationships with others, as described within the themes, were also identified by all participants as important as components of quality of life and academic success.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

Although most students enter college with high hopes for the future, many are unprepared for the changes and transitions that are the hallmarks of this phase of life (Bucker et al., 2018; Joseph et al., 2014). Understanding how to attain success in academics as well as how students perceive QoL were the foci of this study. Participants in this study understood that having a high-quality life means that many facets of life must be in balance or perceived as contributing to their well-being, life satisfaction, or happiness. Themes emerged from the data suggesting participants shape their own perceptions of academic success and quality of life. They include (a) purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL; (b) stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success; (c) relationships with faculty are

desired by participants and important to QoL and academic success; and (d) technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL. If students can understand how each theme has relationship with academic progress, they may become informed regarding how to become more successful in college and in life in general.

In this chapter I present a summary of the results. I discuss the findings in relation to the literature and the limitations of the study. I present the implications for practice, policy, and theory, and offer recommendations for further research and a conclusion.

### **Summary of the Results**

The data I collected from the two rounds of semistructured interviews and journal entries were analyzed and suggested the participants understood QoL issues as coming from a variety of life experiences. In particular, four themes emerged as being important to participants as they explored ideas about what made them successful and happy in college. They include (a) purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL; (b) stress, coping and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success; (c) relationships with faculty are desired by participants and important to QoL and academic success; and (d) technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL. These themes describe the process by which participants begin a journey of transition and change during which they define themselves as they search for QoL and academic success.

The themes raise questions about how to support new college students, improve overall well-being, success, and decrease attrition rates. When students are self-aware and satisfied with life and all of its components, they find academic success easier to attain, they are more positive, and they feel more capable of managing life's needs and demands. The data showed that this

awareness also helped to increase efficacy as well as confidence among participants. The findings are important for faculty, staff and any mentor at the college level. Students perceived that faculty involvement was a critical element of their productivity, accomplishments, and success. Obstacles were identified as well. Younger participants described struggling with many QoL issues, and older participants struggled with coping and supports to adeptly manage these same issues.

The documents that I collected and analyzed demonstrated that participants need support, especially during the first few years of a college education. The stress, anxiety, and pressures of this transitional time pushed participants toward new ideas about themselves, their career choices, and relationships.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The semistructured interviews and journal entries revealed that participants understood QoL and academic success to be founded upon a variety of life experiences. What one participant declared as important to her QoL another student did not or had much different experience. The four themes, however, were common to all students and are important to discuss.

#### **Theme 1: Purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL.**

All participants noted that identifying a purpose or meaning in life influences their perception of a positive QoL. Where this purpose and meaning originated was less important to the participants than having a sense of purpose itself that answered, “Who am I?” Some participants stated that identifying a career choice satisfied their sense of purpose in meaning in life. Others said that family relationships, friends, and social constructs fulfilled purpose and meaning. Still noothers stated spirituality, religion, and service provided their life’s purpose. An epiphany or

sudden sense of clarity through life struggle helped others identify a purpose in life.

Acknowledging, participating, or behaving in such a way that fulfilled their purpose gave these individuals great life satisfaction, or QoL. This acknowledgment then played a part in their self-efficacy or belief they could achieve academically in college and in life. An identified purpose and meaning in life also provided a greater sense of positivity, self-determination, and confidence.

Purpose and meaning in life seemed to evolve and change over time. Younger participants reported much distress when attempting to identify their own purpose and meaning in life. They reported that they need or needed help, academically and from faculty, friends, and family. For older participants the process included identifying a sense of purpose, becoming more self-aware, and managing and coping with the changes of life more adeptly.

**Theme 2: Stress, coping, and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success.** Academic stress came from a variety of sources. Some participants stated getting into graduate school or the program of their choice was particularly stressful. Attaining a certain grade point average, test scores, and assignment grades was also high on the list of stressors. Younger participants felt the associated stressors that come from transition into college life. Getting adjusted to a new peer group and being away from a consistent support system, often the family of origin, produced anxiety, as did co-managing life demands and school work. Participants also identified managing employment and keeping up with financial demands affected their QoL. Such financial demands often had a negative impact on academic success, as time spent at work was time away from studies.

Coping with stress was managed through effective time management strategies, organization in academics, leisure, and relationships. Interestingly, participants said that positive

coping strategies, such as healthy leisure and supportive relationships, also caused stress, as did drinking to excess or spending money as a stress management technique. An additional stressor was maintaining relationships fraught with conflict, disagreements, or other struggles.

Participants stated this also took time away from studies, and without good time management strategies, many participants experienced increased anxiety and stress.

Older participants stated that they had learned effective coping strategies over the years that worked with their own lifestyle, and they could better put issues into perspective than could younger students. Younger participants frequently said that they felt lost or did not know how to cope with particular stressors effectively. Still other participants stated that they did not have the resources to cope effectively.

**Theme 3: Relationships with faculty are desired by participants and important to QoL and academic success.** Most participants said that they desired a mentorship with a faculty outside the classroom not only for career and academic guidance but for managing life demands in general. Participants said that when faculty were open, energetic, and enthusiastic, it made them want to approach them. Participants said that down-to-earth, approachable, and organized faculty also made them want to want to engage in a relationship with them. When faculty were unorganized, did not follow established syllabi or rubrics, or seemed uninterested in topics, participants disengaged from learning. Students said that erratic behavior from faculty or faculty who set up competitive relationships within cohorts made them disengage from that course and faculty member. Participants stated that they experienced stress when approaching faculty during office hours or even during class time for fear of being perceived as “stupid” or ill-informed. A mentorship with faculty early within their college experience would have been beneficial and

positive as the students explored purpose and meaning in life and struggled to manage stressors associated with university life.

Younger participants voiced more desire to have relationships with faculty than did older participants. Older participants said that they had study skills, stress management strategies, and supports to better prepare them for university life than younger participants. Older participants said that these supports and resources helped manage life and academic demands, whereas younger students seemed to want faculty help to accomplish these tasks. Older participants said that they acknowledge the benefits of positive faculty relationships but did not seem to seek them out as much as younger participants.

**Theme 4: Technology and social media are perceived positively and negatively; they help and hinder academic success and QoL.** Academic technology was understood by all participants as supportive and beneficial for academic success. Participants stated that access to technology is imperative for enrolling in college courses. Indeed, this generation of college student grew up with technology, and many participants said their experience in college was much different than their parents' in that regard. Participants said that supplemental academic supports through social media technology like YouTube and Facebook were helpful when answers when the course materials, class, or faculty were not understood. Conversely, technology has generated more ways to cheat, copy, or plagiarize during the university experience. While many participants said they this behavior was contemptible, most were aware of how to access and implement those processes.

