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HOW DO COLLEGE STUDENTS DEFINE COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS?

A CASE STUDY

By

Matt Ridenour

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirement for the degree of Doctorate of Education

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

August 2015
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I would like to thank my amazing wife, Rachel, who sacrificed so much of her personal time in the service of this research.

I would also like to thank my children who often told each other knowingly, “Papa has to go work on his ‘sertation.””
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ABSTRACT

Ridenour, M. How Do College Students Define College Preparedness (2015)

This case study utilized grounded theory data collection and analysis methods within the qualitative paradigm to research how college students define college preparedness. The study centered on a large population of students (468 total individuals, representing attendance at 165 different four-year postsecondary institutions), each of whom graduated from the same private high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota between the years 2011 and 2014. A focus group, surveys and intensive interviews were employed to collect data.

The substantive theory that emerged from the data showed that academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness. The majority of what students defined as qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature. Specifically, analysis of the data revealed the following categories of college preparedness: Academic Skills, Self-Management, Self-Discovery and State of Mind.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As a high school teacher, I have often wondered about the ways in which I am preparing students for life beyond my classroom. What knowledge am I providing that will be valuable in future contexts? What, if any, are the transcendent skills that I am cultivating in my students? These questions have become more germane through conversations I have had with former students upon their return from college. Many will say, “I felt very prepared for my postsecondary education.” But what does that mean? What specific knowledge, skills and experiences have they found useful?

My research question - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - seeks to find out just that. In executing this research study, I desire to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to readiness for the academic world beyond high school. While there has been a proliferation of literature on this topic in recent years, which is discussed in great detail in Chapter 2, much of it focuses on such things as remediation statistics and employment trends as the impetus for determining the level of college preparedness in our student population. However, I have not found any research that is fully grounded in the experiences and perceptions of students attending college who are asked to reflect upon their level of preparedness for basic postsecondary work. Therefore, my research places their voices at the center of this narrative on college preparedness.

To begin, I believe it is important to first locate my own place in this study and uncover the significance of the research question by honoring my personal wrestling with the purposes of education, as well as the historical foundations that have led to the present-day complexities
surrounding educational preparation. I believe that one cannot understand such a concept until first examining the philosophical and historical paradigms that have determined what it means to be prepared in the first place. This is because the purpose of education is the antecedent of educational preparation.

The Personal Significance of the Problem

I have now been an upper school social studies teacher for seven years, coming late to the profession after beginning with a not-so-traditional career as a mountaineering and whitewater rafting guide. Because I did not take the traditional route to the classroom, I began my teaching career by seeking out the wisdom of educational sages. For example, I was heavily influenced by Palmer (1998) who argued that it is at the intersection of personal and public life that successful education is found. Otherwise stated, students and teachers alike must connect themselves to the content with which they are interacting in such a way that they are vulnerable to its effects. This creates an “undivided self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 15), wherein one’s life is both honored and affected by what happens in the classroom.

This philosophy of educational coherence has played a significant role in the classroom culture I seek to create. From the beginning, I have hoped that what I teach in class is valuable for my students in both present and future contexts. Desiring to provide this sort of transcendent education for my students, however, has led to years of grappling with the question, “What is the purpose of education?” I certainly do not presume to have a fully-formed answer to this oft-made query. Nonetheless, my educational philosophy has taken its present form as a result of my wrestling with it.

In seeking an answer, I have come to appreciate the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian born teacher and social activist. While many of Freire’s words offer great wisdom, relative to
the purpose of education, none resonates with me more deeply than his statement describing educational purpose:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 2000, p. 34)

From this perspective, the purpose of education is to equip students with the tools necessary to critically evaluate the context in which they live and participate as agents of influence within their communities. It is for this purpose that we should be preparing students.

This particular educational philosophy is often called “critical pedagogy” because of its emphasis on the deeper purpose of education, as opposed to conformity and indoctrination. Shor (1992) defines critical pedagogy in his seminal work *Empowering Education* as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (p. 129)

This definition runs parallel to the previously mentioned quote from Freire, and highlights his position on the purpose of education, which I deeply admire. Freire, who died in 1997, truly understood the relationship between education and introspection, as well as the application of knowledge constructed during the two aforementioned processes. Critical pedagogue Purmensky (2009) agrees:
Freire advocated the importance of acknowledging students’ ability to think critically about their educational situation, and allowing them to be a critical component of their own educational process. This thinking allows students to bring their own insight and experience to the educational process. They can recognize connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. (p. 108).

While I take the risk of sounding like an educational idealist, I must admit that Paulo Freire’s philosophy captures the very essence of what I presently believe to be the purpose of education. His objective is certainly consistent with my own educational and personal aims, insofar as it demands a keen awareness of both the world and our relationship to it. It also implies that we have a well-grounded understanding of ourselves - one developed through an educationally empowered process of introspection. Finally, Freire’s philosophy on the purpose of education is actionable - it demands a response. This sense of empowered obligation is precisely what I want to cultivate in my students.

I desire to center my teaching on critical pedagogy in such a way that it will weave itself through what I do with great invasiveness, intricacy and conviction. Furthermore, I want to foster this in the student population, helping each of them to make the connections between education, introspection and the application of their ideation. I want to enact paradigm shifts in the lives of young people, thus allowing their thoughts to move from those that are egocentric to those that embody the critical pedagogy philosophy described above. This has been, and will continue to be, my mission. This is the purpose of education, as I presently see it.

I believe that neglecting a student’s future in favor of the present trivializes and cheapens the educator’s job, reducing instructors to nothing more than dispensers of fact. Teachers are
indeed agents of change, acting as a catalyst for a student’s construction (or reconstruction) of meaning, of their values, and of their purpose beyond high school. This is what comes to mind when I ask the question, “What is the purpose of education?” Preparedness, I believe, should be measured against the benchmark established by critical pedagogy.

The Historical Significance of the Problem

Curiosity and inquiry regarding the purpose of education - and, therefore, the means by which we prepare individuals for it - are not new. From the early days of the republic, the purpose of American education has been debated. As such, one could argue that education functions in two very different worlds. The first is the hopeful paradigm of idealism, where romanticism regarding the possibilities of education can lead to musings about the effects that education should have on schoolchildren. The second paradigm is one of skepticism, where suspicion puts the brakes on the utopian view of schooling and reminds us that there are indeed very pragmatic (and sometimes oppressive) intentions at play. The foundation of American education, therefore, has both romantic and skeptical moorings, which act like tectonic plates that are frequently shifting to create great tension.

Evidence of the idealistic re-bar that permeates the foundation of the educational system in America is ample. In describing the idealistic assumptions inherent in American academics, educational historian Ravitch (2010) tells us that education was, and still is, “the primary mechanism through which a democratic society gives its citizens the opportunity to attain literacy and social mobility” (p. 6). This notion of social mobility, it seems, has historically been on the tip of every tongue that sought to promote education as a means of attaining the ever-elusive American Dream. This is evident in such mantras as, “Education is opening the paths for people, and that’s what our system of public education has done” (Education Week, 2000, p. 4).
Additionally, from the very early days of public education in America, pioneers and reformers in the field of academics implied a significant connection between democracy and education, citing such foundational ideologies as “a free vote cries aloud for free education” (Kennedy, Cohen & Bailey, 2002, p. 325). In doing so, it was also implied that another purpose of education is to prepare individuals “for the responsibilities of democratic citizenship in a complex society” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 13).

Meanwhile, the more skeptical response to the question at hand offers a slightly darker response. When the republic was young, the wealthy did not need the assistance of public schools, and therefore the necessity of such institutions was questioned. However, a shift occurred in the early nineteenth century as middle and upper class Americans realized that if the poor were not educated, they might become “a dangerous, ignorant rabble – armed with the vote” (Kennedy, Cohen & Bailey, 2002, p. 325). Quickly, taxation for the purpose of public education became “an insurance premium that the wealthy paid for stability” (Kennedy, Cohen & Bailey, 2002, p. 325). This was especially significant considering the influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe at that time, many of which had a penchant for socialism (Kennedy, Cohen & Bailey, 2002). Therefore, free-market-loving individuals felt “a desperate need to instill civilized values in these alien newcomers…to preserve American democracy and morals” (Education Week, 2000, p. 5). Such intentionality regarding the proletariat of this country is significant because, if such claims are true, the initial purposes of American education were more oppressive than they were empowering.

The early days of the republic gave way to new and varied discussions on the purpose of education in America, as the divide between the romantics and the skeptics became even larger in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, the latter camp added socialization,
teamwork and rites of passage to their list of ideal purposes of American education (Education Week, 2000). Indeed, there is ample evidence to support their arguments, including the proliferation of clubs, athletic teams and the ever-growing emphasis on leadership training and character curriculum in our nation’s schools (Education Week, 2000). Nonetheless, those who reside firmly in the realm of skepticism need only cite the discrimination, separation and increasing dropout rates of the 20th century as a means of refuting the arguments of the former group. Such people argue that socialization is null and void if it excludes minorities (Ravitch, 2000), the concept of teamwork is laughable if it is contingent on one’s gender (Education Week, 2000), and that the rites of passage associated with education are irrelevant for the multitudes of students who are bounced around from school to school and eventually drop out because of their low ability (Ravitch, 2000).

And so the debate rages and the question remains: What is the purpose of American schooling, and what does it mean to be prepared for that purpose? How does one create the “undivided self” described by Palmer (1998) when, truly, the world of education itself is so divided regarding its own purpose?

The dawning of the 21st century has added a new dimension to the conversation on the purpose of American education. An increased awareness of the interconnectedness of the global economy, as well as the freedom and ease with which individuals can access information, is shifting the education paradigm. Darling-Hammond (2010) has studied this shift extensively. Of it, she writes:

As a consequence, education can no longer be productively focused primarily on the transmission of pieces of information that, once memorized, comprise a stable storehouse of knowledge. Instead, schools must teach disciplinary knowledge in ways that focus on
central concepts and help students learn how to think critically and learn for themselves, so that they can use knowledge in new situations and manage the demands of changing information, technologies, jobs and social conditions (p. 4).

Such a purpose for American education is a far cry from what those in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries espoused. Learning for oneself, as Darling-Hammond writes, would have been counter-intuitive and perhaps counter-productive to the educational aims of early educationists who seemingly sought to use education to create a more uniform society, not a more independent one. As a result, the 21st century conversation regarding the aims of education revolves around preparing students for a globalized economy wherein knowing information (facts, figures and formulas) is no longer an indicator of an educated person because all necessary information can be gathered quickly and efficiently through the use of technology. Putting such information to use, and creating new knowledge from it, is now the educational purpose-du-jour.

Some, like Pink (2006), argue that this paradigm shift is the death knell of traditional, left-brain-centric education. He writes, “Computers can process the binary logic of decision trees with a swiftness and accuracy humans can’t begin to approach” (Pink, 2006, p. 45). This means that “many of today’s knowledge workers will likewise have to command a new set of aptitudes” (Pink, 2006, p. 39). Otherwise stated, education in America must help students produce a whole new mind (Pink, 2014).

Gardner (2008) concurs. He argues that the advent of new technologies - and their replacement of processes and skills once deemed essential in the American classroom - now demand a different set of aptitudes for a changing world. Of this, Gardner writes:

These changes call for new educational forms and processes. The minds of learners must be fashioned and stretched in [ways] that have not been crucial - or not as crucial - until
now. How prescient were the words of Winston Churchill: “The empires of the future will be empires of the mind.” We must recognize what is called for in this new world (p. 11).

Certainly, the demands on education in this age are not those represented by idealists and skeptics in the preceding centuries. Today’s reality has established a new dimension in the conversation on American educational aims, one in which scholastic institutions must, with great intentionality, prepare students for a world that is undergoing an information revolution.

Friedman (2005), an economist who has extensively studied the effects of globalization, notes that in this new educational world, “the winners will be those who learn the habits, processes, and skills most quickly - and there is nothing that guarantees it will be Americans or Western Europeans permanently leading the way” (p. 214). Noticeably absent from Friedman’s list (just like Pink and Gardner) is the word information. In the 21st century, schools are no longer sources of information dissemination - they are sources of habit creation, process formulation and skill setting - for these are the sorts of things that will be necessary in the new economy. As such, Princeton economist Alan Binder also notes, “It is clear that the US and other rich nations will have to transform their educational systems so as to produce workers for the jobs that will actually exist in their societies...In the future, how we educate our children may prove to be more important than how much we educate them” (as cited in Friedman, 2005, p. 302). This begs a very important question for Friedman, and all of us. Specifically, he asks, “What is the right stuff? What is the ‘right education’ young people need” (Friedman, 2005, p. 302)?

American colleges and universities have been the primary means of workforce preparedness since the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of
Rights. Under the GI Bill, “Those with more than two years of service received all tuition and fees plus living expenses for three years of college education” (Davidson et. al, 2014, p. 758). As a result, by the late 1940s, “the government was paying the college costs of nearly half of all male students” (Davidson et. al, p. 758), which subsequently “increased educational levels [and] encouraged a shift from blue-to-white-collar work” (Davidson et. al, p. 758). In essence, “The GI Bill accelerated trends that would transform American society into a prosperous, heavily middle-class nation” (Davidson et. al, p. 760), thus establishing college education as the primary mode of workforce preparedness for the generations that would utilize it.

Because the university system sits atop the American educational hierarchy in general, such institutions rely on those below them (high, middle and elementary schools) to aid in their agenda. Otherwise stated, the success of the American university system is predicated on its ability to receive quality candidates who matriculate into their hallowed halls. To that end, universities have designed the high school in their image. That is to say, universities intend for the schools beneath them to value, and therefore teach, the skills that will be useful and necessary at the college level.

Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that the United States has fallen behind in its goals for the college-preparation of its teenagers. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), while 60% of American high school graduates attend college, only half of them are well-enough prepared to graduate with a degree. The 2013 Condition of College & Career Readiness report issued by American College Testing, Inc., reiterates this concern. According to the report (which measures college readiness among high school seniors) only 26% of 2013 graduates reached the college-readiness benchmarks in the subjects of English, Reading, Math and Science. I believe that there
is a disconnect between what is being taught in U.S. schools and what is required for success at the college level. There is misalignment in purpose, and therefore a disparity in preparedness.

**The Contemporary Significance of the Problem**

In the modern day, the perception of many Americans is that a college education is essential to personal success and a vibrant American economy (Ravitch, 2013). Facts and numbers support this assumption. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, an extension of the United States Department of Labor, notes that for 2013, the median weekly earnings of an individual holding only a high school diploma are less than 60% of that of an individual holding a Bachelor’s degree. By some figures, an American college graduate can expect to make 83% more than an American with only a high school diploma (Tough, 2012). This is true beyond the United States as well. International studies frequently conclude that the probability of finding and retaining full time employment increases significantly when one has some variety of postsecondary education (OECD, 2013). And, as might be expected, unemployment rates are much higher for those that do not have a post high school education. In 2013, the unemployment rate for those who had been granted a degree via a four-year college program was only 4%, whereas the rate for those with only high school diploma was nearly double at 7.5% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). It is no surprise, then, that enrollment in undergraduate degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased nearly 50% between 1990 and 2012, from 12 million to 17.7 million students and is expected to increase to 20.2 million students by 2023 (Kena et al., 2014). The significant increase in college enrollment can be tied to the economic advantage that such an opportunity brings.

Despite this significant increase in postsecondary enrollment of American students in American institutions, there has not been a proportionate increase in college completion. On the
contrary, first year students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are proportionately less likely to graduate in the 21st century than they were in the later half of the 20th century (Bound et. al 2010). This begs the ever-important question, why?

In 1990, the United States Congress passed the Student Right to Know Act, which “required postsecondary institutions to report the percentage of students that complete their program” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). As a result, data on completion trends from the present day to the late 20th century is both ample and accurate. During that time, graduation rates from four-year public colleges (given a five year completion timeline) have decreased from 52.8% in 1986 to 36% in 2013 (ACT, 2013). Darling-Hammond (2010) makes note of this problematic trend, citing that only “35% of an age cohort in the United States gains a college degree, as compared to about 50% in European countries, and over 60% in Korea” (p. 16). To be clear, there is no evidence to suggest the postsecondary graduation standards in the aforementioned countries are lower than those of American schools (OECD, 2013). Among the member countries that comprise the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the United States ranks second-to-last in college completion. As Tough (2012) notes, “Not long ago, the United States led the world in producing college graduates; now it leads the world in producing college dropouts” (p. 150).

One explanation for the decreasing college completion rate in America is the notion that the vast majority of students are simply not prepared to meet the rigors of postsecondary education. As Conley (2005) writes, “upwards of 90 percent of ninth graders say they plan to attend college” (p. 4). Yet research has concluded that only 26% of total high school graduates in the United States are prepared for college-level coursework (ACT, 2013). Separated out by subject area, the 2013 Condition of College and Career Readiness report notes that while 44% of
high school graduates met established reading and mathematics benchmarks for college readiness in 2013, only 36% met the requirements for preparedness in the field of science (ACT, 2013). This substantiates the claim of Darling-Hammond (2010) and others who cite a “long-standing decline in the number of Americans pursuing advanced degrees in science and engineering, even as the proportion of jobs requiring such advanced training increases” (p. 17).

Beyond this, the number of students requiring remediation at the postsecondary level is closely linked to rates of completion as well. Sparks and Malkus (2013) reported that more than one-third of the students at four-year institutions and over 40% of those at two year institutions required remediation. Thus, a gap does indeed exist between college level expectations and the ability of entering freshman to rise to those expectations.

Predictably, freshman-to-sophomore year retention rates have, therefore, been on a steady decline in the 30 year period between 1983 and 2013. During that time, the percentage of first year students at four-year colleges (both private and public) who return for a second year dipped from 74.8% to 71.8% (ACT, 2014). However, in some locales that number is as low as 46% (US News & World Report, 2013). And as Bowler (2009) notes, “remedial students are more likely to drop out. If they take two or more catch-up classes, their chances of graduating plummet” (p. 1). Otherwise stated, college preparedness is directly related to initial retention rates. And with so many students requiring remediation, retaining students to the point of graduation is a significant challenge.