Participants saw social media as having both negative and positive influences on QoL and academic success. These students saw Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram as being a stress relief and were used as a leisure pursuit. Participants said they liked

the way these platforms kept them in touch with friends, family, or a specific community. Relationships and connections were the focus of their positive perceptions of social media, and these relationships supported a positive QoL. Social media were also the cause of great stress and angst among participants. Participants stated that feelings of comparison, judgment, and jealousy were prevalent among users, and that social media and technology was addictive, to the point of ignoring studies and healthy behaviors (sleeping, eating, and physical exercise). Problems included excessive video gaming, chatting online, texting, shopping online, movie viewing, videos, and merely scrolling through the apps on their phones. Participants even described participating in this behavior during class times, group work times, and other formal study times set aside for academics. Participants report being aware of the behavior at the time but not being able to control it, being unaware of time passage, or said that a boring class or instructor was the reason for being online.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The focus of this study was QoL among undergraduate college students and how QoL affects academic achievement. Two research questions were explored: (a) How do university students perceive quality of life issues as they relate to their own perception of academic success? (b) What life experiences are identified as influencing college student's perception of a positive or negative QoL?

The World Health Organization (n.d.) described the four main components of QoL: physical health, environmental health, social health, and psychological functioning. A variety of attributes emerged in the literature as being important to academic success and QoL issues for traditional college-aged students (Asietal, 2016; Aysegul, 2014; Baert et al., 2015; Bjelica & Janovic, 2016; Cavello et al., 2016; Chu, Xu & Li, 2015; Connell et al., 2014; Covarrubias et al.,

2015; Dinzeo et al., 2014; Hershner & Chervin, 2014; Icaro et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2013, Maynard et al., 2015, Mortiz et al., 2016; Ridner et al., 2016; Roksa & Whitley, 2017; Shin & Steger, 2016; Yu & Tan, 2016). The WHO (n.d.) definition of QoL and literature review attributes regarding QoL were used as typologies when I analyzed the data.

Despite a wealth of available quantitative data, few qualitative studies had been undertaken on the topic. Thus, this study helped to fill a gap in the literature regarding QoL and academic success. The results can help scholars, community members, and faculty understand the perspectives of college students and guide them toward success and improved QoL. This study supported other findings in the literature. For example, Jaensch et al. (2015) suggested the lack of career decisiveness, purpose, and direction among college students can be expected to affect their overall life satisfaction. Indeed, the younger participants who discussed their ability to declare a major or become admitted to a program expressed these same worries. Joseph et al. (2014) similarly suggested life development issues associated with young adulthood may influence transitions, with a resulting risk for increased emotional and psychological stress. Sharma and Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) found a relationship between college students' sense of purpose and degree commitment. Students' perspectives on their intentions, goals, commitments, and purpose directly affected their academic performance, faculty interactions, extracurricular activities, and peer group interactions, which further reflected their academic and social integration. This influenced their decision to persist or withdraw from college (Sharma et al., 2018).

Participants in my study described similar ideas and understandings, where purpose, relationships, and faculty interactions helped to provide a sense of social acceptance, positivity, and a sense of academic success. Dinzeo et al. (2014) stated that overall health and sense of

purpose were the best predictors of QoL. Glanzer, Johnson, and Hill (2017) identified 10 common sources of meaning for university students: accomplishment in general, career, happiness, experiences, creative accomplishments, family, friends, service/helping, God/religion, and the ability to change the world for good. Participants in my study established almost identical sources of purpose and meaning in their lives. This helped to increase the perception of positive QoL Quinn (2013) also stated that positivity comes with a sense of purpose and that it enhances learning. Quinn was supported in my study: when students examined and embraced their purpose, their academic drive, enthusiasm, and commitment appeared to increase. This influenced their perspective of their own academic progress and success.

Overcoming stress or obstacles can be linked to autonomy and increased engagement in school and academics (O'Donnell et al., 2013). In my study, new experiences, independence issues, physical disability, illness, or other sources of anxiety and stress influenced a student's purpose and meaning in life. Holinka (2015) found that stress among college students is associated with transition to college, increased autonomy, decreased adult supervision, and new social relationships. Icaro et al. (2017) stated that the emotions experienced in the academic environment are related to important outcomes such as academic adaptation, success, health, and well-being. My study supports this assertion; students described many sources of anxiety and stress, which led to perceptions of poor academic performance. On the other hand, once they learned from or managed the stressor, they were better equipped to cope with and lead a more purpose-driven life and positive QoL. Lancaster (2015) found that multiplicity of meaning is important; meaning may result in thriving and strengthening after a stressful (growth) event, whereas other types of stressors lead to adaptations and learning to cope after the event.

Faculty behavior and actions within the university can encourage or discourage students as they seek relationship within the college system. Sanders (2018) stated that cultivating relationships that build trust, good life mentoring, and attention to vocation are important for academic success. Edvy (2015) suggested the responsibility of higher education is, in part, to improve life-coaching. Mortiz et al. (2016) stated that the training and function of the university should provide a learning environment that promotes students' QoL. These ideas mirrored my participants' viewpoints of positive relationship with faculty, meaningful mentoring, and assisting students through career decisions.

The results also suggest practical change in how universities support young college students. Goodwin et al. (2016) argued universities could better inform students of available services, both online and within formal and established systems, such as student life, residence hall management, clubs, athletics, advising, and faculty, which could improve young college students' experiences. Anding and Quinn (2005) stated that faculty and staff should focus on student-centric activities, as opposed to faculty-centric teaching. These researchers also found that faculty should engage in mutual pursuits of higher purpose. Rezaei and Mousanezhad (2018) found that academic professionals could better provide services to students, especially to those with low life satisfaction scores. The way in which faculty, staff, advisors, and other university personnel approach students must transform into a different state of leadership. In my study, students echo this sentiment; they desired a sense that a faculty was interested in them and wanted to be connected to them. Participants wanted to be seen as unique and significant.

Aksoy (2018) described reasons college students become addicted to social media. She found that individuals begin to use social media because of a lack of friends, social necessity, feeling of fulfillment, fear of missing out, and the intertwining of social media and daily life.

University students use social media to protect social relationships, to socialize, to acquire new friends, and to continue communicating with real life friends (Aksoy, 2018). Kabaskal (2017) reported Internet use can be problematic within families but offers positive attributes: quick, easy, and cheap access of information. In my study, students reported these same positive attributes regarding social media. However, as with Aksoy (2018), my participants also found that social media began to take over time spent in otherwise healthy activities like sports, face-to-face communications, eating, sleeping, and time spent on academics. The fear of missing out, as stated in the Aksoy (2018) study, is similar to the distraction, judgment, and feelings of comparison participants acknowledged in my study. Tekinarslan (2017) found that problematic Internet use was correlated with depression and a decreased perceived QoL. Hawi and Samaha (2017) found that addictive use of social media had a negative association with self-esteem.

These studies also point to the positive contributions that technology has provided to college students. The Internet is one of the essential information and communication mediums that could make contributions toward college students QoL: electronic databases, communication with teachers and classmates, and participating in online courses are among the positive attributes of university technology (Tekinarslan, 2017). This supports the perception of participants in my study.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited because of the qualitative multiple case study design. This made the results ungeneralizable. The reliability of the semistructured interviews made the study weaker because of the inability to generate identical interviews and techniques to all participants. Although in my researcher's journal I cued myself to not unconsciously lead participants toward answers I thought they wanted to give, I might have done so unknowingly. I made notes in the

journal about being enthusiastic when respondents replied with particular answers, but maybe I did not probe directly enough in part because of my inexperience as an interviewer.

Some students' journals were more complete than others. Some journals were specific with regard to entries, and others merely had single words or drawings associated with the topics. Some journals made use of the suggested writing prompts; others used no prompts. In addition, some participants dedicated much time into writing in journal and almost filled the entire journal, when others made notes that might have completed only one page. Thus, the data were prone to interpretation, and I might have interpreted some of the written data incorrectly. Two journals were never returned, which led to incomplete documentation for the data collection phase of the study.

This research was conducted in a midsized Midwestern college of students majoring only in health professions. It did not represent any other participants in any other academic majors or other parts of the college, region, country, or world. A limitation may be that health professions majors value certain aspects of the QoL typologies over another area, and that other majors might value different QoL attributes, which might have led to different results. The sample was homogeneous, with only two non-White students taking part. This mirrors the overall demographic of the university.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The results of this qualitative case study are available to scholarly and educational communities. The results are not generalizable, so the members of these communities should decide if the findings are relevant to them. The results of this study supported social constructivism.

**Practice.** To encourage students to manage stress, form positive relationships, and identify purpose and meaning in their lives, guidance and mentorship are needed. Administrators at colleges and universities should empower faculty, staff, advisors, residence hall workers, coaches, and others in positions of authority to assist in this endeavor. Students should feel supported and encouraged during this transitional and stressful time in their lives. Students' and faculty members' notions of "sink or swim" regarding academic endeavors should be discarded. In light of students' developmental capabilities and sudden changes in life circumstances faculty mentorship in college is warranted. Mentorship for every student should be accessible not only for academic and course advisement but for life-coaching and QoL issues. The possibility of mandatory mentorship for the youngest students should be explored. Face-to-face relationships are important to students, and relationships with faculty are prized and related to students' perceptions of satisfaction and QoL (Siming, et al., 2015). Students desire long-term relationships with faculty. Faculty and counseling staff should continue to work cooperatively. Faculty should continue to refer students to counseling centers when critical situations surrounding students arise and should not wait until there is a crisis. If faculty have strongly connected relationships with students, it could assist counseling programs and forestall the need for intervention.

The identification of purpose and meaning in students' lives is important. Students should have opportunities to form faculty (or other) relationships where students could explore career decisions, stress, purpose, and other important QoL issues. Time spent in early college years on student identification of purpose and meaning, self-awareness, and self-determination could increase the quality of academic experience and QoL for the college student. This time could be spent inside classrooms or with faculty mentors as described above. Faculty/student mentorship

focused on purpose and meaning in life could be interpreted as distinctly different from the typical office hours that many universities enforce. Office hours have typically been underutilized by students, and when students do attend office hours, it is primarily for academic questions, issues, or advising. Faculty should have time built into their teaching loads and schedules to support students in this manner. This kind of support would help students transition from high school into the adult world, especially important for younger students. As students move through an undergraduate career, become more confident, independent, and self-determined, they could decide whether to continue a mentor relationship. Older students may elect to become peer mentors themselves.

Faculty should continue to be trained on the teaching techniques and how to best prepare for coursework and deliver knowledge. They also need training on the newest technological approaches and how to navigate social media platforms should also be pursued. This would help reach students through the media they find attractive, convenient, and familiar. Faculty should be knowledgeable of the impact of social media and technology on a student's overall QoL. Helping students balance a healthy diet of social media and technology with other life essentials is significant according to my study. Knowledge of how to access social media, its purpose, and how to integrate content into the classroom should be required. With so many professors eliminating phones and computer use in classrooms because of non-class browsing time within the classroom, professors should incorporate specific ways to academically incorporate technology and media with purposeful intent.

**Policies.** Educational policies that promotes faculty support of students in roles outside of academic teaching are crucial. Policy changes should encourage mentorship and the student/teacher relationship with a focus on connectedness and relationship behaviors. As shown

in my study, these long-term relationships influence student satisfaction, which can affect retention and attrition rates among students (Rezaei & Mousanezhad, 2018; Rubin et al., 2016; Shin & Steger, 2016). Educational policies are needed that supports advanced training for faculty regarding teacher preparedness, delivering knowledge, attitude toward teaching and technological platforms, and social media. Policies that support the training faculty for mentorship and life-coaching should be examined as students pursue the meaning and purpose in their lives.

The participants identified QoL issues such as living arrangements, financial status, age, social media use, and lack of relationships as causing stress. These QoL factors, among others, could assist university personnel to change policies to support university students by targeting interventions toward students whose demographic and situational characteristics indicate a potential for being at risk (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). University policies should be examined regarding stress because of broader-level factors at the university level. These might include how students apply for and are accepted into programs. Policies that simplify or streamline these processes should be considered.

**Theory.** The findings in this study support social constructivism. The theory states that learners generate meaning through their own lived experiences and relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The findings suggest educational and learning experiences are built within the constructs that surround and individual. In other words, students know the world through their experience of it (Dewey, 1925). Knowledge and understanding is determined by the needs of people in different circumstances at different periods of time (Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

Jung (1921) and Dewey (1925) recognize subjectivity determines objective, trustworthy experience. Dewey stated that a developmental process, through self-awareness, informs a

person of their own state of being. In this study, the participants lived experiences dictated how they perceived their own satisfaction in their lives. Similarly, academic success is understood as being individually interpreted according to experiences and circumstances. Additionally, my study supports Jung's (1921) theories; adolescents and young adults may still be journeying through a developmental process and an awakening of self-awareness as they discover their own purpose and meaning in life. The participants in this study stated that when they were younger they felt lost or alone regarding connectivity, purpose, meaning, and overall quality of life.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A variety of research approaches should be explored outside of this qualitative design. I examined past quantitative studies that used the WHO-QOL BREF, Life Satisfaction Survey, Perceived Stress Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale, and The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well Being (among others). Additional quantitative studies should be added to the literature base. Mixed methods and other types of research regarding QoL and academic success among college students should be pursued to give the literature more substance. Research involving demographic changes for participants, promotion of QoL attributes, faculty practices, mentoring, and technology should all be initiated.