**Focus of the Research**

My research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”, will attempt to address the previously discussed disparity by identifying the factors that college students believe contribute to, and define, what it means to be prepared for the academic world
beyond high school. With this said, the literature review will revolve around four distinct themes - each of them exploring the meaning of college preparedness through the lens of specific interventions intended to address the previously discussed gap. The four themes are centered on this question: In order to ensure that students are ready for the rigors of college work, what interventions are presently deemed necessary and effective?

In knitting these four themes together, I will have a much stronger sense of the unique and necessary position of my research relative to the ongoing academic conversation on college preparedness in this country. It is at the intersection of these four themes that I wish to inject my own research and, thus, build a theory around the voices of those living the college experience firsthand.

**Preview Summary of Research Methods**

The aforementioned research will be organized within the qualitative paradigm, utilizing grounded theory methodology as the chosen data collection and analysis vehicle for conducting a case study regarding responses of high school graduates-turned-college-students (2011-2014) to the research question at hand. In building a theory around the research question - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - focus groups, surveys, and intensive interviews will be employed. Specifics about the research paradigm (qualitative), the research design (case study), and the data collection and analysis methodology (grounded theory) are described in depth in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the case study and details findings from the focus group, survey and intensive interviews - offering a substantive theory to conclude the chapter. In Chapter 5, the literature on college preparedness is revisited and connections between the literature and the research findings are explored. In Chapter 5, limitations of the research are also discussed, and possible topics for future study are suggested.
CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The question at the heart of this research is, “How do college students define college preparedness?” The focus of the research at hand is, therefore, on building a theory regarding the skills, attitudes, habits, behaviors, beliefs and experiences that college students think are contributors to college preparation. This endeavor is theoretically rooted in the historical foundations of American education discussed in Chapter 1. It is also manifested in four themes of literature related to the research question itself, each of which explore the meaning of college preparedness through the lens of a specific change, strategy or intervention intended to ensure that students are indeed ready for the rigors of postsecondary work. Before exploring these themes, it is first helpful to define the very phrase that is driving the entirety of the research.

For the purposes of the research, college preparedness (which will also be referred to as college readiness throughout the literature) is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p. 21). Whereas the term “succeed” may be problematic because of its ambiguity (and, therefore, be susceptible to multiple interpretations), it will be treated as a synonym for the earning of a passing grade, per the instructor’s discretion. With that said, a discussion on the literature and its themes is now pertinent.

Proposed Changes, Strategies and Interventions: Four Themes

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of books, articles and research on this subject. Dissecting the data contained therein illuminates the present-day understanding of what it means to be prepared for college. Volume upon volume of literature on the topic of college
preparedness has appeared over the last decade. This literature is spread across government documents, didactic journals, how-to books, private foundation reports and academic articles from multiple disciplines. This work also represents the many approaches and methods being employed to address the gap between college enrollment and college readiness, much of it in the form of proposed changes to schools and curricula, new strategies for teaching and learning, as well as intervention programs beginning well before students transition out of high school. For example, Cabrera et al. (2006) champion the employment of comprehensive intervention programs beginning in middle school as a way to encourage college readiness, stating that “the improvements that [comprehensive intervention programs] can foster among middle school children can potentially set them on a path toward college enrollment and success – a path that may be very different from the one they were on before the intervention” (p. 94).

These interventions, however, must be targeted; the reasons that students struggle to be prepared for college must be understood if any change, strategy or intervention is to be effective. Conley (2005) suggests that there are two primary reasons that explain why many students struggle to make the transition from high school to college success. Specifically, he argues they are “factors directly related to ability to succeed in the classroom, and more general behaviors” (Conley, 2005, p. 113). Similarly, Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) offer a set of characteristics that they believe contribute to college readiness - resource characteristics, force characteristics, and demand characteristics. While somewhat different in their terminology, both models share some commonalities in that they recognize that college readiness, success and completion are contingent not just on content knowledge and academic skills, but also on a host of behavior and environmental conditions that are not always linked to academic pursuits. In this sense, general human development is just as intertwined with college preparedness as academic preparation.
Deil-Amen and Turley (2007) agree. Relative to the concept of college success and completion, they write that “many individual, family, institutional and system-wide factors simultaneously affect a person’s ability to prepare, apply, enroll, finance and graduate from college (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007, p. 2357). Recognizing that “life-skills development (e.g. strengthening goal-setting and self-esteem)” (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2007, p. 2) is as much a characteristic of college readiness as anything else has become increasingly more common in the last decade, and has expanded the conversation on the transition from high school to college to places previously unexplored.

Relative to this transition from high school to college, Boden (2011) interviewed graduating high school students to determine their perceived college preparedness prior to enrollment in a postsecondary institution. Much like the other researchers, she too found multiple factors contribute to college readiness, including academic skills, a will to succeed, personal educational planning, and the presence of a supportive adult (Boden, 2011). This further reiterates the point that the literature on college preparedness is quite diverse in its findings. As a result, the interventions and changes intended to ensure that college students are prepared are just as diverse, and need to be categorized thematically.

For the purpose of this literature review, then, the proposed changes and interventions will be categorized in four ways: those that involve skills and disciplines, those that involve content proficiency, those that involve self-efficacy, and those that involve environmental and demographic factors (see Figure 2.1)
Figure 2.1: Four Themes of College Preparedness Present in the Literature

Skills and disciplines.

Gardner (2008) writes that the 21st century workplace, and thus the requirements of 21st century education, “will demand capacities that until now have been mere options” (p. 2). Understanding that such capacities are now necessities is of great importance to Gardner, in that he states, “I believe that current formal education still prepares students primarily for the world of the past” (2008, p. 17). But what skills and disciplines are required for the present day?

Gardner believes that most policymakers and education institutions have not truly come to a conclusion:

To be specific, rather than stating our precepts explicitly, we continue to assume that educational goals and values are self-evident. We acknowledge the importance of science and technology but do not teach scientific ways of thinking, let alone how to develop individuals with synthesizing and creative capacities essential for continual
scientific and technological progress. And too often, we think of science as the prototype of all knowledge, rather than one powerful way of knowing that needs to be complemented by artistic and humanistic and perhaps also spiritual stances. We acknowledge the factors of globalization - at least when they are called to our attention - but have not figured out how to prepare youngsters so that they can survive and thrive in a world different from one ever known or even imagined before (p. 17)

Perhaps this is why so many students are not ready for the rigors of college? In the absence of explicit educational aims, students enroll at the postsecondary level with a general idea of what is important (science and technology, for example), but no real sense of what academic skills and disciplines will allow them to succeed. To that end, Gardner suggests that students must begin to cultivate five new mindsets for success in the future - the disciplined mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind, the ethical mind, and the synthesizing mind. In support of this, Gardner notes one specific reason for “undertaking new educational practices” (p. 10):

We might think, for example, that we are educating young persons who are literate, or immersed in the arts, or capable of scientific theorizing, or tolerant of immigrants, or skilled in conflict resolution. But if evidence accrues that we are not successful in these pursuits, then we should consider altering our practices or our goals. (p. 10).

Could the decreasing college completion rate be another piece of evidence to justify the cultivation of Gardner’s “Five Minds for the Future” in our student population?

To be more specific, Gardner’s desire to see new ways of thinking cultivated in students begins with the disciplined mind - the mastery of a distinct “mode of cognition” (Gardner, 2008, p. 3) that accompanies a specific academic subject or profession. Second, in advocating for the synthesizing mind, Gardner argues that students must be capable of connecting “disparate
sources” (Gardner, 2008, p. 3) for the purpose of innovation and evaluation. Similar to synthesis, is the third mind - creating - which breaks new ground by “[putting] forth new ideas, [posing] unfamiliar questions, [conjuring] up fresh ways of thinking, [arriving] at unexpected answers” (Gardner, 2008, p. 3). Fourth, Gardner also believes that students should embody the respectful mind, wherein “differences between human individuals, and between human groups” (Gardner, 2008, p. 3) are both noted and respected, even to the point of accommodation. Finally, Gardner advocates for greater emphasis to be placed on the ethical mind. As Gardner writes, this fifth mind “ponders the nature of one’s work and the needs and desires of the society in which one lives” (Gardner, 2008, p. 3). Clearly, Gardner believes that the aforementioned disciplinary academic mindsets should be the hallmark of academic and workplace preparedness in the 21st century.

Similarly, Pink (2006) argues that while “the last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind” (p. 1), the next few decades “will belong to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind” (p. 1). Specifically, Pink argues that this new world is one wherein “artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers [will] now reap society’s richest rewards and share its greatest joys” (2008, p. 1). Otherwise stated, those who can employ creativity and empathy will be among the most skillful, disciplined and, therefore, desirable in the employment marketplace.

In support of this claim, Pink emphasizes the importance placed on what he calls R-Directed (or right-brain directed) thinking, at the center of which are creativity and empathy. And as Pink observes, this phenomenon is far reaching:

For businesses, it’s no longer enough to create a product that’s reasonably priced and adequately functional. It must also be beautiful, unique, meaningful, abiding what author
Virginia Postrel calls “the aesthetic imperative.” Perhaps the most telling example of this...is the new middle class obsession with design. (2006, p. 33)

Despite this new emphasis on creativity and empathy, Pink notes that they are “underemphasized in the Information Age...and neglected in schools” (2006, p26). It is safe to conclude that Pink champions a shift toward R-Directed skills in 21st century schools.

While the suggestions of Gardner (2008) and Pink (2006) are of the more philosophical variety, others make the case for more pragmatic skills as the key to college preparedness. For example, Jansen and van der Meer (2012) break-down college readiness into six categories, all of them skills: time management, written communication, group work, information processing, verbal communication and use of technology. Conley (2010) also argues for a very practical set of cognitive skills. And like the other authors mentioned thus far, he is quick to note the deficiency of the development of these skills at the secondary level:

The development of key cognitive strategies in high school is often overshadowed by an instructional focus on decontextualized content and facts necessary to pass exit examinations or simply keep students busy and classrooms quiet. (Conley, 2010, p. 32).

It is, therefore, incredibly important in Conley’s view that the following skills, strategies and disciplines are propagated in young people who intend to go to - and finish - college.

Conley’s research isolates five key cognitive strategies embedded in entry-level college classes across common disciplines. These included problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication, precision and accuracy. While mostly self-explanatory, a brief summary of each is useful for the purposes of this literature review. To be clear, Conley does not suggest that these skills and strategies are only useful for a particular course of college study, but rather that they “are broadly representative of the foundational elements that underlie various
ways of knowing” (2010, p. 35). Otherwise stated, these skills are the groundwork for college success and completion.

Relative to problem formulation, Conley’s research suggests that the successful student “develops a repertoire of strategies and learns how to select from among that repertoire based on the characteristics of the problem and the results from the administration of each strategy” (2010, p. 34). Additionally, Conley finds that a successful student “identifies appropriate resources to help answer a question or solve a problem by identifying all possible sources” (2010, p. 34), otherwise known as research. Much like Gardner (2008), Conley places emphasis on synthesis as well, though he uses the term interpretation instead. Regardless of the terminology, the meaning is the same - “the student analyzes competing and conflicting descriptions of an event or issue to determine the strengths and flaws in each…synthesizes the results of an analysis...into a coherent explanation” (Conley, 2010, p. 34). Similarly, Conley places great emphasis on communication as a necessary skill for college learners, advocating that they can “construct well-reasoned arguments or proofs to explain phenomena or issues” (2010, p. 34). Finally, Conley’s research reveals a great need for precision and accuracy in the work of would-be college students. By this, Conley means that a student “applies understanding of content knowledge appropriately and accurately, achieves accurate results, and reaches appropriate conclusions” (2010, p. 34). Conley’s conclusions about precision and accuracy are akin to those made by Gardner regarding the disciplined mind.

Such a pragmatic approach to the necessities of college and workforce preparedness is not uncommon. In their book, 21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times, Trilling and Fadel (2009) break down the necessary skills for 21st century learning into three categories: Learning and Innovations skills, Information, Media and Technology skills, and Life and Career
skills. Relative to Learning and Innovation skills, Trilling and Fadel (like Pink) contend that “The 21st century global economy is also requiring higher levels of imagination, creativity and innovation to continually invent new and better services and products” (2009, p. 49). Beyond this, it is also noted that, learning and innovation skills “have long been at the heart of what it takes to become a self-reliant lifelong learner” (p. 49).

The advent of the information age (which accompanied the new century) also requires what Trilling and Fadel call information, media and technology skills. More specifically, “students need to acquire the skills to appropriately access, evaluate, use, manage, and add to the wealth of information and media they now have at their thumbs and fingertips” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 64). They believe students must harness all the information at their disposal:

With today’s and tomorrow’s digital tools, our net generation students will have unprecedented power to amplify their ability to think, learn, communicate, collaborate, and create. Along with all that power comes the need to learn the appropriate skills to handle massive amounts of information, media and technology. (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 64).

This skill represents a new and unique area of exploration in the literature – one not mentioned specifically by other authors and researchers.

However, Trilling and Fadel (like so many others) are quick to recognize more general life skills as essential to both academic and workforce preparedness. These include flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, accountability, leadership and responsibility (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). This is quite similar to Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) who argue that college readiness, success and completion are
contingent not just on content knowledge, but also on a host of more general behavioral conditions.

Wagner (2008) also acknowledges the interrelatedness between college competency and general behaviors, which he calls survival skills. In compiling the research for his text, Wagner consulted existing research and leaders within the business and education community, as well as engaged in extensive classroom observation. As a result of this combination, Wagner concludes, “Our system of education – our curricula, teaching methods, and the tests we require students to take – were created in a different century for the needs of another era. They are hopelessly outdated” (2008, p. 9). In response to the outdated nature of American education, Wagner offers seven skills that he believes are essential for survival in the 21st century. While not specifically directed at college preparedness, the skills about which he writes (based on his research) can be reasonably inferred as necessary for any postsecondary institution that seeks to prepare students for a globalized economy, because the conversation on college readiness is now viewed by some as synonymous with employment readiness (Baker, Clay & Gratama, 2005).

To this end, the skills to which Wagner refers are as follows: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, adaptability, initiative, effective communication, accessing and analyzing information and finally, curiosity and imagination. While this list contains some familiar recommendations, that which is unique to the literature is the skill of collaboration, about which Wagner writes, “The skillfulness of individuals working with networks of people across boundaries and from different cultures has become an essential prerequisite” (2008, p. 24). And it is not just Wagner that believes an emphasis should be placed on this skill. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills agrees, noting on the homepage of their website that the notion of global awareness really refers to the ability of a student to “[learn] from and [work]
collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community context.”

While Academic Skills and Disciplines represent just one facet of college (and therefore, workforce) preparedness, the aforementioned research embodies the vast majority of proposed changes to the landscape of college readiness. Within this research, three commonalities can be found.

First, much of the research suggests that because technology and ease of information access are the impetus for change, a greater emphasis should be placed on creativity and imagination (because students need not worry as much about traditional left-brain skills such as memorization and computation). Pink (2006), Gardner (2008), Wagner (2008), and Trilling and Fadel (2009) all make a point to include the cultivation of this variety of academic discipline and way of thinking in their writing.

A second common theme across the research is the prominence of synthesis (some call it interpretation or analysis) as a necessity for postsecondary students. Considered as both a skill and a discipline, the ability to evaluate separate and sometimes seemingly disparate pieces of information from multiple sources for coherence is something that Gardner (2008), Conley (2010), Wagner (2008) and Trilling and Fadel (2009) all mention.

Finally, one cannot ignore the importance placed on initiative by each and every one of the texts utilized in the literature review thus far. Though different nomenclature is used, each of the authors and researchers highlighted the necessity of personally-driven mastery, curiosity, resourcefulness and self-direction in the lives of would-be successful 21st century learners. Clearly, the research points very strongly at 21st century preparedness in part as a function of these skills.
Content proficiency.

While not as prolific as the research on skills and disciplines, there is evidence to suggest that would-be college students are deficient in certain areas of content proficiency. Adelman (1999) found that the content of a student’s high school curriculum exhibits one of the strongest influences on successful college completion - the more rigorous and robust the content, the more likely a student is to complete college. Yet most American colleges and universities must offer remediation courses for students who lack proficiency in common reading, writing and mathematics content (Rouche & Rouche, 1999). The very existence of such offerings suggests that some moderate form of remediation is actually expected by colleges and universities, and also suggests that such institutions recognize that there will likely be some gap between high school content and college content expectations. However, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board, have found that every year, “nearly 60 percent of first-year college students discover that, despite being fully eligible to attend college, they are not academically ready for postsecondary studies” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 1). These students have found that “their high school diploma, college preparatory curriculum, and high school exit examination scores did not ensure college readiness” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 1). And while the aforementioned statistic is disturbing, there is evidence to suggest that the proportion of college un-readiness is even larger.

According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office in California, despite great attention paid to the relationship between high school curriculum and admission requirements at all 23 campuses that are a part of the California State University system, roughly two-thirds of the 50,000 students entering as freshmen require remediation in either math, writing or both (Legislative
Analyst’s Office, 2011). This same source also cited the fact that nearly all students attending community college in California need remediation (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2011). As the Southern Regional Education Board notes, “There is every reason to believe that most states would have similar remediation rates if they employed similar college readiness standards and placement tests across all public colleges and universities” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 3). To be clear, for the purposes of this literature review, remediation is defined as courses set aside for students who lack the skills necessary to perform college level work per the rigor defined by the institution at which said student is attending (Parsad & Lewis, 2003).

In Texas, another state with a large state-supported university system, Barnes and Slate (2014) conducted a study researching college readiness rates in reading and math. Similar to the statistics emerging out of the California system, Barnes and Slate found that during the 2007-2008 academic year, the college readiness rate in reading for all high school seniors was 42.81% (2014). For the same year, slightly more than half (50.48%) of all high school students exhibited readiness in math (Barnes and Slate, 2014). For this study, as with so many others, it is important to note that there are not necessarily significant overlaps between the two groups needing remediation in reading or math, thus bringing the total number of students needing remediation higher. Specifically, Barnes and Slate found that in total, only 30.74% of all graduating students were college ready in both subjects (2014). This leaves roughly 70% of the students unprepared for the content-specific rigors of the postsecondary academic world.