This qualitative case study should be replicated in more colleges and universities, and in other parts of the country. The Midwest may offer a unique culture, religion or belief system that may prove significant and may have influenced the perspectives of participants involved in this study. In other parts of the country where the culture, belief system and backgrounds of participants are different than the Midwest, results may differ. Researchers could focus on the perceptions of younger or older students, undergraduates versus graduates, and students studying

in other professions. If a researcher changes the demographics of the study in any of these ways, different results regarding QoL and academic success might be discovered.

Researchers should further explore how to promote positive QoL attributes among university students. Studies that focus on interventions that improve coping techniques, student/teacher relationships, campus support services, and life-coaching would be helpful to inform university administration and improve student satisfaction, retention, and attrition rates. Studies exploring the perspectives of university students and their journey to identify purpose and meaning in their life would also be important. A study about current faculty practices as they attempt to integrate QoL topics into teaching or mentorship sessions would be informative. How faculty attempt to improve their own practice in this area would also provide guidance for other mentors, faculty, and universities at large. Student understanding of these practices would be informative and could guide faculty toward more student-centered practice.

Another area of study would concern student practices as they try to mediate, change, or influence their own social media use as it relates to their understanding of QoL. Additionally, a study focused on best practices regarding balanced use of technology and social media could inform students and faculty regarding academic approaches that are most useful. Finally, a study regarding how social media platforms are used in informal and formal educational settings would inform faculty about the current practice. A follow-up study regarding best practices would help faculty prepare for teaching in a more inclusive way, attending to more up-to-date learning styles.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of college students as they examine QoL and academic success. Participants identified four ideas that

guided their understanding of how positive QoL and academic success were attained: (a) purpose and meaning in life relates to overall academic success and QoL; (b) stress, coping, and academics were perceived as important to QoL and success; (c) relationships with faculty are desired by participants and important to QoL and academic success; and (d) technology and social media help and hinder academic success and QoL. Participants identified with each of these themes in different ways and intensities. Each participant had a unique perspective and understanding depending upon their experience as a college student.

In conclusion, my findings provide new insight into the perceptions of college students and their understanding of quality of life and academic success. Understanding the perceptions and needs of students is a crucial first step in improving the circumstances that surround students. Students are interested in, and desire mentorship with faculty, an understanding of their own purpose in life, to improve their own abilities to manage stress and cope with life needs and demands, and also to balance social media and technology in positive ways. If these desires are met by thoughtful interventions from faculty and university personnel, this could lead to overall increased satisfaction levels among students. Improved retention and graduation rates could be the result. This study offers promise because there exists real solutions that would help students transition from anxious and dissatisfied to confident professionals and contributing members of society.

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## **Appendix A: World Health Organization, Quality of Life Definition**

The body of work regarding Quality of Life issues are measured through many instruments, and in particular, the WHO QoL (World Health Organization, Quality of Life measure, n.d.) which offers a comprehensive and well researched perspective. The WHO QoL BREF includes the variables: physical health domain (activities of daily living, dependence on medicinal substances/medical aids, energy/fatigue, mobility, pain/discomfort, sleep, rest and work capacity), and environmental surroundings (financial resources, freedom, physical safety and security, health and social care, accessibility, quality home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information and skills, participation in and opportunities for recreation and leisure activities, physical environment, pollution, noise, traffic, climate and transportation. In addition, the WHO QoL BREF identifies social relationships (personal relationships, social supports, and sexual activities) and psychological well-being (body image, appearance, negative feelings, positive feelings, self-esteem, spirituality/religion/ personal beliefs, thinking, learning, memory and concentration) as components that influence Quality of Life. Using the WHO QoL BREF to gain perspective among college students is an approach that has been used throughout the literature.

## Appendix B: Interview Guide 1

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (Subject Number):

Position of interviewee:

Description of the project: To understand QoL issues among college students. The first interview wishes to explore the physical, social, environmental, and psychological attributes associated with QoL and the understanding of students own academic success. Journaling expectations are also described. Prompts are provided for the journals.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences with fitness or exercise and your life as a college student.
2. Describe your experiences with sleep or fatigue and how that might be linked to academic success?
3. Explain the role of illness in your life as a college student.
4. Tell me about your financial situation and its impact on your QoL.
5. How does stress or anxiety influence your academic experience?
6. Tell me about your spirituality and college life?
7. How do you relieve academic or other pressures? How do you cope?
8. Describe your relationships with friends, family and faculty and the benefits and challenges associated with QoL and academic success?
9. Explain your living environment, and how it influences your QoL and academic success.
10. Tell me about your leisure and academic success?

Conclude Interview session: Do you have other ideas or suggestions regarding today's interview content?

Thank you.

Reflection:

## Appendix C: Interview Guide 2

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (Subject Number):                      INTERVIEW 2

Position of Interviewee:

Description of the project: To understand QoL issues among college students and how it relates to academic success. The second interview wishes to explore further, the attributes of college students and their own perceptions of academic success. Journal entries will be collected.

Questions: Will be developed after analysis of the first round of interviews. Typologies and themes will be analyzed within each transcript and between transcripts to identify areas in which deeper questioning will be explored.

Questions:

1. Psychological Functioning, (PsY 3, and Spirituality): Tell me about how your understanding of purpose in meaning in your life helps you to understand Quality of life and your academic success.
2. Psychological Functioning (Psy 2, Coping, and Academic Success): How has your understanding of QoL and academic success changed over time?
3. Social Health (SH4, Social Media, and Technology): What about social media and/or technology helps/hinders your QoL and learning?
4. Social Health (SH3, Relationships with Faculty): Tell me how faculty and/or staff could be more helpful as you pursue academic success.

Conclude interview session: Do you have any other ideas or suggestions regarding today's interview content.

Thank you.

Reflection

## **Appendix D: Journaling Prompts**

Time:

Date:

Journalist (Subject Number):

Description of Project: The journal is to describe your own personal understandings of each topic presented. You are encouraged to write consistently and as much as you would like. You may respond to each prompt, some of them or none of them, according to your own experiences.

Writing Prompts:

1. How does physical health (sleep, nutrition, exercise, illness or alcohol/drug use effect my quality of life? My academic success?
2. Stress, anxiety, academic pressures, or depression and college experiences?
3. Spirituality and the role in your life: academics and college life?
4. Social relationships with friends, faculty or famiy; your QoL and academic success?
5. What about social media affects your Quality of Life?
6. My finances effect my academic or Quality of Life issues in the following ways:
7. Leisure and your life; work/life balance issues.
8. Living and university environments; academic success and QoL.

Please feel free to add or comment upon any other topic that you feel is important to your experience as a student regarding quality of life and academic success.