While the previously discussed studies in California and Texas represent a micro look at content proficiency, several studies have sought to generate data on the national status of college readiness as it relates to content (specifically math, reading and writing). In Measuring College and Career Readiness, ACT reported that just 23% of graduating seniors in the class of 2009
were likely to be capable of completing entry-level courses at a college or university (ACT, 2009). Similarly, the Educational Testing Service recently concluded that large numbers of the nation’s student population do not possess the literacy and numeracy skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary education (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto & Sum, 2007). With all of these statistics, it is important to note, however, that there is a difference between a need for remediation and actual enrollment in remedial courses.

For example, in 2004, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that more than 50% of students attending college enrolled in a remedial math course (as cited in Barnes & Slate, 2014). However, according to that very same organization, the number of students (nationally) who now report enrolling in a remedial course of any kind is down to 20% (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). As Bailey, Jeong and Cho (2010) found, a gap certainly exists between those in need of remediation and those actually enrolling in remedial courses. As previously mentioned, college readiness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, content proficiency is certainly at the center of the college preparedness conversation.

As a remedy to this need for remediation, several interventions and challenges to content standards are particularly prevalent and pervasive. Adelman (2006) contends that to address the content gap between what students are getting in high school courses and what students need to succeed in college (without remediation), greater attention must be paid to content standards themselves:

Over the past two decades, states have paid increasing attention to content standards for elementary and junior high school curricula, and the No Child Left Behind legislation has stimulated a period of intense review and refinement of these standards. But...similar
detailed sets of content standards at the secondary school level are rare. We get
generalized requirement that reference course titles such as “11th-grade English” or
“Applied Biology,” and have no idea what precise learning objectives will be pursued.
(Adelman, 2006, p. 97)

For this reason, Adelman champions moving beyond credit counting to “comprehensive
criterion-referenced statements of what graduating high school students should know...in order to
succeed in postsecondary environments” (2006, p. 97).

Most recently, this push for a set of comprehensive standards has taken the shape of the
Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). Labeled a state-led effort and launched with
the intention of ensuring that all students - regardless of where they live - are graduating high
school prepared for college and the workforce, the CCSSI seeks to spell out the content that
students are expected to know in order to be college and career ready. Presently, the standards
are broken down into two categories: English Language Arts/Literacy Standards and
Mathematics Standards. According to the CCSSI website, the standards are research and
evidenced based as well as aligned with college and career expectations.

It is important to note that content standards are not new. Hirsch (1987) was the first to
champion a necessary content list for students - required knowledge he thought was essential for
all Americans - and his work has been the genesis for much of the other scholarship on the topic.
Hirsch’s emphasis on content (which included elements of human history and culturally relevant
sayings and anecdotes) enjoyed both praise and criticism upon publication before fading into a
temporary obscurity as the pendulum of academic trends swung a different direction. However,
Hirsch’s ideas on content are experiencing a renaissance. As Baker (2013) notes, “Mr. Hirsch’s
newfound popularity comes largely because of the Common Core” insofar as his “lesson plans,
teaching materials and exercises [are] seen as matching [Common Core’s] heightened expectations of student progress” (p. C1). Like some of the criticism targeted at CCSSI, criticism of Hirsch’s work centers primarily on the balance between skills and factual knowledge:

He is normalizing a view of teaching and content which, in the current moment, enshrines the standardization of knowledge and assessment, which I believe is very deadly for what it means for students to learn and think creatively and critically. (Baker, 2013, p. C1).

Nonetheless, such standardization of content knowledge continues to be a strong suggestion from those who wish to use it as a remedy for addressing the gap between high school graduates and college preparedness.

Similarly, Conley (2010) is another scholar who believes that academic skills and strategies must be coupled with content in order to ensure college readiness:

Successful academic preparation for college is grounded in two companion dimensions: key cognitive strategies and key content knowledge. Understanding and mastering key content knowledge is achieved by processing information so that its structure becomes more apparent and then probing, consolidating, and applying that information by means of the key cognitive strategies. With this relationship in mind, it is entirely proper and worthwhile to consider some of the general areas in which students need strong grounding in content that is foundational to the understanding of academic disciplines. (p. 35)

To this end - and much like Hirsch, though not as specific - Conley lays out the elements of the “Core Academic Subjects Knowledge” (p. 37) that he believes are critical. They include content
within the disciplines of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, World Languages and the Arts (Conley, 2010).

In terms of remedying the great need for remediation when it comes to content, Conley also suggests some specific interventions that he believes would be useful in eliminating the gap between the content with which high school graduates are actually equipped and that which they must master in order to be prepared for postsecondary work. On this topic he writes, “Tackling this fundamental disconnect requires rethinking relationships and assumptions about the content of courses and how the senior year of high school and the freshman year of college are connected” (Conley, 2010, p. 56). Conley’s suggestions for doing so are fourfold.

First, high school and postsecondary course syllabi must be aligned relative to the “expected skills and prerequisite knowledge for success in the course” (Conley, 2010, p. 58). Second, Conley contends that the employment of college-ready seminars can help eliminate the content gap by “emphasizing deeper understandings of content knowledge previously taught and an emerging awareness of the structure of knowledge in core academic subject areas” (p. 61). To be specific, a college-ready seminar is defined as “a specially designed course that seeks to challenge students in ways that approximate what they will face soon in college” (Conley, 2010, p. 59). Third, Conley calls for more college-ready assignments in high school. Such assignments should be created with great sensitivity to postsecondary readiness criteria and scored along those same lines (Conley, 2010). Finally, Conley advocates for a paired-course model, wherein high school and college teachers work together for course creation. In his view, “the purpose of the partnership is to develop guidelines that apply to exit-level high school courses and entry level college courses” (Conley, 2010, p. 64), thus establishing a clear connection between high school and college course content.
Conley (2005) also lays out the “key principles and concepts of the disciplines...and key content knowledge that students must possess” (p. 169) in what he calls the complete Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) standards. These standards and the research behind them were compiled after a group of college and university presidents - who were concerned about the relationship between high school curricula and postsecondary education - requested further formal inquiry (Conley, 2005). These institutions are all members of the Association of American Universities (AAU).

The KSUS standards “represent the first comprehensive statement of what it takes to succeed in entry-level college courses” (Conley, 2005, p. 171). Relative to academic content, the KSUS standards are very clear. They lay out in no uncertain terms English Content Standards, Mathematics Content Standards, as well as those for the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Arts (Conley, 2005). The level of specificity is intended to present “the prerequisite knowledge associated with college success” (Conley, 2005, p. 170). To that end, the KSUS standards (as prepared by the AAU schools) represent just another form of content intervention directed at preparing high school students for the rigors of college.

Self-efficacy.

While academic skills and content are the two most prominent topics of discussion when it comes to college preparedness, there most certainly is a strand within the research that suggests self-confidence and self-motivation also play a significant role in the transition from high school to postsecondary scholarship. For the purposes of this literature review, the two will be combined together under the banner of self-efficacy.

The notion of self-efficacy is generally defined as the belief that one is capable of accomplishing a goal or end product - a belief that, in the academic world, most certainly can
affect a student’s work and their college preparation (Bandura, 1997). Beyond this, self-efficacy can be used as a predictor of classroom and content engagement in high school students (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003). Specifically, the higher a student’s self-confidence and self-motivation, the more likely she is to both engage and succeed in school (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003). Likewise, Bandura (1997) noted that self-efficacy specifically affects effort and achievement.

Additionally, Bouffard-Bouchard (1991) found that regardless of cognitive ability and age, self-efficacy has an influence on such academic tasks as self-regulation, work-time monitoring, persistence and even rejecting or accepting academic hypotheses and ideas. This led Bouffard-Bouchard to conclude that self-efficacy is indeed one form of academic competence, in the same way that academic skills and academic content also constitute necessary elements of college preparedness. Students with poor self-efficacy often have low motivation that can result in cyclical and recurring sub-par academic performance (Margolis and McCabe, 2006).

To be clear, one’s self-efficacy is not the product of a single factor. It is affected by multiple variables. In an academic setting, these variables are usually bi-products of the learning environment and the teaching strategies used (Fencl & Scheel, 2005). To that end, a pedagogical approach to improving self-efficacy has developed over the years as yet another form of intervention that may lead to more confident, and therefore more prepared, students.

Relative to teaching, Margolis and McCabe (2006) provide several intervention strategies to aid in improving self-efficacy for struggling students. These include giving frequent and focused feedback, setting moderately difficult goals (rather than extraordinarily difficult goals that reinforce low self-efficacy), and teaching targeted study skills (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).
Kingori (2011) found that underprepared college students are more likely to succeed at the postsecondary level if they experience positive faculty interactions that provide feedback and encouragement. Schunk (1995) noted that providing focused feedback gives students a sense of both their progress and capabilities, thus motivating them and concurrently improving their sense of self (assuming any praise received is deemed credible and trustworthy by the student). Marzano (2007) agrees with this contention, citing that “Feedback provides students with information regarding their progress toward [the] target” (p. 12). Nonetheless, Marzano also states that feedback alone is not as powerful as when it used with another of the aforementioned teaching strategies for improving self-efficacy: goal setting. To that end, Marzano says, “Goal setting and feedback used in tandem are probably more powerful than either one in isolation” (2007, p. 12).

Schunk (1995) found that strategies beneficial for improving self-efficacy include near-term, specific learning goals. Similarly, Schunk and Pajares (2002) contend that establishing attainable short-term goals can prove to be a prudent strategy for improving self-efficacy in students:

Learning goals that are specific, short-term, and viewed as challenging but attainable enhance students’ self-efficacy better than do goals that are general, long-term, or not viewed as attainable. Students believe that they can attain the former goals, which offer clear standards against which to gauge progress. (p. 15)

Needless to say, the research-derived data suggests that goal setting as an intervention strategy may improve self-efficacy, and therefore impact academic achievement.

The teaching of effective study skills is the third common intervention strategy utilized to improve self-efficacy. It should not be lost on the reader that this represents the intersection of
self-efficacy with another area of concern for college preparedness - that of academic skills. In knowing what study skill to use and exactly how and when to implement it, learners are apt to become optimistic (increased self-efficacy) about their ability to succeed on tasks for which the strategy was designed (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). The catch, of course, is that study skills must be relevant and specific to the content and tasks in the student’s immediate academic context. Therefore, prescribing exact study skill interventions to improve self-efficacy must be contextually sensitive. As such, an out-of-context exploration of suggested study skills to teach learners (in an effort to build self-efficacy) is irrelevant to this literature review.

The research is indeed clear - self-efficacy is a form of academic competence and should, therefore, be considered an area worthy of intervention when it comes to preparing students for the rigors of college. Because self-efficacy affects self-regulation, motivation, effort, achievement, persistence, hypothesizing and is even a predictor of engagement in the classroom, it should not be ignored in the conversation on college preparedness. For, as Mattern and Shaw (2010) found, there is a correlative relationship between a high school students’ self-efficacy and their academic performance in their first year of postsecondary academic work.

**Environmental and demographic factors.**

Finally, it should come as no surprise to anyone in academia that environmental and demographic factors such as one’s home environment and socioeconomic status can affect academic experiences and, therefore, college preparedness. Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) note that “individuals’ interactions with their surrounding environments [can] indirectly instigate the development of college readiness” (p. 19). These reciprocal interactions serve as sources of variation from what one might experience in a more static environment. Of course, “individuals vary in their characteristic ways of selecting, experiencing and instigating responses from their
environments” (Arnold, Lu & Armstrong, 2012, p. 19), which means that environmental factors do not wholly determine a student's college readiness, but rather play a part (along with the other areas of exploration in this literature review - academic skills, content proficiency and self-efficacy).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) contend that human development is “a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person [and] the environment” (p. 798). The same theory can be applied to academic development. One’s academic preparation, and therefore college preparedness, can be considered a function of both the characteristics of the student, as well as their surrounding environment. When Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ theory is applied to the academic realm, the resulting literature points primarily to socioeconomic status and the home environment as the key environmental factors affecting academics.

Ravitch (2013) agrees. She claims that the achievement and preparedness gaps between different students are, in part, “because they have been exposed to very different environments” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 230). The examples she provides in order to support such a claim are not just based on research, but on observation as well:

Some children hear many words and have a large vocabulary; others do not. Some children have parents who are college educated; others do not. Some get regular visits to the doctor and the dentist; others do not. Some live in comfortable homes in safe neighborhoods. Others do not. These differences affect children’s readiness to learn. They influence their vocabulary and background knowledge. Access to health care and nutrition affect their physical and mental development. Of course, all children can learn, but some have a head start because of their socioeconomic circumstances, while others start far behind. (Ravitch, 2013, p. 230).
Certainl, this position is not new. It is a well-established belief that a family’s socioeconomic position is related to the educational and career attainment of the children in that family. Beginning with the well-known Coleman Report in 1966, it was asserted that “schools bring little influence to bear on a child’s achievement that is independent of his background and general social context” (Coleman, 1966, p. 325). Otherwise stated, the social and economic environments in which a student is raised play a significant role in academic preparation and achievement. Academic skills, content knowledge and self-efficacy are intertwined with their social and economic environments.

Since that original study, others have made similar findings. McLoyd (1990) found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are at a higher risk for lower academic performance. Other research corroborates McLoyd’s claims, including studies conducted by Jencks and Phillips (1998), Albert and Luzzo (1999) and Lent, Brown and Hackett (2000). Beyond this, as Heckman (2013) notes, the connection between socioeconomic status and future academic and career prospects cannot be denied, insofar as “we live in a society in which birth is becoming fate” (p. 3).

Yet, as previously stated, the socioeconomic environment is not the only environmental factor affecting academics. As Heckman, a Nobel Prize winning economist again writes, “A large body of evidence suggests that a major determinant of child disadvantage is the quality of the nurturing environment rather than just the financial resources available” (2013, p. 24). This, of course, is referring to the home environment itself. Like Bronfenbrenner and the Coleman Report before him, Heckman recognizes the significant effect that outside forces can have on academic achievement. Of particular interest is the work of neuroscientist Avshalon Caspi who found that “a gene associated with antisocial behavior and higher crime rates [is] triggered by
growing up in a harsh or abusive environment” (Heckman, 2013, p. 16). And if such things as antisocial behavior and crime rates are triggered by certain varieties of experiences in the home environment, then the conclusion that academic outcomes and successes are also closely tied to the home is not much of a leap. This is because “both cognitive and socioemotional skills develop in early childhood, and their development depends on the family environment” (Heckman, 2013, pp. 4-5). The two are most certainly intertwined.

For these reasons, “Kids born into disadvantaged environments are at much greater risk of being unskilled, having low lifetime earnings, and facing a range of personal and social troubles” (Heckman, 2013, p. 3). One component of the disadvantaged environments is parent academic involvement. Trusty (1999) determined that parents’ academic involvement (both at home and in the school context itself) was related to students’ college completion expectations. An earlier study conducted by Young and Friesen (1992) found that parent academic involvement can ensure that adolescent students obtain the skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for college and career. Perhaps most interestingly for this review of the literature, Hill and Taylor (2004) determined through a longitudinal study that among parents with greater academic involvement in the lives of their adolescent students (across all demographics), there were fewer behavioral problems, higher achievement and higher aspirations. Thus, the environment of the home (specifically parental involvement) plays a significant role in academic achievement and any subsequent college preparation. Unfortunately, the environment of the American home has been relatively unstable as of late:

Family environments in the United States have deteriorated over the past 40 years. A growing fraction of our children are being born into disadvantaged families, where disadvantage is most basically a matter of the quality of family life and only secondarily
measured by the number of parents, their income, and their education levels. And the disadvantage tends to accumulate across generations. (Heckman, 2013, p. 5)

So how does one provide adequate intervention to combat the destructive effects of these environmental factors (home and socioeconomic environments) on academic preparation?

Ravitch (2013) argues that we must “Begin at the beginning” (p. 227) by “provid[ing] good prenatal care for every pregnant woman” (p. 227). The end result, she claims, will be one that not just schools, but all of society, can appreciate:

Children will be healthier. They will have fewer disabilities. There will be fewer referrals to special education in the future. The costs to society will be reduced, far more than the cost of the medical care provided at the right time. Our society, our children, our families, our communities, and our schools will reap the rewards. (Ravitch, 2013, p. 229).

Ravitch goes on to suggest that other types of interventions in the early years of a student can also combat negative environmental effects.

The availability of high-quality early childhood education (preschool), Ravitch contends, cannot completely eliminate the negative effects associated with poor home environments or lower socioeconomic status, “but researchers have concluded that it is more successful in narrowing the gap than most other interventions” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 230). The researcher to which Ravitch is referring is none other than the aforementioned economist James Heckman. As a strong proponent of early-childhood education, he believes “that enhancements of family environments can cause improvements in children’s outcomes” (Heckman, 2013, p. 26).

Specifically, Heckman argues that studies on the effects of early childhood education (such as the Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project) “demonstrate substantial positive effects of early environmental enrichment on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills,

A final intervention suggestion focuses on equipping parents with the tools necessary to create healthy home environments regardless of socioeconomic status. This is because “the available evidence suggests that the quality of parenting is the important scarce resource” (Heckman, 2013, p. 35). Ravitch agrees, stating, “Families have a greater influence on children’s success in school than teachers” (2013, p. 259). Targeting parents, therefore, is essential. One example of such targeted intervention is the Nurse-Family Partnership. Because the family environments of single-parent homes are not as favorable for investment in children and because children of less educated women (especially in single-parent households) are at an academic disadvantage (Heckman, 2013), the Nurse-Family Partnership seeks to intervene in such a way as to minimize the impact of these variables:

The nurses also work to enhance parent-child interactions. Nurses help parents to understand their infants’ and toddlers’ communicative signals, enhance parents’ interest in playing with their children in ways that promote emotional and cognitive development, and help to create safer households for children. Nurses also help women establish and clarify their own goals, to solve problems that may interfere with their educations, finding work, and planning future pregnancies. (Wilder, Allgood & Rothstein, 2008, p. 27).

In turn, the results of such a partnership have had an impact. A study of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) examining the effects of such home visits found that significant benefits accompanied such interventions:
High-quality evaluations of the NFP have found significant positive effects on pregnancy outcomes, child health and development, and family economic self-sufficiency. Specifically, randomized field trials of the NFP in several geographic locations found improved prenatal health, fewer subsequent pregnancies, increased maternal employment, and increased intervals between births for mothers; and fewer childhood injuries and improved school readiness for children. (As cited in Wilder, Allgood & Rothstein, 2008, p. 27).

While additional research and longitudinal studies are necessary to fully examine the effectiveness of environmental interventions (in service of academic preparedness, specifically), the existing data points to the importance of recognizing that environmental and demographic factors such as one’s home environment and socioeconomic status certainly can affect academic experiences and, therefore, college readiness.

**Summary**

The compelling nature of the statistical data in Chapter 1 provided justification for the research question at hand, “How do college students describe college preparedness?” The literature explored in that chapter (which addresses the perceived gap between what students need in order to be college-ready and what they are actually receiving in preparation for college courses) established the connection between a decline in college completion and a lack of overall college preparedness, despite an overall increase in college enrollment in the United States.

Consequently, Chapter 2 explored potential changes and interventions for combating the phenomenon described in Chapter 1 - specifically, the lack of college preparedness in 21st century students. Implicit in the review of the literature (and appearing often in the research) was the notion that college readiness is now viewed by many as a synonym for workforce or
workplace readiness. For this reason, much of the literature that was reviewed focused not just on the college classroom, but also on employment.

Because there are many views and theories about the variables that play a role in academic and workforce preparedness, the proposed changes and interventions were broken down into four themes in this chapter: that which involves skills and disciplines, that which involves content proficiency, that which involves self-efficacy and motivation, and that which involves environmental and demographic factors.

The literature on the first theme, skills and disciplines, constitutes the most abundant research relative to the research question. Interventions and changes relative to this theme focus primarily on cultivating the cognitive skills and academic strategies deemed essential for college-level work. Commonalities among researchers and scholars include such skills and disciplines as creativity, imagination, synthesis, curiosity, resourcefulness and self-direction.

Relative to the theme of content proficiency, much of the literature focuses on high rates of remediation as the greatest indicator of content incompetency in the American college and university system. As a result of such high rates of remediation (per the literature), there has been a push for a set of cross-discipline comprehensive standards (such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative) that seek to provide consistency in the experiences of high school students and, therefore, guarantee that every student has the opportunity to be prepared for a college education. This form of intervention (one that focuses on standards) represents the most common form of intervention relative to perceived content proficiency gaps in enrolled college students.

The third theme - self-efficacy and motivation - represents the intersection of formal psychology and college readiness. The literature review reveals that one’s self-efficacy (a
combination of confidence and motivation) directly correlates to academic achievement. As such, raising one’s self-efficacy can be an effective interventative strategy for developing a greater likelihood of college success. The literature states that self-efficacy can be increased through certain pedagogical practices such as helping students to establish near-term learning goals, providing focused feedback and the cultivation of effective study skills.

Finally, a burgeoning field of study regarding environment and demography suggests that one’s home environment and socioeconomic status can significantly affect academic experiences and, therefore, college readiness. Rooted in the notion that all other interventions are impacted by these things, the literature reveals that economists, educationists and psychologists alike agree that focused attention on at-risk children from lower socioeconomic environments, as well as those where the quality of the nurturing environment at home is less than desirable, can significantly impact one’s academic success. More specifically, such interventions can result in positive effects on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, school achievement, as well as job performance and social behavior.

So, “How do college students define college preparedness?” The preceding literature offers insight regarding potential student responses. The next chapter describes the research paradigm and methodology into which the research question best fits. In seeking answer to the question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”, a qualitative research paradigm was employed to build a theory on the topic of college readiness. A case study research design was used to investigate and analyze data from a bounded set of students, all of whom graduated from the same private high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, between 2011 and 2014. The aforementioned theory was built by gathering data through multiple methods (a
focus group, survey and intensive interviews). This type of data collection method is most accurately labeled grounded theory.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

As previously stated, this research seeks to contribute in a unique way to the popular dialogue on college preparedness. This must start by placing the research question - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - at the center of the research. As such, this chapter on methodology begins with an explanation regarding why the qualitative paradigm best fits the research question. The chapter continues with an exploration of case study as the chosen research design and a discussion of the participants and setting. Finally, the chapter ends by detailing grounded theory data collection methods and the data analysis techniques that were employed.

Explanation of the Research Paradigm (Qualitative)

Maxwell (2013) differentiates the quantitative paradigm from the qualitative paradigm in part by noting that quantitative research often places the research question at the beginning of a “linear or cyclic sequence” (p. 4), where the question is “the starting point or controlling piece of the design, to which all other components must conform” (p. 4). In contrast, qualitative research uses the question as “the heart, or hub, of the model - the component that connects most directly to all the other components” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 4). This means that in qualitative research, “[Questions] not only have the most direct influence on the other components, but are also the component most directly affected by the others” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 4). These other-referenced components include goals, conceptual framework, methods and validity, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1, taken from Maxwell (2013, p. 5).
Placing the research question at the heart of the design is also consistent with Maxwell’s description of the types of intellectual goals for which the qualitative research paradigm is especially useful. Specifically, “Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved in or engage in” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30) is an endeavor that is quite compatible with qualitative research. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) note that qualitative research is distinct because it “describes and analyzes people’s individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions” (p. 395). This is accomplished through the “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and
places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell as cited in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 320).

With all of this in mind, a qualitative design suits the question well, insofar as the research intends to make meaning out of the experiences and perceptions of college students (relative to the notion of college preparedness) by collecting data in a sensitive and relevant manner, so as to ground any emerging theories in the data itself. Doing so will allow for the possibility of “interpret[ing] phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 395), rather than simply testing a predetermined hypothesis against empirical data via a fixed sequence of steps, as the quantitative research paradigm dictates (Maxwell, 2013). Most importantly, employing this approach allows the perspectives of the students to be emphasized in a conversation that has been, thus far, dominated by the voices of others.

**Explanation of the Research Design (Case Study)**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “a case study is an in-depth analysis of a single entity” (p. 344). Similarly, Creswell (2005) defines a case study as “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system” (p. 476). For the purposes of this research, a case study design is employed to answer the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” The case itself involves students that graduated from the same private Minneapolis, Minnesota high school between 2011 and 2014 and continued their studies at the postsecondary level. More information on the participants is provided in that section.

As a research design, case study concerns itself primarily with becoming deeply and uniquely familiar with the experiences of a specific organization, individual or group. Relative to the research question at hand - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - a
case study design provides a very focused means for examining the perceptions of a particular group of individuals on the topic of college preparedness. Because the data relates only to the experiences of this specific group of graduates from a single high school, the data will not be generalizable. It is bound by the very system within which it is investigated. As Stake (1995) notes in his seminal work on case study research, this is perfectly acceptable:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is an emphasis on uniqueness. (p. 8)

Stake makes it quite clear - case study research itself acknowledges the limitations of the research design. Yet the design’s inadequacy in creating a generalizable theory is also a strength.

Merriam (1998) notes that cases are often chosen because they are naturally bounded. In fact, Merriam uses this as the very definition of a case study - that is, “the case [is] a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (1998, p. 27). In defining a case as such, Merriam encourages the researcher to consider the following:

If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case. One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite amount of time for observations. If there is no end...then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to be a case. (p. 28)

It is the very nature of being bounded that makes a case so intriguing, insofar as the finite nature of the data that can be collected allows the researcher to drill down to an understanding of the phenomenon that might not otherwise be possible if the data was more proliferous. Maxwell
(2013) agrees. He states that a case study “can confidently answer such [a] question posed in particular terms” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 79), as compared to other qualitative studies that seek to represent larger groups of uncertain representatives. Again, as previously mentioned, this research is best defined as a case study because of the bounded nature of the population being explored.

Within case study design, there are two different varieties of case studies. Creswell (2005), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), Stake (1995), Stake (2000) and Merriam (1998) all distinguish between intrinsic case studies and instrumental case studies. By definition, an intrinsic case “may be selected for study because it is unusual” (Creswell, 2005, p. 439) such as “an unusually gifted athlete, a new advanced placement class, a charter school, or a political election” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 345). Stake (2000) and his study of a particularly unique bilingual school is an example of an intrinsic case study. On the other hand, instrumental case studies “provide insight into a specific theme or issue” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 345) by using a small population sample for investigation and exploration. As Creswell (2005) notes, “[it] is called an instrumental case because it serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue” (p. 439). When framed within the context of a particular private high school, the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” takes on the form of an instrumental case study, insofar as it seeks to provide illuminating (albeit non-generalizable) data on the theme of college preparedness.

Explanation of the Data Collection Methods (Grounded Theory)

Unlike other research designs, “case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis. Any and all methods for gathering data...can be used in a case study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). For this reason, grounded theory – a research methodology well
established in education research circles – is the most conducive to the question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” For, as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) write, “grounded theory may provide a better explanation than an existing theory” (p. 346), particularly if those existing theories have neglected the people who are at the heart of the phenomenon to be researched.

As previously mentioned, much of the literature on the topic of college preparedness has focused on employment trends and the skills associated with maintaining relevance in a changing twenty-first century job market. In gathering information about college preparedness, researchers have interviewed college faculty and business leaders, observed classrooms and engaged in analysis of economic trends. However, it is believed that no one has engaged the students in a way that this research study involved them. To date, no research that is fully grounded in the experiences and perceptions of students attending college has been published, wherein they are asked to reflect upon what it means to be prepared for basic postsecondary work. Ignoring the voices of students is an imprudent means of constructing a theory regarding college preparedness. It is for this reason that employing a grounded theory data collection methodology is so very important. Grounded theory places the voices of the students at the very center of the research itself.

Grounded theory is an approach to data collection and data analysis wherein the “main purpose...is to develop a theory” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 37). In the case of this research, the primary purpose in utilizing grounded theory was to develop a theory on college preparedness in order to answer the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”

Consistent with concerns over present college preparedness theories derived from sources other than students, Strauss and Corbin (1990) note that grounded theory is undergirded by “the
belief that not all of the concepts related to the given topic have been yet identified” (p. 37).
Thus, grounded theory allows new theories on college preparedness to surface that would otherwise not be part of the present dialogue on the subject (especially given the fact that the present dialogue is not grounded in the experiences and perception of students). This means that researchers must be open to the possibility that something new may emerge via grounded theory that is wholly inconsistent with the research as it presently exists. The opposite is also true; one must also be open to the notion that grounded theory may reveal great consistency with the current literature on college preparedness. For this reason, the road to a conclusion within grounded theory is quite open.

Rather than fear this uncertainty and ambiguity, grounded theory (as a data collection and analysis method) embraces it. As Strauss & Corbin (1990) remark, “One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (p. 23). In the end, then, grounded theory methods “constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). It is this theoretical formulation on the topic of college preparedness that this research sought to provide.

In terms of a data collection method, “grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection” (Strauss & Corbin. 1990, p. 23). The data itself yields a theory, rather than the data confirming a previously formed hypothesis (which is the direction taken in most quantitative research studies). Bryant and Charmaz (2007) see grounded theory data collection in a similar fashion, writing that “grounded theory strategies allow for imaginative engagement with the data that simple application of a string of procedures
preclude” (p. 25). For all of these reasons, the means by which data is collected is incredibly critical to the objective of theory-making.

In terms of traditional data collection methodology within grounded theory, “The researcher collects primarily interview data, making multiple visits to the field. That initial data collection is done to gain a variety of perspectives on the phenomena” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 24). The coding of these initial interviews is then used to inform more of the same, as “the interactive conceptualization of the research process in grounded theory involv[es] a continuous process of moving back and forth from data collection to analyzing and theory development” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 521). As McMillan and Schumacher state, this back-and-forth gives grounded theory a “self-correcting nature” (p. 396) that even “quantitative researchers like to see in an educational study” (p. 396). It is for this reason that grounded theory (and the data collection and analysis methods it utilizes) is well respected within the research community.

Additionally, grounded theory allows the researcher to build a theory on the interplay of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods in order to strengthen the research. Within grounded theory, quantitative data is used for purposes of theory verification and substantiation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Strauss and Corbin (1990) agree by making the point that for grounded theory, “[quantitative measures] can be built into the theory as further verification of conditions, actions/interaction, consequences, and so forth” (p. 191). Survey data was determined to be the best means of accomplishing this end, with focus group and intensive interviews bookending the survey on either side. Though a deep exploration of the grounded theory process is provided in subsequent sections, an overview is offered in Figure 3.2 below, taken from Charmaz (2006, p. 11).
Participants

As directed by the research question itself - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - the participants of the study were current college students, all of whom graduated from the same private high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota, between 2011 and 2014. This school serves students from the Minneapolis and St. Paul Metro area and surrounding suburbs. Graduating classes between 2011 and 2014 ranged from 102 to 135 students. Approximately 76% of the students at the school are European American, while 24% are students of color (18% African American, 6% Asian American).
It is noteworthy that the school considers its curriculum to be college-preparatory in nature. On average, over 90% of the members of each graduating class attend a four-year postsecondary institution. A look at the school’s profile also reveals that the average student ACT score is 27, and the average student SAT score is 1867.

The initial pool of students from whom the data was drawn included 468 total individuals, representing attendance at 165 different four-year postsecondary institutions across the nation. To draw upon such a wide swath of college experiences allowed the theory that emerged from the data to be fully saturated.

Given the demographic data of the research participants (as well as the planned data collection methods for the study), the Human Subjects Committee (HSC) at the Hamline University School of Education unconditionally approved the research several months prior to data collection. The relevant conditions required for approval included the collection of data from non-vulnerable adults, as well as ensuring that the research was absent of any form of deception.

The focus group interview was conducted with nine students, seven of whom identified themselves as European American and two of whom identified themselves as African American. These students represented attendance at four different universities. One of them graduated from high school in 2014, three in 2013, four in 2012, and one in 2011. It was from this same pool of students that the participants in the intensive interviews were drawn.

The pilot survey participants numbered 16 in all, 15 of whom identified themselves as European American and 1 of whom identified themselves as Asian American. Five of them graduated from high school in 2014, four in 2013, four in 2012 and three in 2011. These students represented attendance at 12 different postsecondary institutions across the country.
There were 43 survey participants, 35 of whom identified themselves as European American, 6 of whom identified themselves as African American, and 2 of whom identified themselves as Asian American. 11 of them graduated from high school in 2014, 11 in 2013, 11 in 2012, and 10 in 2011. These students represented attendance at 36 different postsecondary institutions across the country.

**Setting**

The focus group meeting was conducted in a classroom with desks arranged purposefully to create a relaxed atmosphere conducive to open conversation. Refreshments were provided for the participants. The session lasted for two hours and was moderated by a single individual (the researcher) using the Metaplan process for focus group facilitation (described in detail in the next section). The intensive interviews were conducted in the same classroom, though they took place in a one-on-one environment, unlike the focus group.

**Explanation of the Focus Group Interview**

Not all data collection methods are consistent with grounded theory. As such, “To meet the criteria for producing [a grounded theory study], a researcher must utilize its general procedures, and many of the specific ones” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 192). To that end, the accepted means of grounded theory data collection were honored by utilizing a focus group interview in the beginning of this case study. The data mined from this initial interview was then used to create a more general survey, distributed to a much larger population of students.

As Charmaz (2006) notes, “interviewing has long been a useful data-gathering method in various types of qualitative research” (p. 25), and grounded theory is no exception. While one-on-one interviews have traditionally been used within grounded theory, it is accepted that “other forms of interviewing...might be indicated for certain grounded theory projects” (Charmaz, 2006,
A focus group interview strategy was employed for this particular study. Nine students participated in the focus group, which is consistent with the recognized standard for that variety of interview format being six to ten participants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

As Kvale and Brinkman (2009) are quick to note, “the aim of the focus group is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints” (p. 150). This is highly desirable for a qualitative study that seeks to explore a topic with a group whose voice has not traditionally been part of the dialogue:

Focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews. (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 150)

For all of the reasons above, a group interview provided an excellent beginning to the research, and a springboard into the survey portion of data collection.

Relative to the focus group, the following logistical details are worth noting. The nine participants of the focus group were culled from a list of former graduates currently attending a college or university in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. All students who met those criteria were contacted and the first ten to respond were selected. One of those ten was unable to attend.

Upon arrival, participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix A). The focus group was recorded for transcription purposes; audio and video recordings were both made. During the interview, data was collected using Metaplan (Schnelle & Stoltz, 1987), a facilitation process for focus groups that allows interview participants to freely articulate their thoughts on a specific topic or line of inquiry. The Metaplan steps are illustrated in Figure 3.3.
Similar studies conducted with college students (regarding their perceptions of preparedness for upper-level college coursework) have also employed this very same data collection method. Dunlap et al. (2011) describe their use of Metaplan in a focus group context in this way:

According to Metaplan precepts, each focus group discussion question is addressed through a continuum of specific steps. Initially, each participant writes personal, relevant thoughts concerning the question under discussion on individual notecards. As the process unfolds, participants and researchers jointly discuss and collaboratively organize written thoughts on agreed-upon, participant generated categories. The Metaplan process concludes when participants...individually rate emergent categories by degree of personal importance/preference on a seven-point Likert scale. (p. 176)

The focus group discussion questions addressed through the Metaplan process were as follows (and can also be seen in Appendix B):

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**Figure 3.3: Metaplan Process Steps and Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>A question is stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Participants write thoughts and feelings on note cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Participants write clearly and neatly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Write one idea per card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Use 7 words or less if possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>The moderator collects and reads note cards aloud and displays them on the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>The moderator, with participants’ help, organizes the note cards into clusters or categories of thoughts, feelings, and opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8</td>
<td>Participants may continue writing their thoughts during the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 9</td>
<td>The moderator and participants discuss their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through the clustering process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 10</td>
<td>Participants conclude the process by rating the categories according to how they feel about the importance of each category. They also rank their top categories according to perceived importance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What does it take to be prepared for college?

2. In what ways were you unprepared for college?

A third question was planned but was not addressed due to time restraints.

After the focus group was completed, the interview was transcribed and coded - a process that is described in greater detail in a subsequent section of this manuscript. Pseudonyms chosen by the student participants at the beginning of the focus group were used in the transcript and all subsequent references. The transcription of the focus group is provided in Appendix E.