## Appendix E: Researcher's Journal, Reflexivity, and Bias

Time:

Date:

Researcher:

Topic:

Description of Journal: To generate a journal of reflection that records the researcher's own thoughts, ideas, and possible bias throughout the process of research. Self-analysis and reflection helps to separate the researchers own thoughts from the data. Consistent times and thoughtful responses will be set aside to record these experiences. They will be journaled by time, date, and topic.

2/6/19: I need to be cognizant that I am drawn to stories of adversity and overcoming obstacles.

The stories during interviews from non-traditional students who have shown resilience and fortitude are inherently interesting to me. I need to be aware that other interviews and stories are just as valuable, and just as meaningful. For example, the traditional 19 year old sorority member, and her life of assumed privilege is just as important as the alternative described above.

I need to be always aware that a potential bias toward the students who experience adversity exists, and make sure I spend equal amounts of time and effort collecting data and analyzing the data from all participants.

2/26/19: I must remember when I am interviewing, not to just rephrase or paraphrase, but to think deeper and present the participant with probing questions. I need to be present at all times and be more able to follow the participants lead when they begin to talk about something or seem hesitant to broach a topic. I need to become acutely present...and mindful of where the participant is leading me. At the same time, I need to be careful about NOT leading the

participant in ways that are familiar, or seem intuitive to my own experience. I need to be aware of their own unique experience and find ways to help them express their own ideologies.

3/30/19: Analysis is difficult! I must remember to not insert my own opinions, perceptions, or ideas into the analysis component of the study. I must remain vigilant in letting the data speak for itself.

4/15/19: Interesting results. Some similar to my expected findings, some not so similar. There will be interesting literature comparisons, which I am seeming to stumble upon. I must remember to include the Quinn information, and see if there is a link between positivity, purpose and career decisiveness.

## **Appendix F: Member Check Questions**

1. Have I presented your responses fairly?
2. Have I presented your responses accurately?
3. Is the write-up a respectful representation of your experiences?
4. Are your responses from your initial interview reflective of your current perspective?
5. Is there anything you would like me to add to your responses?

## **Appendix G: Typological Analysis**

This typology is based on Hatch (2002):

1. Identify typologies to be analyzed.
2. Read the data, marking entries related to your typologies.
3. Read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet.
4. Look for patterns, relationships, themes within the typologies.
5. Read data. Code entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of your patterns.
6. Decide if your patterns are supported by the data, and search for the data for nonexamples of your patterns.
7. Look for relationships among patterns identified.
8. Write your patterns as one-sentence generalizations.
9. Select data excerpts that support your generalizations.

## Appendix H: Informed Consent Documentation

1. **TITLE OF STUDY:** Perceptions of Academic Success and Quality of Life Issues among Undergraduate University Students
2. **RESEARCHER:** Susan Sunden, M.Ed., CTRS. The researcher is a degree candidate in the Concordia University–Portland, and is conducting dissertation research.
3. **PURPOSE:** This is a research study and the purpose is to understand how undergraduate university students perceive their own quality of life as it relates to their own perceptions of academic success.
4. **REASON FOR INVITATION:** The reason for the invitation is that the students invited are undergraduate university students.
5. **HOW PARTICIPANTS WILL BE SELECTED**
  - Students will be selected on a voluntary basis after reading of a script in their classroom. Informed consent will be obtained.
  - Due to conflict of interest, [redacted].
6. **PROCEDURES**

Interview 1 will be conducted within the first week of the study and will be approximately 45 minutes in length.

Validation of interview transcript by participant, 1 week after interview for approximately 30 minutes.

Journaling requirements will be explained at the beginning of Interview 1, and will be encouraged for 6 weeks. Journals will be collected at week 6, or at the beginning of Interview 2. Each journaling will be encouraged for 20 minute durations. Total time allotment for journaling is approximately 120 minutes or 2 hours over 6 weeks.

Interview 2 will be conducted between weeks 6–8 for approximately 45 minutes.

Validation of interview transcript by participant, 1 week after interview 2 for approximately 30 minutes.
7. **RISKS** There is minimal known risks to the participants of this study. Your risks could be slight stress as you analyze your own lifestyle, habits and/or issues associated with your ability to achieve academic success at college. Please be aware you may exit the study at any time. You will be excused and receive a referral to psychological counseling immediately if any thoughts of self-harm or harm to others is described in the process of journaling or interviews. Electronic data will be collected and/or stored for this research project. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there exists a minimal risk that data could be lost or stolen.
8. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU** The benefit to you is a greater self- awareness and understanding of your own psychological, social, emotional, and environmental quality of life. An understanding of how this quality of life impacts your own perceptions of academic success is also a benefit.

9. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SOCIETY** While there are many quantitative studies that measure variables associated with Quality of Life and university students, there are few qualitative studies that explore the student experience/ perceptions surrounding this topic. This qualitative research adds to the few studies from which scholars, faculty, and administrators may benefit. Student life, residence staff and administrators at the university level may benefit from a greater understanding of quality of life issues and academic success as it relates to retention and attrition rates. Society at large can benefit as many studies indicate that this is the most transforming and anxiety ridden time of a students' life. Understanding this time in greater detail is essential so that change may be incorporated that more fully supports students while at a university.
10. **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION** Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be immediately destroyed.
11. **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY** Your name will not be given to anyone other than the researcher. All information collected from you or about you is for the sole purpose of this research study and will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. In very rare circumstances specially authorized university or government officials may be given access to our research records for purposes of protecting your rights and welfare or to make sure the research was done properly
12. **RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS** You will be informed about any significant new findings developed during the course of the study that may relate to your willingness to continue participating in the study. If you wish to learn about the results of this research study you may request that information by contacting: Susan Sunden at [sundens@gvsu.edu](mailto:sundens@gvsu.edu)
13. **PAYMENT** One \$20 gift card will be offered as an incentive for participation in the study. It will be provided at the time of interview 2, and when the journal is submitted.
14. **REMOVAL FROM STUDY** You may be removed from the study by voluntary action, or if you present any psychological duress as represented in interview or journaling that might include ideation of self-harm or injurious behavior. If this occurs you will be referred to counseling professionals.

By signing this consent form below you are agreeing to the following:

- The details of this research study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to have my personal data used for this study and agree the data can be transferred to the United States if originally collected outside of the United States;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign Name in ink: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

8. **CONTACT INFORMATION** State “If you have any questions about the study you may contact

NAME: Susan Sunden, M.Ed., CTRS

PHONE: [redacted]

E-MAIL: [redacted]

See physical address, below.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the **Office of Research Compliance & Integrity** [redacted] University, (address deleted).

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at [redacted] University (Study #19-128-H). Expiration: November 18, 2020.