**Explanation of the Survey**

Considering the fact that grounded theory allows researchers to “choose methods that help [them] answer [their] research questions with ingenuity and incisiveness” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15), the survey questions were derived from the focus group interview Metaplan data as well as the codes that emerged from the focus group transcripts. The focus group, therefore, informed the survey by giving it specific direction relative to the language that was used.

The survey was administered electronically using Google Forms. Participants were sent a link to the survey, which began with a letter of informed consent. Continuing the survey was contingent upon their agreement to the letter of informed consent. Demographic data was also collected at the beginning of the survey. All of this is provided at the beginning of Appendix C.

The survey items were a mix of open and forced response questions. The open response items were two-fold and used the same language as the questions asked during the focus group. These were as follows:

1. What does it take to be prepared for college?

2. In what ways were you unprepared for college?
Survey participants were asked to provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the aforementioned question. The forced response items, of which there were 31 questions, were provided on a seven point ordinal scale. Each question asked the participants to provide their opinion about the degree of importance of a given concept relative to college preparedness (one being not important on the scale and seven being very important). It is worth noting that this precise scale was also used by Dunlap et al. (2011) in a study with similar content and data collection methods. The entirety of the survey is provided in Appendix C.

The population size for the survey was 468 students, all of whom graduated from the same private Minneapolis, Minnesota high school between 2011 and 2014 (see Participants section). In an effort to ensure the best possible breadth of responses, the nine participants from the focus group were excluded from the surveys. This brought the surveyable population from 468 to 459 students.

Pilot survey.

A pilot survey was first executed with a small group of respondents. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a pilot survey should be sent to provide for the researcher a sense of how much time it takes to complete the survey, as well as identify concerns with the language of the survey and provide a sense of what types of responses will result from the survey questions. Seeing that “the pilot can be successful in identifying needed changes if as few as 10 individuals are willing to complete it and provide suggestions to improve the clarity and format” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237), the pilot survey was sent to 20 students, chosen using a simple random sampling method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). 16 of them responded and represented an appropriate cross-section of the total population. Of the sixteen, five graduated
from high school in 2014, four in 2013, four in 2012 and three in 2011. They represented 11 different universities across the country.

The pilot survey data was then examined for anomalies in the responses that could indicate confusing, unnecessary or poorly worded items. Additionally, the pilot survey revealed that several of the initial categories of interest (relative to college preparedness) were of such little consequence to the students that they should be removed from the survey altogether and disregarded as categories of interest. It was also at this time that special considerations were made to ensure the integrity of the survey, specifically in terms of reliability and validity.

Fink (2009), in providing guidelines for pilot testing of surveys, suggests that in terms of ensuring reliability, researchers should “focus on the clarity of the questions and the general format of the survey” (p. 44). To that end, Fink says that researchers should look at pilot surveys for unanswered or partially answered questions, as well as items where several answers were provided for the same question. Finally, she also suggests that anyone conducting a research survey pay attention to biased or leading language, the clarity of directions, as well as mutual exclusivity in forced response questions (Fink, 2009, p. 44). All of these were taken into consideration when analyzing the initial data from the pilot survey.

In an effort to create a measure of internal reliability and consistency within the survey itself, seven additional questions were added following the pilot. These questions asked students to rank (again on a seven point ordinal scale) the importance of the over-arching categories created by the focus group, as opposed to just the subcategories. This provided a measurement of “how well different items complement each other in their measurement of the same quality or dimension” (Fink, 2009, p. 42).
Adjustments were also made to the survey following the pilot in an effort to ensure the survey’s validity. Fink (2009) states, “A survey is valid if the information it provides is an accurate reflection of respondents’ knowledge, attitudes, values and behavior” (p. 43). There are four measurements of survey validity - predictive validity, concurrent validity, content validity and construct validity (Fink, 2009, p. 43). According to Creswell (2005), “researchers might report different forms of validity” (p. 164) - meaning that there are multiple perspectives on which measurement of validity is the most indicative of a quality survey. In fact, researchers such as Hubley & Zumbo (1996) and Messick (1980) have suggested that survey results can be deemed valid if they simply have use and result in positive consequences.

In the case of the survey at hand, attention was paid specifically to content validity. Fink (2009) states, “A survey can be validated by proving that its items or questions accurately represent the characteristics or attitudes they are intended to measure. A survey of political knowledge has content validity, for example, if it contains a reasonable sample of facts, words, ideas, and theories commonly used when discussing or reading about the political process” (p. 43). Because the survey items were derived from a focus group addressing the same topic as the survey, content validity was somewhat present from the beginning. However, after the respondents returned the pilot survey, the survey items and responses were cross-referenced with the current literature on the topic to further ensure content validity.

Survey administration.

Once the survey was adjusted, it was electronically distributed to a larger group of respondents. The potential sample population was 443 total students after the pilot survey (focus group and pilot survey respondents were removed from the population to guard against redundancy and ensure reliability). After conferring with a statistician, it was determined that a
simple random sampling method should be utilized for the final survey. This is consistent with established standards within the survey (Fink, 2009) and statistical (Starnes et al., 2012) realms. Consequently, the list of potential respondents was randomized and then assigned a number from 001 to 443. Then, using a table of random numbers from Starnes et al. (2010), 80 names were chosen to receive the link to the electronic survey (their email addresses previously sourced with permission from several databases kept by the school from whom the students had graduated). Of the 80 surveys, 53 were returned. This was slightly more than expected, given that a 50% return rate is considered typical (Fink, 2009). However, 10 of the surveys were dismissed as a result of anomalies within the responses. The anomalies included inconsistent demographic responses and incomplete surveys. This left 43 total surveys to be analyzed from a population of 443 students.

Sampling 10% of the population (9.7% to be exact) was necessary in order to satisfy conditions for constructing a confidence interval - a measurement of assurance that the true attitude or belief of the population on any given survey item lies within a small but certain range of scores. This is generally referred to as the “10% condition” (Starnes et al., 2012, p. 437). In reference to it, Starnes et al. write, “When sampling without replacement, the sample size \( n \) should be no more than 10% of the population size \( N \) (the 10% condition)” (Starnes et al., 2012, p. 479). This is because “when sampling without replacement from a finite population, the proportion \( p \) of successes is actually changing as we select each individual. But the standard deviation formula assumes that \( p \) remains constant” (Starnes et al., 2012, p. 437). Standard deviation - a measurement of any individual survey response’s distance from the mean response of the collective sampled population (Fink, 2009) - is an essential component of constructing a confidence interval. Therefore, Receiving complete responses from 43 out of a possible 443
students was ideal, insofar as statisticians suggest that sampling as close to 10% of the population as possible (without surpassing it) is best in order to provide a more precise confidence interval (Starnes et al., 2012). More detailed information on standard deviation and confidence intervals for the survey are provided in the results discussed in Chapter 4.

**Explanation of the Intensive Interviews**

Concerning conventions for grounded theory data collection, it is important to note the researcher is constantly shaping and reshaping data collection, and therefore “several combined or sequential approaches” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15) may be in order. Consistent with this belief, the survey results informed the questions for the third and final data collection effort - the intensive interviews. According to Charmaz (1991), “intensive interviewing is a directed conversation that elicits inner views of respondents’ lives as they portray their worlds, experience and observations” (p. 385). Intensive interviews, therefore, are the means by which an individual can tell their own story in their own words (Bachman & Schutt, 2015). They can also be used to clarify previously collected data. For example, Bachman and Schutt (2015) suggest to researchers, “For an intensive interview component, propose a focus for the intensive interviews that you believe will add the most to the findings from the survey” (p. 205). To that end, the intensive interviews for this particular research intentionally occurred after the survey data had been returned; the intensive interviews acted as a form of theoretical sampling that sought new, specific information on the topics illuminated by the survey (Charmaz, 2006).

In conceptualizing the questions for the intensive interviews for this study, Kvale and Brinkman’s (2009) position that “knowledge production in interview research comes closer to a craft than a rule-following method” (p. 21) was followed. Therefore, “the structure [came] close to an everyday conversation” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 24) and was “characterized by a non-
directive style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 150).

Insofar as the topic of discussion was “How do college students define college preparedness?”, normative conventions for such interviews were honored by “creating a permissive atmosphere for the expression of personal and conflicting viewpoints on the topic” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 150). This approach is consistent with the views of other experts on the topic of intensive interviews. Bachman and Schutt (2015) also note that intensive interviews are particularly effective when “interviewers allow the specific content and order of questions to vary from one interviewee to another” (p. 182) through the use of non-directive probes (such as, “Can you tell me more?”) and follow up questions. Otherwise stated, interviewers strategize during the interview itself regarding how best to accomplish the objectives at hand (Bachman & Schutt, 2015).

Hochschild (2009) notes that the “central purpose of an intensive interview is conceptual mapping” (p. 1), insofar as they can be “supplements to...or correctives of virtually any opinion survey” (p. 1). This is because “intensive interviews can do directly what statistical analysis seeks to do indirectly and at a distance - show what attitudes or values are ‘correlated’ and how strongly they are associated” (Hochschild, 2009, p. 6). As such, the intensive interviews acted as supplements and correctives, just as Hochschild suggests:

[These interviews are] a vehicle for developing explanations of inevitably superficial survey results. That is, perhaps the survey is the pretest, conducted mainly to suggest areas of discussion for the intensive interviews to follow. In that logic, the [intensive interviews] will confirm, disconfirm, or transform one’s hypotheses; the surveys are mainly the set-up. (2009, p. 7).
Charmaz (2006) writes that “intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well” (p. 28) because it is “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p. 28). In the spirit of this open-ended yet directed approach, for the research at hand, the interview questions followed suit, and clarifying questions were asked as the interview progressed. As previously established, each of the interview questions sought greater explanation on survey results and other phenomena within the research as it had already taken shape. This is, by definition, the nature of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). The questions for the intensive interviews were as follows (and can also be seen in Appendix D):

1. No one, in the focus group or the survey, identified socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. Do you think that this is unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you have encountered in college as well?

2. In the research, I’ve found that “basic content knowledge” (a subset of academic skills) is not considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think?

3. I’ve been encountering the word “analysis” in the research. Would you call analysis an academic skill or a state of mind?

4. Are study skills personal to the individual, or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college

5. In the end, what’s more essential for college preparedness 1) knowing your content or knowing yourself 2) Having practical study skills or having a particular state of mind?

For the intensive interview sessions, then, six of the original focus group members were interviewed, this time in a one-on-one environment. These participants had previously signed a letter of informed consent that covered both the focus group and the intensive interviews
(provided in Appendix A). The interviews were recorded for transcription purposes and the same pseudonyms chosen during the focus group were again used in all subsequent references. Transcripts of the intensive interviews can be found in Appendices F-K.

**Explanation of the Data Analysis Processes**

Relative to data analysis (and as previously mentioned), the employment of grounded theory encourages “a continuous process of moving back and forth from data collection to analyzing and theory development” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 521). Therefore, analysis of the aforementioned data involved several components.

The first step involved coding the focus group interview transcript (Appendix E). According to Charmaz (2006), coding within grounded theory “means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43). Otherwise stated, “coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytical interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). The coding of the focus group interview was made significantly easier by the fact that participants had written down much of their thoughts and generated many of their own coding categories because of the nature of the Metaplan process.

With that said, further coding of the data beyond what was completed by the participants during the focus group interview was necessary. Within grounded theory, such coding has two main phases (open coding being the first, and focused coding being the second):

1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by

2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize large amounts of data. While engaged in initial
coding, [the researcher] mines early data for analytic ideas to pursue in further data
collection and analysis. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46)

Using the above-mentioned coding process, tentative categories from the data began to emerge.
Charmaz (2006) defines the creation of these categories as “the analytical step in grounded
theory of selecting certain codes as having overriding significance or abstracting common
themes and patterns in several codes into an analytical concept” (p. 186). For the research at
hand, these categories represented potential answers to the research question, “How do college
students define college preparedness?” Otherwise stated, each category became an umbrella
concept under which similar responses from the focus group participants could be clustered.
This was accomplished by naming each piece of data from within the transcript (open coding)
and grouping similar or matching data into a labeled category, all of which was aided by the fact
that focus group participants had, themselves via the Metaplan process, created many of their
own categories. Categories included “state of mind”, “drive” and “academic skills.” All told, 12
different categories emerged from the focus group. However, a number of them were either
discarded or absorbed by other categories after the initial memo-writing process.

As an intermediary step between data collection and data analysis, memo-writing is
described by Charmaz (2006) as “pivotal” (p. 188) because it forces the researcher to “stop and
analyze their ideas about their codes and emerging categories” (p. 188). Beyond that, “memo-
writing is a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts researchers to analyze their
data to develop their codes into categories early in the research process” (Charmaz, 2006, p.
188). Strauss and Corbin (1998) note, “Memos can take several forms” (p. 218) and “that there
are no wrong or poorly written memos (p. 218). As such, it is very much up to the researcher to
decide what form a memo will take. The first memo (after the transcription and coding of the
focus group transcript) took the form of individual observational paragraphs on each of the 12 initial categories. When these observations appeared redundant or similar, categories were combined or discarded, bringing the total number of categories to seven with 24 subcategories - “concepts that pertain to a category, giving it further clarification and specification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101).

After the survey was constructed, piloted and completed (using the categories that emerged), the second formal step in data analysis began - coding and quantifying the data from the survey. The quantification of the data from the respondents provided substantive, mathematical corollaries to data that emerged in the coding of the interview transcript. Per Strauss and Corbin (1998), this mixing of qualitative and quantitative methodologies is fully acceptable within grounded theory, and only serves to strengthen the research design and any theories that emerge.

Specifically, a descriptive statistical approach to the survey data analysis was used. Fink (2009) notes, “Descriptive statistics for surveys include frequencies or frequency distribution (numbers and percentages), measures of central tendency (the mean, median and mode), and measures of variation (range and standard deviation)” (p. 78). All three - distribution frequency, central tendencies and variation were used for data analysis. This information is included in Appendix L.

An alternative form of survey data analysis was also used to further corroborate the survey results with the initial findings of the focus group. This method involved determining an aggregated point value for each of the subcategories by multiplying each individual response by its corresponding ordinal rank, thus establishing an overall hierarchy of all subcategories (Fink,
This process and subsequent results of this alternative form of analysis are discussed in Chapter 4, and are provided in Appendix M.

The open response questions on the survey were also coded, using the aforementioned open coding process from Charmaz (2006). These codes were compared to, and combined with, those from the focus group to initiate the second formal phase of coding - focused coding.

Charmaz describes focused coding as follows:

Focused coding is the second major phase of coding. These codes are more directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident by incident. After you have established some strong analytic directions through your line-by-line coding, you can begin focused coding to synthesize and explain larger segments of data. Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. (p. 57)

The focused coding process brought the number of categories down to five total. The number of subcategories was also diminished, from 24 to 14.

After analyzing the survey data, more memos were crafted. Again, memos are generally informal analytic notes that explicate the coding and capture the researcher’s thoughts, connections, comparisons and questions regarding the data at hand (Charmaz, 2006). The post-survey memos served primarily to articulate remaining questions about the data at hand. These questions formed the basis for the theoretical sampling that would take place during the intensive interviews.

According to Charmaz (2006), “The purpose of theoretical sampling is to obtain data to help you explicate your categories” (p. 100). At the same time, “it is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of your results” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 101) -
that is what the focus group and surveys were for. Strauss and Corbin (1998) agree, citing that to engage in theoretical sampling is to sample “on the basis of emerging concepts, with the aim of being able to explore the dimensional range or varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary” (p. 73). Through theoretical sampling, the researcher “can elaborate the meaning of [his] categories, discover variation within them, and define gaps among categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 108). Theoretical sampling is often “a procedure that researchers conduct through interviews” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 107). And so theoretical sampling became the intention of the intensive interviews.

As previously stated, six of the nine individuals who participated in the focus group also participated in the intensive interviews. The transcripts from these interviews (Appendices F-K) were analyzed using the same open coding process described previously. The data was then compared, contrasted and combined with all previous data, and the categories were finalized - now numbering four in total, with 12 subcategories. A final memo was made, wherein specific attention was paid to naming properties of each of the four categories. To be specific, “properties are the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 117). These properties were synthesized from multiple, specific statements made by respondents throughout the data collection process. The properties, and their associations, can be seen in Appendix N.

Upon completion of the theoretical sampling step, it was determined that the categories were quite saturated with data - meaning that no new categories or properties were illuminated. Similarly, Charmaz (2006) notes, “You conduct theoretical sampling...to develop your categories until no new properties emerge” (p. 96). For this reason, the decision was made to proceed to
concept diagramming and central concept formulation, which is the final step in the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006).

As depicted in Appendix O, a concept diagram was used in the final stage of data analysis. As Charmaz (2006) notes, “Diagrams can enable you to see the relative power, scope, and direction of the categories in your analysis as well as the connections among them” (p. 118). The concept diagram that was created also integrated the raising of the categories into two distinct theoretical concepts. On determining the nature of these theoretical concepts, Charmaz (2006) is quite clear:

Consistent with grounded theory logic, you raise the categories that render the data most effectively...These categories contain crucial properties that make data meaningful and carry the analysis forward. We choose to raise certain categories to concepts because of their theoretical reach, incisiveness, generic power, and relation to other categories...theoretical concepts serve as interpretive frames and offer an abstract understanding of relationships. (Pp. 139-140).

In addition to forming two theoretical concepts, one central concept (Charmaz, 2006) was also integrated into the diagram. Also known as a “central category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 147), this central concept was chosen for “its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). Strauss and Corbin detail the criteria for choosing a central category in this way, using the notions of central concept and central category interchangeably:

1. It must be central; that is, all other major categories can be related to it.
2. It must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept.
3. The explanation that evolves by relating the categories is logical and consistent. There is no forcing of data.

4. The name or phrase used to describe the central category should be sufficiently abstract that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of more general theory.

5. As the concept is refined analytically through integration with other concepts, the theory grows in depth and explanatory power.

6. The concept is able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is, when conditions vary, the explanation still holds, although the way in which a phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different. One also should be able to explain contradictory or alternative cases in terms of that central idea. (p. 147)

The resulting central concept became the substantive theory of the case study. Significant explanation of its creation can be found in Chapter 4. The entire concept diagram is provided in Appendix O.

Affinity Studies Utilizing Similar Methodologies

It is noteworthy that similar studies have been conducted in recent years utilizing similar methodologies and data collection processes. In researching perceived academic preparedness of Latino students before entering college, Boden (2011) utilized a grounded theory approach because she felt that doing so helps the researcher to “discover perceptions that may lend to further study” (p. 99). Dunlap et al. (2011) employed a focus group facilitation process for exploring students’ perception of preparedness for upper-level teacher and nursing coursework. This is quite similar to the focus group strategy described above. More specifically, Dunlap et al. utilized Metaplan for data collection and organization during the focus group.
Summary

The research question - “How do college students define college preparedness?” - was well addressed within the qualitative research paradigm, utilizing grounded theory methodology as the chosen data collection vehicle for conducting this case study. As previously mentioned, placing the research question at the center of the case study allowed a theory on college preparedness to organically emerge from the focus group, survey and intensive interview data. This ultimately yielded significant answers to the question that set this research in motion. The entire process, from data collection to data analysis, was finalized with the building of a theory that “preserves and presents the form of the analytic work” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 151). It is this theory that constitutes the majority of Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

Results

As previously discussed, enrollment in undergraduate degree-granting postsecondary institutions has been steadily on the rise in the United States for quite some time, and is showing no sign of slowing down. Approximately 17 million students are presently enrolled in such institutions, a number which is expected to rise to over 20 million by 2013 (Kena et al., 2014). Yet this substantial increase in postsecondary enrollment of American students in American institutions has not been met with a proportionate increase in college completion. First year students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are proportionately less likely to graduate in the 21st century than they were in the later half of the 20th century (Bound et. al 2010).

One explanation is the notion that the vast majority of students are simply not prepared to meet the rigors of postsecondary education. As Conley (2005) writes, “upwards of 90 percent of ninth graders say they plan to attend college” (p. 4). Yet research has concluded that only 26% of total high school graduates in the United States are prepared for college-level coursework (ACT, 2013). This is supported by the fact that more than one-third of the students at four-year institutions and over 40% of those at two-year institutions require remediation (Sparks & Malkus, 2013).

The research question, “How do college students describe college preparedness?”, attempted to address the aforementioned disparity by identifying the factors that college students believe contribute to, and define, what it means to be prepared for the academic world beyond high school. Up to this point, college preparedness has been a topic of discourse addressed by many stakeholders – teachers, research institutions, and educationists – but never students
themselves. That is to say, college students have yet to be consulted about their beliefs on the subject. This study sought to address a gap in the research.

This chapter begins by providing a brief description of the methodology used to gather and analyze the case study data. This is followed by an account of the analysis itself, conducted primarily through open and focused coding. For reference moving forward, by the end of the analysis process, the data was organized into two theoretical concepts, which are as follows:

I. When considering college preparedness, knowing oneself supersedes knowing content.
II. When considering college preparedness, a student’s state of mind is just as critical as their academic skills.

In keeping with the criterion necessary for its creation and selection (detailed in Chapter 3), a central category was also formed. It is as follows: Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

To support this central category, the data from the focus group, survey and intensive interviews were broken down into four categories with 12 subcategories, each of them elaborating on the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”

Methods

The case study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm, utilizing grounded theory methodology for data collection. Analysis relied on both statistical and non-statistical procedures. Statistical procedures included the use of descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution (numbers and percentages), measures of central tendency (the mean, median and mode), and measures of variation (range and standard deviation). Non-statistical procedures for data analysis focused on open and focused coding processes.
Data was collected first through a focus group interview with nine people from four different postsecondary institutions, all of whom were current college students and all of whom had graduated from the same private Minneapolis, Minnesota high school between 2011 and 2014. The focus group was conducted using the previously described Metaplan process, wherein participants were asked two specific questions:

1. What does it take to be prepared for college?
2. In what ways were you unprepared for college?

A third question was planned, but was not addressed. After its transcription and analysis via grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006), the focus group provided substantial information that was used to formulate the survey portion of the research. The transcription of the focus group is provided in Appendix E.

43 students from 36 different postsecondary institutions completed the survey, all of whom were current college students and all of whom had graduated from the same private Minneapolis, Minnesota high school between 2011 and 2014. The survey was administered electronically. The survey items were a mix of open and forced response questions. The open response items were two-fold and used the same language as the questions asked during the focus group. These were as follows:

1. What does it take to be prepared for college?
2. In what ways were you unprepared for college?

Survey participants were asked to provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the aforementioned question. The forced response items (of which there were 31 questions) were provided on a seven point ordinal scale. Each question asked the participants to provide their opinion about the degree of importance of a given concept relative to college preparedness.
(one being not important on the scale and seven being very important). The survey and aggregated responses are reported in Appendix M.

As previously elaborated upon, grounded theory was the method employed for collecting and analyzing the data. Specifically, the data analysis process and descriptions outlined by Charmaz (2006) were primarily consulted, while those of Strauss and Corbin (1998) were also looked to for elaboration and guidance. Charmaz established certain steps within the grounded theory analysis process that included several stages of coding, memo writing and diagramming.

The first coding stage, open coding, involved naming each word, line, or segment of data and attaching labels to each segment of data (Charmaz, 2006). This led to focused coding, “a selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

In addition to both open and focused coding, memos and statistical data were integrated into the data analysis, making it a fluid process of constant examination and reexamination of the data. While this back-and-forth approach (a hallmark of grounded theory) ensures that data analysis is both rich and deep, it also makes it difficult to provide a linear, discrete summation of the process itself. Nonetheless, the analysis that took place led to the formation of a substantive theory on the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” For a specific outline of the data analysis process, see Figure 4.1 below, taken from Charmaz (2006, p. 11). It is noteworthy that the remainder of this chapter is organized around Figure 4.1, utilizing the same descriptive language for each of the steps in the data collection and analysis process. To that end, Figure 4.1 has been modified from the form in which it was presented in Chapter 3 to include explicit indications regarding which data collection methods were utilized at three distinct points in the grounded theory model.
Initial Open Coding: Focus Group Emerging Categories

The first step in analyzing the data involved open coding the focus group interview transcript. According to Charmaz (2006), open coding within grounded theory “means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43). With this in mind, “coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytical interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). As previously stated, the coding of the focus group interview was made significantly easier by the fact that participants had written down their thoughts, generated their own codes and even
preliminarily ranked those codes on a seven-point ordinal scale as a part of the Metaplan process. While these initial codes and categories were tentative in nature (and needed a formal coding process to explicate their meaning), they did provide a very helpful point from which to begin open coding.

Using the open coding process, tentative categories from the data began to emerge. This was accomplished by naming each piece of data from within the transcript and grouping similar or matching data into a labeled category. Charmaz (2006) defines the creation of these categories as “the analytical step in grounded theory of selecting certain codes as having overriding significance or abstracting common themes and patterns in several codes into an analytical concept” (p. 186). These categories represented potential answers to the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” In total, 12 different categories emerged from the focus group interview. These included state of mind, adaptability, self-management, academic skills, communication, drive, manage of free time, social uncertainty, living conditions, self-discovery, prioritization, and path.

**Initial Memo: Raising Codes to Tentative Categories**

Memo writing is a critical step in grounded theory because it forces researchers to develop codes into categories early in the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006). Otherwise stated, “Through writing memos, [researchers] construct analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). While memos can take varying forms, the initial memo after the coding of the focus group data became observational paragraphs on each of the twelve (12) initial categories. When these observations appeared redundant or similar, categories were combined or discarded, bringing the total number of tentative categories to seven. They were as follows:
Category I: Academic Skills
Category II: Self-Management
Category III: Social Preparedness
Category IV: Communication
Category V: Self-Discovery
Category VI: State of Mind
Category VII: Adaptability

Additionally, 24 subcategories were created - “concepts that pertain to a category, giving it further clarification and specification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Creating these subcategories offered greater clarity for the creation of the survey. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena” (p. 124). For example, in the first category, Academic Skills, three subcategories initially emerged: Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Personal Study Skills and Basic Content Knowledge. Another subcategory entitled State of Mind had five initial subcategories: Driven, Motivation Without Rewards, Strong Work Ethic, Being Optimistic, and Being Future-Minded.

**Focused Coding and Descriptive Statistics: Analyzing the Survey Results**

Insofar as grounded theory analysis methods require a constant cross-examination of the data, the return of the survey by the 43 respondents provided a fresh perspective from which the earlier tentative categories could be revisited. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) see this as not only normal but essential to grounded theory because “the interactive conceptualization of the research process in grounded theory involv[es] a continuous process of moving back and forth from data collection to analyzing and theory development” (p. 521). As McMillan and
Schumacher note, this back-and-forth provides grounded theory with a very valuable “self-correcting nature” (p. 396). Therefore, the return of the survey data was a natural point for focused coding to occur.

According to Charmaz (2006), “Focused coding is the second major phase in coding” (p. 57). Focused coding is “more directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding” (Glaser as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). It is, however, noteworthy that focused coding is not an entirely straightforward process. As some researchers have found, “events will make explicit what was implicit in earlier statements or events” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 58). That is to say, “An ‘Aha! Now I understand’ experience may prompt you to study your earlier data afresh” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 58). This is precisely what occurred when the survey data was returned and coded.

The 43 survey participants were prompted to respond to the same two questions that had been asked during the focus group. The multiplication of the data provided a much fuller picture of the landscape of college preparedness, viewed through the eyes of current college students. Once their responses were open coded (using the same process as that which was employed for the focus group transcripts), the original focus group codes were revisited and simultaneous focused coding (as the new data mixed with the old) ensued.

As the research came into focus, some of the initial categories were discarded. For example, Category III (Social Preparedness) and Category IV (Communication) were both eliminated. The expanded data simply did not support their inclusion in the theory. Several subcategories were also eliminated. All told, the focused coding process reduced the number of categories to five, with 14 subcategories remaining. No new categories or subcategories were generated.
These post-survey focused coding adjustments were aided by the presence of descriptive statistical data from the forced response survey items. Frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, standard deviation and internal consistency, were all used to determine which categories had carrying capacity and should continue to be elevated and which carried little relevance in terms of college preparedness. Categories and subcategories with high measures of central tendency (on a seven point ordinal scale) that also had low standard deviations were viewed as central to the theory (as corroborated by the transcript data), whereas those with low measures of central tendency and high standard deviations were removed when subsequent references to previous data failed to justify their importance. For example, the writing skills subcategory had a central tendency (mean score) of 6.4418 out of 7 across all respondents. Writing skills also had one of the lowest standard deviations of .881, meaning that the spread of responses from the mean was the lowest of all subcategories (Starnes et al, 2012). On the other hand, the basic content knowledge subcategory had the lowest central tendency at 4.7906, and a high standard deviation at 1.3012. This precipitated a second look at this subcategory across all data sources, and ultimately led to its removal from the theory. The questions that had been added to the survey as a means of measuring internal consistency (seven in all) confirmed the reliability of the data derived from frequency distribution, central tendency and standard deviation measurements. All told, the categories that the respondents ranked highest in that portion of the survey were consistent with those that rose to the top using the aforementioned statistical measurements. This can be seen in Appendix L.

An alternative form of data analysis was also used to further corroborate the survey results with the initial findings of the focus group. This method involved determining an aggregated point value for each of the subcategories by multiplying each individual response by
its corresponding ordinal rank, thus establishing an overall hierarchy of all subcategories (Fink, 2009). In other words, the ordinal scale questions were assigned mathematical values and placed on a summated additive scale (Fink, 2009), wherein the entire sample group’s aggregate value for each question became an algebraic sum of each of their individual ordinal scale responses. For example, if all forty-three students (on any given question) provided a ranking of six for that particular facet of college preparedness, the question would be given an aggregate score of 258 \((N \times 6)\). Given that \(N=43\) for the survey, the highest possible point value for any given subcategory was 301 \((N \times 7)\), with zero being the lowest possible point value. The aggregated point value was, therefore, measured on scale of 0 to 301. Table 4.1 below provides the point values and hierarchy using this formula across all categories. This information is also provided in greater detail in Appendix M.

Table 4.1: Hierarchy of All Survey Subcategories Using Point Value Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Point Value ((N=43))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Skills</td>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing How to Seek Help</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Study Skills</td>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding/Maintaining Balance</td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Work Ethic</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to New Situations</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Free Time</td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Driven</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Stress</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Skills</td>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting With Peers</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Confidence</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Advanced Memos: Supporting Refined Conceptual Categories

As an accompaniment, and response, to the survey data, more memos were crafted. These advanced memos represented a shift in the work that had been done up to that point, in that they served primarily to support the now refined conceptual categories and verify their significance. They are integrated (in their final form) into Appendix N.

Additionally, a memo entitled “Memo in Preparation for the Intensive Interviews” was particularly helpful as a means of articulating remaining questions about the data at hand. These questions formed the basis for the theoretical sampling that would take place during the theoretical sampling phase of data collection. An excerpt from that memo is worth noting here:

Much of the literature on the topic of college preparedness spoke to the influence of environmental and demographic factors, specifically socioeconomic status. Yet this had not come up in the research at all; not once had a student mentioned it as a factor in college preparedness. This manifested itself in the advanced memo in this way:
No one in the focus group or the survey identified socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. I am curious if this is unique to [graduates of their school], or is it less of a factor in the lives of those who these students have encountered in college as well?

This particular memo led to an important line of inquiry in the final days of the research process - a line of inquiry that then led to conclusive information that was later juxtaposed with the prominent literature on the very same topic.

**Theoretical Sampling: Seeking Specific New Data**

Within the grounded theory model of data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling occurs when conceptual categories still require the “seeking and collecting of pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in [the] emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 96). Further information is needed to gather more data that focuses on a particular facet of a category in order to “explicate the categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100). Additionally, theoretical sampling allows for the refining of properties within the categories - “characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Theoretical sampling is, therefore, an essential component of data collection and analysis.

It is noteworthy that the purpose of theoretical sampling “is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of a [the] results” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 101). Instead, the purpose is to further saturate the categories with data by filling in gaps and obtaining answers to remaining questions. Theoretical sampling typically has a narrow focus and is usually a procedure conducted through interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling was accomplished by conducting intensive interviews with six of the nine members of the initial
focus group. The interviews were transcribed and coded, per the aforementioned protocols and standards. These transcripts are available in their entirety in Appendices F-K.

Data from the intensive interviews was consistent, with very few variations in student responses. Such data led to a few important changes to the emerging theory. A final category (Adaptability) was removed, bringing the total number of categories to four (with 12 subcategories):

I. Academic Skills
II. Self-Management
III. Self-Discovery
IV. State of Mind

A second important change to the emerging theory involved the development of properties for each of the 12 subcategories. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) note, “Through the delineation of properties...we differentiate a category from other categories and give it precision” (p. 117). When analyzed, the data from the intensive interviews - when coupled with all previous data - allowed for the properties to take shape. For example, the subcategory “Study Skills” was assigned the following two properties:

C1. Study skills are highly subjective and personal
C2. Finding what works for the individual and for different subjects/disciplines

These two properties “are the general or specific characteristics or attributes” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 117) of the Study Skills subcategory, and were the direct result of the theoretical sampling that occurred through the intensive interviews. All told, 21 properties were developed from the data. These properties can be seen in Appendix N.
The Final Step: Concept Diagramming via Memo Integration

According to Charmaz (2006), the final unique step in grounded theory data analysis is concept diagramming. This occurs through the integration and summation of all prior memos with the data itself. In terms of accomplishing this task, Charmaz (2006) suggests the following:

- Sort memos by the title of each category
- Compare categories
- Use your categories - carefully
- Consider how their order reflects the studied experience
- Now think how their order fits the logic of the categories
- Create the best possible balance between the studied experience, your categories, and your theoretical statements about them. (p. 117)

As a result of this process, relationships between the categories became clearer. For example, the former category “Adaptability” was reinstated as a subcategory under the category “State of Mind” because of associative properties. Appendix N provides the complete integrated memo.

Finally, the concept diagram portion of data analysis represented a unique opportunity to project a concrete image of the theory that had emerged from the data, thus allowing a visual of the “relative power, scope and direction of the categories in [the] analysis as well as the connections among them” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 118). The three components of the diagram included the categories and their corresponding subcategories, as well as two theoretical concepts, and a central concept, - the importance of which were explored in Chapter 3. While the concept diagram is provided in Appendix O, it is also presented here as Figure 4.2.
Figure 4.2: Substantive Theory Concept Diagram

Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

With that said...

Theoretical Concept I: When considering college preparedness, knowing oneself supersedes knowing content.

Theoretical Concept II: When considering college preparedness, a student's state of mind is just as critical as their academic skills.
Analysis of the Data Supporting the Final Categories

As previously stated, four distinct categories emerged from the data analysis - Academic Skills, Self-Management, Self-Discovery and State of Mind. Each of them represents the researched population’s response to the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” What follows is an in-depth explanation of each category, and the data analysis (across all data collection points and memos) that led to their development.

**Category I: Academic skills.**

When asked, “What does it take to be prepared for college?”, the nine students who participated in the focus group made it clear that “Academic Skills” are certainly part of the answer. Of the 38 distinct responses received to that particular question during the focus group, just over 20% were categorized (by the focus group itself, via the Metaplan process) as “Academic Skills.” They were as follows:

1. Understanding how to effectively complete and understand reading assignments
2. Baseline of knowledge to build off of in more advanced classes
3. Ability to write a well-formed analytical or persuasive essay
4. A firm foundation of general topics (i.e. math, English)
5. Good writing ability
6. Strong studying skills
7. Knowing how to study/learn (not memorize)
8. An ability to handle academic rigor of college classes.

When the same group of individuals was asked during the second half of the focus group, “In what ways have you noticed that you are not or were not prepared for college?”, “Academic Skills” again surfaced, with 9 of the 36 distinct responses revolving around that topic, as
determined by the participants themselves via the Metaplan process. Thematically, the data was similar, in that it revolved around study and communication skills, as well as a basic understanding of varying content areas.