Researcher: Susan Sunden email: [redacted]

C/O: Faculty advisor and research mentor, Professor Heather Miller, Ph.D.

Concordia University–Portland

2811 NE Holman Street

Portland, Oregon 97221



Concordia University – Portland Institutional Review Board  
Approved: December 5, 2018; will Expire: December 5,  
2019

## Appendix I: Instructor Permission Letter

Dear Faculty Member,

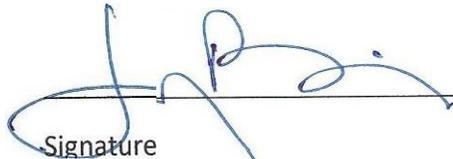
Greetings! I am writing to ask your permission to allow me to read a recruitment script (attached) in any/all of your sections of the classes where you teach undergraduate health students. The recruitment is for a research study I am conducting entitled: Perspectives of Academic Success and Quality of Life Issues among Undergraduate University Students for Concordia University. This study has been approved by both [redacted] IRB and CU IRB.

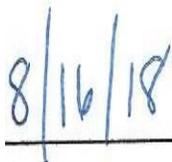
The script will only take about five minutes to read. I will then offer answers to any questions asked by the students. An indicator card will be distributed where the students will answer “yes” or “no.” If they answer yes, an email will be requested on the card so that I may schedule them for participation. If they answer no, they will be thanked for their time. The entire process will last approximately 10 minutes. This recruitment method was requested by the [redacted] IRB so that no student would be able to determine if one of their peers is participating or not participating in the study.

If you agree, kindly sign below acknowledging your consent and permission for me to recruit students from your course(s). Your approval to conduct this study is greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance in this research.

Susan Sunden, M.Ed., CTRS

Assistant Professor, Doctoral Student [redacted]

  
Signature

  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J: Recruitment Script

Dear Students,

My name is Susan Sunden, M.Ed., CTRS, and I am a faculty member in the College of Health Professions at [redacted]University. I am conducting a research study examining university students, their quality of life and how it relates to perceptions of academic success. I am inviting you to participate because you qualify as an undergraduate university student.

Participation in the research includes interviews and journaling. The 2 interviews are anticipated to take no more than 45 minutes each, and journaling occurs over a semester. The interviews will be audiorecorded. Upon successful completion of the study, one \$20 Amazon gift card will be provided to the participant.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Your identities will be protected by the assignment of confidential codes to interviews and corresponding journals. Data will be destroyed according to IRB requirements, after three years. Interviews will be conducted in [redacted].

If you would or would not like to participate, please complete the distributed research indicator cards, and indicate “yes” or “no” indicating you would or would not like to participate in the study. The card will be distributed at the end of the reading of this letter. If you indicate yes, you will be instructed to include an email address, so that I may contact you for scheduling reasons. Thank you for your participation,

Susan Sunden, M.Ed., CTRS

Assistant Professor, Doctoral Student

## **Appendix K: Student Participation Card**

### **Interest to Participate in Research Study**

I am interested in participating in the research study: *Perceptions of Academic Success and Quality of Life Issues among Undergraduate University Students*. I understand my information will be kept confidential, and I may withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_ **Yes** If yes, please include an email for scheduling purposes:

\_\_\_\_ **No** Thank-you for your time!

**Appendix L: Typologies for Data Analysis, Code Bank**

Code	Physical Heath (PH)	Environmental Health (EH)	Social Health (SH)	Psychological Function (PsF)
Code/Typology	PH-1: Exercise and Fitness	EH-1: Financial Issues	SH-1: Friendships	PsF-1: Academic Stress/Anxiety
	PH-2: Sleep and Fatigue	EH-2: Living Arrangement	SH-2: Family Support	PsF-2: Coping with Academic Pressure
	PH-3: Alcohol and Drug use	EH-3: Leisure and	SH-3: Faculty relationships	PsF-3: Spirituality and coping
			SH-4: Social Media	

### Appendix M: Overview of Participants

Participant	Major	Age
Ashley	Sonography	20
Meg	Speech-Pathology	20
Abbey	Allied Health Sciences	28
Kyle	Pre-Physician's Assistant	19
Cole	Pre-Physical Therapy	25
Amanda	Speech-Pathology	19
Eileen	Allied Health Sciences	19
Lori	Speech-Pathology	20
Tess	Ultrasound/Sonography	19
Donna	Speech-Pathology	28
Kara	Allied Health Sciences	19

## Appendix N: Sample Summary Sheet

Interview 1, Lori

Typology	Comments, quotes, patterns
PH1(physical health, coded blue) PsyF 1 (stress and anxiety, coping, coded red) SH2 (social health, family, coded orange)	Affected by anxiety: decreased sleep, weight loss: “I hate drinking, it sucks. I don’t drink much. . . I turn 21 next weekend so that’s going to be interesting.” “I do not use drugs or alcohol to cope. I receive some pressure from my friends to party. I cope by calling my mom.”
PsyF1 (anxiety, PsF3 spirituality, coded red) SH1 (social health, friends, coded orange)	<p>“My generalized anxiety disorder affects all aspects of my social, leisure and academic life. I am learning to cope with that. I tell myself, I don’t have time for this today (anxiety). This helps to change my life. School is the most stressful thing. The biggest stress is getting into graduate school. It terrifies me. I want it so bad. There is always something in the back of my head that says; if you don’t do good on this you won’t get in. Spirituality is a coping mechanism it also grounds me.”</p> <p>“I think what makes me happy is being successful. That is all I want in my life is success. And in relationships too...along with jobs...it’s how I view myself. I’m pretty social, I have social study habits too, I study together and talk it out...it helps.”</p>
EH1 (environmental health, finances, coded green) EH2 (living arrangements, coded green)EH3 (leisure, coded green) PsyF1 (Anxiety, coded red). SH 4 (social media, coded orange)	<p>“I need to work, I’m broke. I have financial aid. I’m taking a second job babysitting. My parents help with groceries. I spend like 100 dollars a month on groceries. I have to learn to deal with financial stress in my life. My living environment is fine. Campus is fine. The Grand Valley environment supports academic success. You’ve got to find yourself a place to learn.” Leisure: YouTube beauty tutorials are super relaxing...I could watch them all day, but they are also a distraction from school.”</p>

SH 1, 2 (Social health family and friends, coded orange) SH3 (faculty, coded orange)SH4 social media, coded orange)

Parents, siblings and friends identified as big supports. Copes by talking to mom. “My mom is so positive, all the time, whenever I’m feeling down I’m like, hey, I’ve got to call her.”

Faculty relationships: “I like the fact I’m not being taught by a TA. Reading Power points is terrible...faculty not making up their own materials is terrible. I don’t like when professors are not organized or prepared. Teaching another person’s content does not work. I would like a good relationship with faculty, but sometimes it’s not possible. “There are strong feelings of not learning in classes like this. I have one professor...there is no listening to her...we shop, we do anything online, because...its impossible (to learn).”