Specific comments made by focus group participants emphasized the importance of academic skills to college preparedness. In particular, conversation focused on the individual nature of study skills. When asked to elaborate on various types of study skills during the focus group, Emma (pseudonym) spoke up:

I think part of it is knowing what works and what doesn’t work for you. So if you’re studying or learning something, if you know that you work better making flash cards or notes, know that you do that - versus someone else who can study a textbook and they learn best that way.

This same sentiment was underscored later in focus group by Zach (pseudonym) who, when asked if there was a fixed way to learn, responded, “I think it is preferential.” The implication that study skills were not universal but instead subjective and personal led to additional lines of inquiry during subsequent data collection.

As previously mentioned, focus group participants named reading and writing skills among those central to college preparedness, especially relative to their implications for completing assignments. Finally, focus group participants touched briefly on the notion that baseline content knowledge (i.e. math and English) was also important for college preparedness, though very little dialogue or discussion was had on this topic.

After transcribing and coding the focus group interview, four subcategories were arranged under academic skills: Reading skills, writing skills, personal study skills and basic
content knowledge. An excerpt from the researcher memo following the focus group reveals initial impressions of, and questions about, this category and its subcategories:

Academic skills are both universal and personal; both objective and subjective. The universal academic skills that students describe revolve around reading, writing and baseline content knowledge. However, when students are pushed to describe more specific studying skills, their answers revolve around ‘knowing how you learn best’ as well as generic concepts of seeking help and self-advocacy with professors and others in positions to provide academic aid. Because of its somewhat subjective nature, this category, then, may prove to be problematic moving forward...there is no singular answer.

The survey results further emphasized the importance of academic skills, relative to college preparedness, insofar as respondents ranked them among the most important of the forced response questions. Reading skills received a mean ranking of 6.0465 and personal study skills received a mean ranking of 6.3953 (out of 7). Writing skills received the highest mean score of all forced response questions - 6.4418. The standard deviations for each of the subcategories were among the lowest on the survey, indicating general consensus. Table 4.2 below provides an overview of the statistical representation of the survey results for Category I.

Table 4.2: Category I: Academic Skills: Descriptive Statistics for Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Mean Ranking (N=43)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Writing Skills</td>
<td>6.4418</td>
<td>.8810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Study Skills</td>
<td>6.3953</td>
<td>.9294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Reading Skills</td>
<td>6.0465</td>
<td>.8985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Basic Content</td>
<td>4.7906</td>
<td>1.3012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Surprisingly, the fourth academic skill subcategory - basic content knowledge - was ranked quite low on the survey - the lowest of all subcategories (4.7906 out of 7) with one of the highest standard deviations of all the forced response questions (1.3012). This inconsistency led to further question of basic content knowledge as a legitimate subcategory.

An alternative form of survey data analysis was also used to further corroborate the survey results with the initial findings of the focus group, which was previously described in this chapter. This method involved determining an aggregated point value for each of the subcategories by multiplying each individual response by its corresponding ordinal rank, thus establishing an overall hierarchy of all subcategories (Fink, 2009). Given that N=43 for the survey, the highest possible point value for any given subcategory was 301 (N x 7). As one can see in Table 4.3, this approach also provides validity to the three subcategories of academic skills (writing skills, personal study skills and reading skills) while justifying the questioning of basic content knowledge as a subcategory. Whereas writing skills, personal study skills and reading skills all scored quite high, basic content knowledge received the lowest point value total of all subcategories across all categories.

Table 4.3: Category I: Academic Skills: Rankings of Subcategories Using Point Value Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Point Value (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Writing Skills</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Personal Study Skills</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Reading Skills</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Basic Content Knowledge</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The open responses from the survey also proved to be an important source of validation for the academic skills category. Above all else, respondents reiterated the importance of determining personal study skills. For example, when asked, “What does it take to be prepared for college?”, one student stated in the survey, “No matter how intelligent you are, knowing how to, when to and how much to study is going to help in college.” Another survey respondent agreed:

To be prepared for college, you need to have developed good study skills from high school. In order to succeed you need to be studying a little bit every day, and staying on top of your coursework and not just studying the night before. Making flashcards, reading ahead, and learning to make your own study guides ahead of the test is helpful.

A third student simply said, “There is no cramming for college tests. In college, the first thing I had to do was learn how to study.” All told, references to quality, quantity and methods of studying were pervasive in the open response portion of the survey.

Students also heavily cited reading and writing skills as integral to college preparedness. One respondent remarked, “College classes, regardless of the area of study, require a lot of reading. One may be able to ‘get by’ by only studying the notes but to be truly prepared for the exams and get a passing grade, you have to read the textbooks and it is a large volume of reading.” In the same way, another student remarked, “Reading a textbook for a class in college can make or break a student’s performance in that class.” Yet another survey respondent simply said, “I was not prepared for the amount of reading that needed to be completed.”

Relative to writing skills, the open responses to the survey corroborated the descriptive statistical analysis of the forced response items. Students wrote of such things as “analytical expression - ability to express complex ideas and observations in writing” and “articulating your
thoughts and opinions in writing [by] critically analyzing what you read and hear.” One survey respondent spoke particularly highly of the importance of writing for college preparedness:

The single most important aspect of college preparedness is the ability to write and evaluate essays and other written materials on a high level. This includes developing an extensive vocabulary and understanding proper use of grammar and punctuation. It is often that a professor’s best means of evaluation is through a student's writing.

At the same time, what was again noteworthy was the lack of any evidence suggesting that basic content knowledge deserved to be a subcategory under academic skills.

Not a single student hinted at content knowledge when asked, “What does it take to be prepared for college?” As a result, seeking new information on this topic became important during the intensive interviews. The six participants in those interviews were helpful in justifying the removal of “Basic Content Knowledge” from the subcategory list while verifying the legitimacy of the other academic skills subcategories.

During the intensive interviews, the sentiment regarding basic content knowledge as a subcategory was best summed up by Diana (pseudonym):

General knowledge about things that you learn in high school is, unless you sort of get into what you're doing, it's pretty...a lot of it's pretty useless, I would say. So I kind of agree with the statement that, you know, basic content knowledge, it's not enough to really carry you through anything. So it kind of all gets replaced, I would say.

Diana’s opinion regarding basic content knowledge was echoed by other respondents. Andrew (pseudonym) noted that colleges are able to help students themselves adjust to varying degrees of prior content knowledge:
But I don't think [basic content knowledge] necessarily has anything to do with your college preparedness, because I was just as prepared for my...science class than somebody who was taking a lower class. I think they have so many levels in a lot of colleges that [basic content knowledge] doesn't really matter that much, because a lot of the time you get put into whatever is best for you.

A number of the intensive interview participants did note that the importance of basic content knowledge does “depend on what you want to do,” meaning that certain majors may require a student to build on certain prior skill sets (math, for example) while others do not. Nonetheless, the intensive interviews provided enough clarification and justification for removing basic content knowledge from the subcategories list.

On the other hand, the intensive interviews also provided data helpful for firming up the other subcategories under the Category I: Academic Skills. In particular, some clarity was needed regarding the nature of study skills - are they truly subjective and relative to personal preference, or are there certain skills universally necessary for college preparedness? Each of the six intensive interview participants was clear in their response: study skills are individual in nature, determined by the student through a self-propelled process of discovery. Andrew noted, “I think you do have to ultimately develop your own method” while Reuben (pseudonym) remarked, “I don't think there's necessarily a right way to do it. There are definitely better ways to do it for an individual, but I would say that my opinion is that it's pretty individualized.” The other four responses echoed this sentiment.

In the end, the data analysis for Category I: Academic Skills yielded three subcategories. In keeping with the already mentioned standards for grounded theory data analysis, those subcategories were assigned properties that elaborated upon their qualities and attributes, per the
data. These properties are listed in Table 4.4 below and represent the complete data as it relates to Category I: Academic Skills.

Table 4.4: Category I: Academic Skills: Associated Properties for Final Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Reading Skills</td>
<td>A1. Deep, analytical reading</td>
<td>“You need to be able to critically analyze what you read and hear.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2. Prepared for volume of reading</td>
<td>“You have to read the textbooks and it is a large volume of reading.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Writing Skills</td>
<td>B1. Clear written expression</td>
<td>“It is important to be able to express information clearly.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2. Analytical written expression</td>
<td>“The most important needs for preparedness for college are those of... analytical expression - ability to express complex ideas and observations in writing.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Study Skills</td>
<td>C1. Highly subjective and personal; there is no singular, correct way to study.</td>
<td>“I don't think there's necessarily a right way to do it. There are definitely better ways to do it for an individual, but I would say that my opinion is that it's pretty individualized.” (Intensive Interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C2. Finding what works for the individual and for the subject</td>
<td>“Much of my freshmen year was spent figuring out how to best prepare myself for exams and finding what worked best for me.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category II: Self-management.

Self-Management is a category that revolves almost exclusively around the concept of time; it is about how time is used in an environment (college) where it is both an abundant and deceiving resource. Students talked about managing free time nearly as much as any other topic. Their use of other terms like balance and prioritization were simply derivatives of this very same idea. When they spoke of balance, it was about time. When they spoke of prioritizing, it was about time.

Self-management differs from other categories in that it refers specifically to those personal factors over which students believe they have a measure of control. This is different from the yet-to-be-discussed self-discovery category, which focuses on unknown, undiscovered or changing variables such as stress and other personal limitations.

As a category, self-management was created by the focus group participants to act as an umbrella for such ideas as independence and balance (all in response to the question, “What does it take to be prepared for college?”). Because students spoke so frequently about time management, a separate category was initially created with that label as well. Time management and self-management were merged, however, after a post-focus group memo cited the interrelatedness of the two categories. Additionally, during the focus group itself, the moderator was prompted by the comments of the participants to ask, “So time management is not an academic skill, it’s a form of balance?” All participants agreed with this statement, indicating the interrelatedness between the two categories.

Specific comments from the focus group participants reinforced this conclusion as well. Lee (pseudonym) began describing the importance of self-management by saying, “I just feel like to have balance, that is something that every [college student] needs to do”, a comment to
which Christine (pseudonym) responded, “I would say that balance goes under self-management.” Others vocalized their agreement. In fact, the subcategories under self-management were so interrelated that several focus group participants drew attention to it. Reuben noted, “I actually sort of want to question prioritization - is that different from balance...because it might be the same category?”

These comments - coupled with the frequency with which time management came up during the focus group - led to more inquiry about self-management during the survey. The survey results revealed the interconnectedness of the all three subcategories of self-management that had emerged from the focus group - managing free time, balance and prioritization. All respondents ranked each of the three subcategories similarly, and those ranking were high. Table 4.5 demonstrates this relationship. Managing free time received a mean ranking of 6.2093 (out of 7), balance a mean ranking of 6.3255 (out of 7) and prioritization a mean ranking of 6.1627 (out of 7). It is important to cite that the standard deviation for prioritization indicates less agreement among respondents than the other two subcategories.

Table 4.5: Category II: Self-Management: Descriptive Statistics for Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Mean Ranking (N=43)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>6.3255</td>
<td>.8652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Managing Free Time</td>
<td>6.2093</td>
<td>.9894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Prioritization</td>
<td>6.1627</td>
<td>1.2136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As was the case with the academic skills category and its corresponding subcategories, a secondary approach to analyzing the data from the forced response questions was also employed with the self-management category. Again, this method involved determining an aggregated
point value for each of the subcategories by multiplying each individual response by its corresponding ordinal rank, thus establishing an overall hierarchy of all subcategories (Fink, 2009). Given that N=43 for the survey, the highest possible point value for any given subcategory was 301 (N x 7). As one can see in Table 4.6, this approach also provides validity for the three subcategories of self-management (balance, managing free time and prioritizing).

Table 4.6: Category II: Self-Management: Rankings of Subcategories Using Point Value Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Point Value (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Finding/Maintaining Balance</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Managing Free Time</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Prioritizing</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The open responses from the survey were also helpful in elevating the self-management category to permanent status. When asked, “What does it take to be prepared for college?”, the number of students referencing time management as an essential component of college preparedness was overwhelming. All told, over half of the respondents discussed time management in the open response portion of the survey - the single most mentioned topic in the entire survey. As one student simply put in their survey response, “The most important needs for preparedness for college are those of refined time management abilities.” Another noted, “It takes a measure of self-discipline and diligent time management to be prepared to be successful in college.” Others elaborated more in their survey responses, specifically citing the relationship between free time and work time:

In order to be successful in college, one needs three things. First, each student needs to understand time management. You will most likely have in between two to four classes
in a single day. Meaning, there will be a lot more free time. During this free time it is essential that each student finds time during this free time to do his or her assigned work.

And yet another student survey response was even more blunt about the necessity of time management relative to college preparedness, citing the difference (for some) between high school and college:

Just understanding how to manage your time. You don't have your parents to tell you to do your homework. These professors have hundreds of students and are not going to single you out for not doing your homework, you are on your own and this is very important to succeeding.

In reading these responses, the connection between the subcategories of time management and balance are clear. Students, in responding to the survey, were also quick to make that connection:

In order to be prepared for college, one must learn to master the skill of good time management and study skills. Balancing academics, extracurriculars, work, a social life, and your personal health can be difficult, so in order to succeed at the university level, it is crucial to learn how to use your time wisely and efficiently in order to complete assignments, study, participate in clubs and sports, and have time for friends and family.

Unfortunately, many students learned that this was an element of college preparedness the hard way, as one respondent indicated when saying, “The ways in which I felt I was unprepared for college were mostly the balance between free time and academics.”

It is again important to note that no one used the word prioritizing or prioritization in their survey response. And so, after analysis - and taking a hint from Reuben’s earlier comment
that prioritization and balance were the same thing - it was determined that prioritization should be discarded as a subcategory.

No further inquiry was necessary during the intensive interviews considering the consistency of the data during our other phases of data collection. Otherwise stated, there were no gaps in the data that required further investigation (which is the purpose of theoretical sampling via intensive interview). Thus, the data analysis for Category II yielded two subcategories. In keeping with the already mentioned standards for grounded theory data analysis, those subcategories were assigned properties that elaborated upon their qualities and attributes. These properties are listed in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Category II: Self-Management: Associated Properties for Final Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Managing Free Time</td>
<td>A1. Temptation to waste time - avoid distractions</td>
<td>“There are many distractions in college that can take away from your school work.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Managing Free Time</td>
<td>A2. Amount of time necessary for success is greater than high school (studying must be a priority)</td>
<td>“Not only was the learning more in depth, the total time spent preparing for lectures, post lecture notes, class notes, book notes and study aids were significantly higher work-load than I experienced in high school.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Balance</td>
<td>B1. Balancing social time with study time.</td>
<td>“You need to be able to balance academics and extracurriculars.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Balance</td>
<td>B2. Because time is finite, balancing time within subjects and disciplines is important</td>
<td>“Freshman year was all about finding (and re-finding) a balance between all the separate academic parts.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category III: Self-discovery.

The self-discovery category was so-named by students in the focus group to describe elements of their understanding of college preparedness that were borne out of new experiences that shifted paradigms or forced personal change. This is quite different from the prior category, self-management, in that self-discovery implies a level of intentional uncovering and learning that is not present in the other category. That is to say, self-management involves maintenance of known factors while self-discovery involves new levels of awareness.

In that sense, self-discovery is the precursor to self-efficacy. One learns how to handle stress, learns limitations and gets to know oneself via the trials and travails (both social and academic) of the early college experience. This, in turn develops self-efficacy.

However, across all points of data collection, students had a difficult time clearly articulating this concept. Discerning and calculating their meaning, therefore, took a particular level of intentionality that was unnecessary in the other categories. This ambiguity began in the focus group, when multiple students began to allude to the presence of this so-called self-discovery element of college preparedness. Lee (pseudonym) began this vague exploration during the focus group by saying, “I feel like a lot of people said, ‘I needed to learn to set limits or gain knowledge about myself.’ Like a challenge aspect - I don’t know how I would say it.” After being prompted to more deeply explore these comments, Diana (pseudonym) said, “I would say self-discovery or something like that,” and the other participants agreed with this conclusion.

The students in the focus group used the category of self-discovery as a holding location for sentiments regarding the following initial subcategories, all as they related to the question, “In what ways were you unprepared for college?”:
1. Needed to gain knowledge about myself
2. Becoming an adult
3. Self-Confidence
4. Living on my own
5. [Addressing] being sheltered
6. Unaware of personal limits (in terms of obligations)
7. Managing stress in a healthy manner

After the focus group transcripts were coded, the decision was made to combine several of the above-mentioned subcategories. This led to the creation of three initial subcategories of self-discovery: managing stress, determining personal limits and developing confidence.

Knowing that self-discovery was indeed an important facet of college preparedness - yet also operating with an understanding that students have many ways of articulating it - the survey provided a welcomed measure of clarity on certain facets of the category, though not all.

The survey respondents identified the ability to manage stress as an important subcategory of college preparedness, insofar as it received a mean ranking of 6.1395 (out of 7). They were somewhat more ambivalent about determining personal limits, giving it a mean ranking of 5.8604. Similarly, developing confidence was given a mean ranking of 5.8837. All three subcategories, however, had high standard deviations (relative to other subcategories), meaning that there was less agreement among respondents on those topics. Table 4.8 below demonstrates this phenomenon.
Table 4.8: Category III: Self-Discovery: Descriptive Statistics for Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Mean Ranking (N=43)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>Managing Stress</td>
<td>6.1395</td>
<td>1.0137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>Developing Confidence</td>
<td>5.8837</td>
<td>1.1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>Determining Personal Limits</td>
<td>5.8604</td>
<td>1.0137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These descriptive statistics were, therefore, not helpful in clarifying the importance or unimportance of each subcategory relative to a theory on college preparedness. Furthermore, the previously described point-value method of analyzing the survey data was also inconclusive (see Table 4.9)

Table 4.9: Category III: Self-Discovery: Rankings of Subcategories Using Point Value Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Point Value (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing Stress</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Confidence</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Personal Limits</td>
<td>Self-Discovery</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quite helpful were the open responses given by those who participated in the survey. In the survey open responses, students spoke frequently of the importance of managing stress, in particular, as it relates to college preparedness. One survey respondent remarked that being prepared for college “comes down to managing stressors that come your way” while another commented that college preparedness means “knowing how to handle stress and not letting it overcome you.” Yet another insightful survey respondent provided more clarity on the topic of discovering and managing stress as a measurement of college preparedness:
Weight gain, peer pressure, monetary issues (taxes, loans, budgeting) and other stressors are things that almost every college student experience that were never addressed in my high school. I think that things like stress management, healthy eating, and how to handle monetary situations are things that could be easily incorporated into high school curriculums, and potentially lessen this problem with students.