Social media: “Technology helps my learning and leisure. YouTube, Twitter, texting is also a distraction, but can help you too.”

## NOTES

Ask more about technology and social media. Ask more about purpose and meaning in life. Questions: What drives you forward...what makes you more aware of your success? Make the questions more clear...

Many areas are cross-typed. Meaning that more than one answer can be categorized in different attributes.

## Appendix O: Interview 1 Master Summary Sheet

PH (physical health), PsyF (psychological function), SH (social health), EH (environmental health)

Patterns, themes, relationships

### Supporting Evidence from Interviews

All typologies connect and influence one another. Certain typologies are more important to specific students. However, purpose and meaning in life, changes in perspectives over time, and relationships seem to be a common pattern between participants.

(PsyF)  
*Purpose and meaning in life*

Three participants: Kyle, Amanda and Kara, strongly tie physical health issues with a strengthened abilities in resilience. In other words, they mention these ongoing health issues/problems as giving them strength, and then fostering a sense of confidence, purpose or drive to help them succeed in college. Amanda (when talking about the onset of her chronic illness): “I wasn’t weak enough to die, I wasn’t strong enough to live.” Kyle: “My traumatic brain injury affected my mom, my family and all of my relationships. It put my life on hold. This is why I want to be a physician’s assistant. Kara: “I have constant migraines. Sometimes I cannot go to school for a week. My mom also has stage 4 uterine cancer. I keep praying and hoping ...I know these things are put in my life for a reason. It puts everything into perspective.”

In other example, Amanda, Tess, and Meg identify their Christian faith as giving them purpose, and that the values found in their spirituality helps them to cope and provides strength to succeed in school. Tess: “I know God exists in my heart. He is the driver of everything. But it seems lately I’ve been dealt a bad hand with my finances and family situation ...it’s not going well. And I feel he knows it. I keep trying to have a good relationship with him and a good heart, but it is hard.” Amanda: “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. He has never failed me.” Also “Campus ministry helps me to carry out Gods plan.”

For others, (Abbey and Donna), a change in career paths helped to clarify their own purpose and meaning in life. This was a huge motivator toward success in school. Similarly, Cole identified that he has changed majors and career choice many times. He states that if he finds his program or career he will feel much more settled, and motivated toward his studies.

Still others, Kyle and Cole, identify experiences of epiphany, or experiences where clear and distinct meaning of life served as guiding their ideas of purpose. This placed an increased value on academics and overall understanding of quality of life. Kyle identifies an experience on vacation, where intense social contacts and positive relationships helped to guide his identity and purpose. “I was at this music festival in Tennessee called Bonnaroo, and it changed my life. All of these people, just radiating positive energy ...if I could pick one place on earth to de-stress, this would be it. I felt bonded with the people there. That was the biggest thing. The people

there.” Cole identifies “flow” experiences in sports and recreation as critical to his sense of quality of life and how he views his own path toward academic success. “I can remember being behind the boat, wakeboarding. The exact moment when I decide to cut across the wake, ...my hand in the water, the feel of it. The wind in my face, the spray. I decided to try to make wakeboarding part of my career.”

Some students identified that undergoing a problem or crisis in their lives helped to shape their understanding of overcoming, confidence, purpose and meaning. Interview notes suggest that purpose and meaning no matter where it originates, may be a strong motivator toward academic success. Develop further questions for interview 2 in this area.

***Lifespan  
Development  
and academic  
success***

It should be noted that Abbey, Donna and Cole are among the oldest in the study. They all seemed more career focused than the younger participants. Do older students perceive the typologies as working together more naturally than younger students? Do they have a “bigger picture”? Is there a transformation that takes place from younger student to older student? Does the jump from adolescence to young adult change the understanding, focus or perception of QoL and academic success? Do they develop more self-awareness as time goes on? So, a question might be about how their perceptions of quality of life and academic success have changed over time.

***Relationships***

All participants identified social relationships as key to their feelings of quality in their life and academic success. Family, friendships and relationships with faculty were mentioned. Some students report that changing relationships were highly impactful. Transitions in relationships seemed to be very important to their understanding of QoL. Kara: “My friend Becca is a lifesaver. She and I go out for dinner sometimes...these times are a lifesaver for me. We study and go to classes together.” Eileen: “I spend a lot of time with my roommates I cope through talking with them, we journal together, take walks, exercise together.” Tess: “My family is crazy and messed up. The situation gives me PTSD. I am very selective about my friends because of this. I have four roommates that is difficult. I like having my own time. My best friend is a roommate and she is better-off than me. That is frustrating because I can’t afford to do the things she wants to do. ” Some participants talked about social media as a large influence, but others did not. Interview notes and coding indicate a need to further investigate how technology and social media influence the participants understanding of their own academic success and quality of life. In addition, some participants identify faculty as a major influence in guiding them toward success and feelings of well-being. Others state that faculty play a small or no role in college success. How can this be? How can faculty play no role? I need to understand this better, so I will generate another question in order to understand this.

## Appendix P: Interview 2 Master Summary Sheet

PH (physical health), PsyF (psychological function), SH (social health), EH (environmental health)

Patterns, themes, relationships	Supporting Evidence from Interviews  All typologies connect and influence one another. Certain typologies are more important to specific students. The following are emerging themes of analysis: Stress, coping and academics, purpose meaning and career decisions, social relationships with faculty and technology and social media.
<i>Stress, Coping and Academics</i>	Adolescent developmental status seems to influence how students understand their own stress over time. Stress is perceived and managed differently between students but an emerging pattern seems to indicate that younger students struggle with this more than older students. Older students (Cole, Abbey and Donna) all cite stress management techniques that they use regularly, or a general outlook on life where stress does not receive that much attention. Abbey: "I roll with the punches, I persevere. Life is short and beautiful ...I'm here to help people and positively influence people, my academics reflects the track I'm on." Cole: "I have some low grades, from when I first came to school, but what can you do? I realized there was a really good chance I wasn't going to get into my program. I need to figure something out. I have to have that willingness to adapt." Donna: "I feel like academics are important, and it is important to be successful with that, but you need to be...to balance things out. I need time for a spiritual side, to have time to relax, and clear my mind, and have time with friends, family and have relationship. Also, I have decided not to give anxiety that much attention. I don't have time for that. " Younger students (Ashley, Meg, Amanda) verbalize about stress, but do not comment about coping as much as older students. Ashley: "I tend to worry about everything, like a lot. It does not help with studying and everything. I've been freaking out about applying to my program. And my classes, I'm always worried about those. Also about passing and grades. I get headaches a lot. My dog had surgery that distracted me from classes for a while." Meg: "I still am very exhausted if I am in a very stressful week, like if I have a bunch of exams. My sleep will be disrupted. I will wake up, think about my exams and go back to sleep. I take pride in my sleep schedule, but at the same time, I think I need to study more and not sleep." Amanda: "I have always had anxiety problems my whole life. I am so dedicated to getting a 4.0. I had a 4.0 my freshman year, but now this year I'm not going to get it. I am so stressed this entire time because I'm trying to get into the physician's assistant program. I have a Disability Resource Support plan for my anxiety. I get to test in different places ...There is like not a moment where I'm not freaking out about school. That affects everything: sleep, social life...I get so nervous that I can't even look at my book. It triggers the anxiety." Stress seems to stem

from finances (school based expenses, work/life balance), transition in living (independence issues, changes in relationships and supports), physical health (changes in health, nutrition, sleep and exercise) and grades and academics, Coping with stress seems to be found in many students through leisure, religion, and family and friend relationships.

***Purpose,  
meaning and  
career  
decisions***

There may also be a relationship between development and changing perceptions over time with a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Abbey (age 28) abandoned a full time job with good pay and benefits as a surgical technician to go back to school because “I didn’t want to be married to my job,” and “I want to have the career and lifestyle that I want. This degree will afford me this.” Donna (age 28) also gave up a full time job as a paraprofessional in a school where she worked with special needs students: “I had the opportunity to observe a speech-language pathologist, as I was assisting my students. I talked with her. My talents for listening and helping seemed to fit with that profession. I liked the job. I came back to school to give back. Especially to minority students, and those in poverty. I can relate to that. It is also who I am.” Cole (age 25) stated: “I wanted to be an anesthesiologist. My heart was set on it. But that didn’t work out. And many other ideas didn’t work out. But with all the major changes, I know I’m getting closer. Whatever I end up being, a Recreational Therapist, a Physical Therapist, ...its only part of who I am. I understand there are many parts of me.” Older students link career decisions with purpose and meaning in life, and younger students identify religion (Amanda), relationships,(Lori) and parenthood (Eileen) as part of their purpose and meaning. Some younger students admit they are still searching: Tess: “I’m still trying to figure out what God wants me to do.” Students identified a variety of understandings of purpose: religion, career, family, friends, and leisure. A pattern has emerged that when purpose is identified (often through struggle), students report decreased academic stress and increased positivity and coping. Kyle, Kara and Amanda struggled with physical illness and disability and they cite these issues as giving them motivation and new positivity toward their purpose in life. So there is a relationship between the first two themes identified here. That is, purpose and meaning influence understanding about QoL, and these may change over time. Purpose and meaning also influence academic success in that there is a perception that when you have purpose, there is more ambition, drive, and positivity. This feeds motivation toward academic success.

***Social  
relationships  
with faculty***

Students seem to want mentorship and relationship with faculty. If they do not have a strong relationship with faculty they verbalize that they desire one. Eileen: “I need a relationship with faculty. When I was a freshman I was at a loss. I needed something. You don’t know how to create a relationships with someone older than you.” Amanda: “Before you get into a program, you have no relationship with faculty. You are a number, its sad.” Kara: “I know professors have office hours, but it would be nice if they had more available

time. Just to fit in a little extra time for us.” Meg: “I hate my hybrid class. They never see me. It’s all busy work. I want to see the professor face to face. What is the point in doing this? They don’t know who I am and I don’t know who they are. I want them to know me.” Students perceptions of justice and fairness in the classroom and “unfair practices” like not staying true to specified rubrics, or changing rules for different students, are pronounced. Abbey: “I was the only one on time for anything. The rest of the group didn’t perform. But because I forgot one evaluation, which was mindless, I lost 50 points. I emailed the professor, but the whole department has the same policy.” Poor teaching methods are understood and seem to warrant disengagement from relationship with faculty. Meg: “The faculty set up a competitive atmosphere in the classroom. She said, ‘only x number of you will get into the program’. It promoted an adversarial community. We were all fighting each other for a spot. Why would she do that (crying)?” Lori: “We have a professor, I really hope she is a first time teacher, because she is horrible. She just reads another person’s slides at the front of the room. I mean, we, the whole class, are totally disengaged. We shop online, we are resigned that we have to teach ourselves. And we do.” When faculty seem open, “like a real person”, and refrain from “acting superior”, or “making me feel stupid”, students feel closer to faculty and then closer to academic success. Most students note that when resources are available, opportunities for dialogue exist, and when they “don’t feel like a number”, the perception of the ability to achieve academic success seems to be more positive.

***Technology  
and Social  
Media***

There seem to be positive and negative perceptions of social media and technology and how these are understood as QoL issues. Academic success is also identified as having a relationship with technology and social media. Technology is identified as “a must” an “important resource” for all students. They state that it helps with homework, they stay connected with group members, maintain relationships with other students and faculty and stay updated on current events and news. Cole: “It’s amazing. I can look up so many YouTube lectures on my very topic. It is helpful that 100 different professors can explain it to me, it improves my chances for understanding.” Abbey: “It fosters a sense of community when you belong to a group.” In addition, platforms like Blackboard, and college and university databases helps them stay organized and up to date on academic demands and requirements. Social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram are both understood as having positive and negative attributes. They help students stay connected, are a source of leisure, (one student said she likes to watch beauty tutorials online to help her unwind, others shop, still others watch movies), help maintain social relationships and foster a sense of community. On the other hand, strong perceptions of judgement, comparison, lowered self-esteem, distraction, and media addiction play a role in the experiences of negative QoL. All the females in the study state that they compare their lives to other people on social media platforms. Most understand that these images or posts are not realistic, but they continue to compare themselves anyway. Some students

say it affects their self-esteem. Lori: “You see so many beautiful women and they are fit and gorgeous...it can hinder your self-confidence.” Some students say it is a stressor and distraction from academics. Ashley: “I have to make myself put my phone down and it is like, 3 o’clock in the morning.” Still others report that they have implemented timers on their phones so that they have a reminder to put their phones down. Participants admit they are addicted to their phones or other forms of technology. Cole: “I get worried sometimes because I will play these games until all hours of the morning. I will put off my studying if a buddy wants to play games with me.” These perceptions also hinder academic success. Students identify new ways to cheat through technology, either through smart watches, (having notes on a watch during tests) and buying answers to homework online. Academic success is also identified as having a relationship with technology and social media. Technology is identified as “a must” an “important resource” for all students. They state that it helps with homework, they stay connected with group members, maintain relationships with other students and faculty and stay updated on current events and news.

## **Appendix Q: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

**Statement of Original Work (Continued)**

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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Digital Signature

Susan Dawn Sunden

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Name (Typed)

June 25, 2019

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Date