Comments like these aided in solidifying stress management as a legitimate subcategory of self-discovery. Nonetheless, open response comments on the other two subcategories - determining personal limits and having confidence - were nonexistent. One possible explanation for this was documented in the researcher’s post-survey memo:

> After reading student responses, I’m wondering about this category. It seems as though managing stress, knowing one’s limits and having confidence are only a few ways that students might articulate self-discovery. Their responses seemed laden with references to this category, though not using the same terms as the pilot group. Further exploration is necessary.

This further exploration would come by way of theoretical sampling, namely in the intensive interviews.

Prior to the intensive interviews, however, the subcategory labeled “developing confidence” was discarded. This came about as a result of its interrelatedness and similarity to subcategories in the yet-discussed state of mind category. This left just two subcategories for further exploration - managing stress and determining personal limits.

During the focus group, students had alluded to the importance of determining personal limits. Diana (pseudonym) noted that she was “unaware of personal limits in terms of obligations on my plate” and that when she said this, she was “thinking in my mind [about]
prioritization and self-discovery.” Later in the focus group, Reuben (pseudonym) commented that “if I was going to make a sub-category, I would do something with limitations,” and many agreed. But what does this mean in terms of building a theory on college preparedness?

In seeking an answer, this question was intentionally posed to students in the intensive interviews: In the end, what’s more essential for college preparedness - knowing your content or knowing yourself? The desire was to coax out a different dimension of self-discovery that might have otherwise gone uncovered. In response to the question, Emma elaborated on the nature of the first year of college:

I think knowing how you work well and knowing even what makes you want to do well, even things like being alone or being with people, I think freshman year is such a large learning year. And part of me doesn't even think that freshman year the first semester grades should be counted, in a way, because there's just so much going on that you don't know what to do and you’re discovering your limits.

Similarly, Andrew (pseudonym) mentioned boundaries (determined to be a synonym of the limits concept) and environmental limits in his response:

I think you really have to know what are going to be your pitfalls in college; if you can't study around people, or if you need conversation to study. If you lose some of that, like, desire or something, what are the types of, like, environmental factors that you can have around you and put those around you and, like, set those boundaries. And I think that if you know those things, then I think that the content that is thrown at you, you'll be able to handle better than if you did it in the reverse.

And finally, Christine (pseudonym) spoke directly about self-discovery in her intensive interview response by referencing the notion of getting to know oneself:
I got to college and thought one thing about myself - I'm going to love a big school, I'm going to go to all the games and all sorts of things like that. And within the first month I was like, well, that's not me at all. So I think getting to know yourself and kind of knowing where your fit in, and I think that's probably most essential [for college preparedness].

With all of this said, the intensive interviews provided a much needed magnifying glass through which the category of self-discovery could be viewed.

Additionally, a third and final subcategory was added to self-discovery - learning to seek help. Originally a subcategory of the disregarded communication category, learning to seek help was highest ranked subcategory overall (tied with writing skills), with a mean ranking of 6.4418 (out of 7) and a standard deviation of .9077. The point value method of data analysis for the survey revealed similar findings, with this subcategory (seeking help) receiving a point total of 277, the highest of all subcategories (again tied with writing skills).

When describing this subcategory, students in the survey noted that being prepared for college means that “You need to be able to ask for help when necessary.” Along the same lines, another stated, “In college, a professor isn't going to personally reach out to me, I have to seek help myself and it is up to me and only me to make sure I'm on top of everything and seeking assistance if I'm not.” For these reasons, this subcategory was included in the final list.

The data analysis for Category III yielded three subcategories. In keeping with the already mentioned standards for grounded theory data analysis, those subcategories were assigned properties that elaborated upon their qualities and attributes, per the data. These properties are listed in Table 4.10 and represent the complete data as it relates to Category III.
Table 4.10: Category III: Self-Discovery: Associated Properties for Final Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Discovering and Addressing Stressors</td>
<td>A1. Stress is normal and typical; too much is worrisome for personal health</td>
<td>“There are necessary stresses in college. To be prepared for college means having the work ethic to complete the necessary stresses of college courses in a healthy way.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2. Managing stress in a healthy way is critical to college preparedness.</td>
<td>“One must be able to...handle the stresses of college in a healthy manner.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1. Sources of stress are not just academic</td>
<td>“Weight gain, peer pressure, monetary issues (taxes, loans, budgeting) and other stressors are things that almost every college student experiences.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Discovering Personal Limits &amp; Boundaries</td>
<td>B2. Discovering personal limits and boundaries in relation to time spent on academic work, relationships and personal care.</td>
<td>“There's just so much going on that you don't know what to do and you're discovering your limits.” (Emma, Intensive Interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Learning to Seek Help</td>
<td>C1. Knowing how and when to seek academic help; academic self-advocacy</td>
<td>“You need to be able to ask for help when necessary.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Category IV: State of mind.**

With four subcategories, state of mind is the largest college preparedness category to emerge from the data. State of mind, unlike self-discovery, was quite concrete for the students to describe. State of mind implies a way of thinking that students feel is essential to being prepared for college. The original category, as determined by the students during the focus group, initially contained eight subcategories. There were as follows:
1. Goal-oriented mindset
2. A desire to be [in college]
3. Confidence
4. Understanding that it is not the same as high school
5. Ability to see things in the long term
6. Not sheltered
7. An open mind
8. The optimism to learn from mistakes

Two other categories (drive and adaptability) also existed in the beginning that contained facets of what later became the complete state of mind category - this is how strongly students felt about them as a factor in college preparedness.

Given the interrelatedness of all of these categories and subcategories, combining them became an immediate task. For the time being, adaptability remained its own category but the notion of drive was combined with the state of mind category. Redundancies were also identified and eliminated, paring down the subcategories considerably.

The forced response portion of the survey highlighted several state of mind subcategories that became essential to building a theory on college preparedness. The survey also justified eliminating and combining several of the categories. As was the case with all other categories, a descriptive statistical method was employed to analyze the survey results relative to the state of mind category. The results can be seen below in Table 4.11. Strong work ethic (6.2558 out of 7) and being driven (6.1860 out of 7) emerged as subcategories of interest, whereas being optimistic, being future minded, and motivating without reward were given lower rankings.
Table 4.11: Category IV: State of Mind: Descriptive Statistics for Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Mean Ranking (N=43)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Strong Work Ethic</td>
<td>6.2558</td>
<td>1.0022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Being Driven</td>
<td>6.1860</td>
<td>1.1803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Being Optimistic</td>
<td>5.7906</td>
<td>1.2451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Being Future Minded</td>
<td>5.3023</td>
<td>1.4231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Motivating Without Reward</td>
<td>5.0697</td>
<td>1.6094</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously stated, adaptability remained its own category for the survey, though it was determined to have similar qualities to that of state of mind. The survey results and descriptive statistics for it are provided in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Descriptive Statistics for Adaptability Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Mean Ranking (N=43)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Adapting to New Situations</td>
<td>6.2325</td>
<td>.9216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Being Flexible</td>
<td>5.7674</td>
<td>1.0654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Willing to Try New Things</td>
<td>5.6976</td>
<td>1.4231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the alternative form of data analysis, aggregated point value totals for the survey were also considered during the data analysis phase. Table 4.13 provides those point totals.
The above results corroborate those provided by the descriptive statistical method - strong work ethic and being driven received high point assessments in the state of mind category, while adapting to new situations received the highest aggregated point value in the adaptability category. For those reasons (using and comparing both methods of survey analysis), the decision was made to pare down the number of subcategories and also fold adaptability into the state of mind category.

This paring down of the subcategories was also supported by comments from the open response portion of the survey. One survey respondent put it simply, “You need to have the drive to succeed in school” while another student lamented their lack of drive when saying, “Fortunately I had friends, my family and my future goals to push me.” Perseverance was also used as a synonym for drive, as one student remarked, “Perseverance includes the ability to push through difficult academics, living situations, and life events.”

Students also consistently wrote about the importance of a strong work ethic when it comes to being prepared for college. Their responses were brief and to the point. One student

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Table 4.13: Category IV: State of Mind: Rankings of Subcategories Using Point Value Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Point Value (N=43)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Work Ethic</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to New Situations</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Driven</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Optimistic</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Flexible</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing To Try New Things</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Future-Minded</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation Without Rewards</td>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
wrote, “I think a solid foundational work ethic in the academic setting must be established.”

Similarly, another wrote, “To be prepared for college means having the work ethic to complete
the necessary stresses of college courses in a healthy way.”

Several students also wrote about the necessity of adaptability in being prepared for
college. As one survey respondent commented, “I was rarely challenged with my high school
coursework and so I struggled my first semester when trying to adapt to harder courses,
workloads, and activities” and yet another simply wrote “adaptability” in response to the
question, “What does it take to be prepared for college?”

One additional state of mind subcategory also emerged from the survey that had not
emerged during the focus group analysis. In the open response portion of the survey, many
students referenced analysis, though it was unclear if those respondents intended it to be read as
a state of mind or an academic skill. For example, one student wrote in the survey, “You need to
be able to critically analyze what you read and hear” while another said that “The ability to
analyze and synthesize information” was important for college preparedness. Yet another student
extolled the importance of analysis when saying, “Above anything else, students need to know
how to break down material in an understandable way.” But is this a skill or a state of mind? The
intensive interviews were helpful in clarifying this point.

The six students who participated in the interviews described it as both a state of mind
and a skill, with some leaning more towards one than the other. This can be observed in the
transcripts for the intensive interviews, available in Appendices F-K. However, one particular
comment made by Edward (pseudonym) during the intensive interview re-focused the analysis
and provided clarity for the rest of the interview data. When asked if analysis was a state of
mind or an academic skill, he stated:
You can say it's a state of mind by how you're approaching something. But also, you can learn in classes how to be better at it. So I think you need to have a little bit where you should have the state of mind to do it, but I also think classes can make it into an academic skill, where it can either give you the tools or help refine your analytical mindset over time.

Therefore, upon further probing and consideration, the decision was made to add analysis as a subcategory of state of mind. As Edward noted, analysis is a state of mind that is then manifest in particular courses via a particular skill set (thus, it begins as a state of mind).

The data analysis for Category IV yielded four subcategories. In keeping with the already mentioned standards for grounded theory data analysis, those subcategories were assigned properties that elaborated upon their qualities and attributes, per the data. These properties are listed in Table 4.14 and represent the complete data as it relates to Category IV.

Table 4.14: Category IV: State of Mind: Associated Properties for Final Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Drive</td>
<td>A1. Not being distracted</td>
<td>“It takes a lot of drive. There are always distractions to pull you away from your schoolwork. Since parents aren't there to make sure you're staying on track, it is now the student's job.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Drive</td>
<td>A2. Perseverance</td>
<td>“It takes the ability to push through difficult academics, living situations, and life events - perseverance.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| B. Strong Work Ethic      | B1. Working hard even when it is difficult | “A student will not have any success if they are not prepared to put in the work to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Strong Work Ethic</td>
<td>B2. Self-motivation without rewards</td>
<td>“Another skill that is not as easy to teach is simply being motivated without the end in sight.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Analytical</td>
<td>C1. Breakdown and/or connect information</td>
<td>“Students need to know how to break down material in an understandable way; this makes it easier to comprehend the information to such an extent that the student could easily explain it to someone else.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Adaptability</td>
<td>D1. Adapting to new paradigms with new rules, definitions and expectations</td>
<td>“I struggled my first semester when trying to adapt to harder courses, workloads, and activities.” (Survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Disregarded Categories and Subcategories**

While four categories and twelve subcategories were determined to be part of the final theory (yet to be discussed), there were multiple categories and subcategories that were disregarded during the data analysis process. This occurred for various reasons.

First, categories and subcategories were disregarded after the survey results (both forced and open responses) failed to prove their capacity for representing anything substantive relative to the research question. As a whole, the category entitled social preparedness (and its three subcategories) had low mean rankings and high standard deviations on the survey. In fact, they represented some of the lowest ranked responses across the survey. The same was true for the category labeled communication - save its seeking help subcategory, which was folded into Category III: Self-Discovery. Several subcategories were also disregarded for the same reason.
Two of them from within the state of mind category were removed after being assigned low mean rankings.

Additionally, subcategories were disregarded when they could be absorbed, because of similarity, by more established subcategories. For example, the subcategory entitled “Being Flexible” was absorbed by “Adapting to New Situations” when it was determined that students were using them as synonyms (but more frequently using adaptability as the preferred term). All told, the categories were reduced from an initial 12 to a final 4, while the subcategories were cut in half from an initial 24 to a final 12.

Concepts: Theoretical and Central

As previously discussed, the concept diagram that was created (as represented in Figure 4.2 on p. 91) also integrated the raising of the categories into two distinct theoretical concepts. On determining the nature of these theoretical concepts, Charmaz (2006) is quite clear:

Consistent with grounded theory logic, you raise the categories that render the data most effectively...These categories contain crucial properties that make data meaningful and carry the analysis forward. We choose to raise certain categories to concepts because of their theoretical reach, incisiveness, generic power, and relation to other categories...theoretical concepts serve as interpretive frames and offer an abstract understanding of relationships. (Pp. 139-140).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) go further in explaining the relationship between categories and concepts within grounded theory by noting, “If theory building is indeed the goal of a research project, then findings should be presented as a set of interrelated concepts, not just a listing of themes” (p. 145). What follows is an exploration of the two theoretical concepts that were
derived from the final four categories and their corresponding subcategories. Per Strauss and Corbin (1998), they are presented as interrelated concepts:

Because they are interpreted abstractions and not the descriptive details of each case…[they] are ‘constructed’ out of data by the analyst. By ‘constructed,’ [it is meant] that an analyst reduces data from many cases into concepts and sets of relational statements that can be used to explain, in a general sense, what is going on.” (p. 145)

Theoretical Concept I.

The following statement comprises the first theoretical concept: When considering college preparedness, knowing oneself supersedes knowing content. This theoretical concept sources the self-management and self-discovery categories and their corresponding subcategories. It draws attention, also, to the fact that the research did not show a belief among college students that content played a significant role in college preparedness.

Theoretical Concept II.

The following statement comprises the second theoretical concept: When considering college preparedness, a student’s state of mind is just as critical as their academic skills. This theoretical concept sources the academic skills and state of mind categories and their corresponding subcategories. Specifically, it draws attention to the way that skills and mindset are both necessary for college preparedness, insofar as one may sometimes lead to the other.

Central Concept.

In addition to forming two theoretical concepts, one central concept (Charmaz, 2006) was also integrated into the diagram. Also known as a “central category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 147), it was chosen for “its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). With that said, the central concept is as follows:
Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

As is the case with the theoretical concepts outlined earlier, this central concept is also an interpreted abstraction of the data. Finally, at the end of Chapter 3, the six criteria for determining a central concept were outlined. Table 4.15 provides the justification necessary validating this central concept.

Table 4.15: Evidence Justifying that the Central Concept Meets All Necessary Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All other categories can be related to it.</td>
<td>All four categories, and both of the theoretical concepts, are represented and blended together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It appears often in the data.</td>
<td>The data is saturated with references to the psychological nature of college preparedness (State of Mind, Self-Management &amp; Self-Discovery) while still representing the necessity of academic skills like reading, writing, and personal study skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explanation is logical and consistent.</td>
<td>All categories and both of the theoretical concepts are seamlessly integrated; the data led to its creation and was not manufactured or manipulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It can lead to more general theory development</td>
<td>The central concept begs for additional research, particularly related to the non-academic nature of college preparedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It can grow in depth and explanatory power.</td>
<td>See explanation for #4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It holds despite variation/contradiction/alternatives</td>
<td>The theory is validated by current literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Substantive Theory

What does it mean to theorize within a case study using grounded theory data analysis methods? Charmaz (2006) puts it simply when saying, “Theorizing means stopping, pondering, and rethinking anew” (p. 135). Strauss and Corbin (1998) elaborate a bit more by explaining that “theorizing is work that entails not only conceiving or intuiting ideas (concepts) but also formulating them into a logical, semantic, and explanatory scheme” (p. 21). The data collection and analysis processes undertaken in this study have rendered the emerging categories and concepts into a schema that accurately and truthfully explain its findings.

The theory that has emerged is substantive in nature, meaning that it is a “theoretical interpretation or explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area, such as family relationships, formal organizations, or education” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189). The theory emerging from the research at hand qualifies as substantive on several levels: it is a case study and it focuses specifically on college education.

As previously mentioned, an integral part of theorizing within a grounded theory case study is combing all categories and concepts “into a logical, semantic, explanatory scheme.” To that end, a review of the data analysis process is worthwhile. First, the categories were systematically created and then methodically subdivided into subcategories and properties. The categories were then grouped into two theoretical concepts, based on the interrelatedness of specific subcategories and properties. In forming a central concept, the two theoretical concepts were merged; the relationship between all data analysis elements were justified by the six criteria for determining a central concept (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, the central concept was reviewed to determine its appropriateness as a substantive theory.
Additionally, the central category was reviewed for gaps in data. One potential gap was identified by way of the literature review. Much of the literature on college preparedness identified environmental and demographic (primarily socioeconomic) factors contributing to college preparedness. This did not, however, come up in any of the data collection points; no one in the focus group or survey related college preparedness to such factors. As a result, new information was pursued during the intensive interviews for the purpose of addressing the potential gap in data. The six intensive interview participants were each asked the following question:

No one, in the focus group or the survey, identified socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. I am curious if this is unique to graduates from your school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you have encountered at school as well?

Their responses aided in the conclusion that for the case study at hand, and the substantive theory being developed, no gap in the data exists. Students in the intensive interviews concluded that the lack of references to environmental and demographic contributors to college preparedness in the focus group and survey data is accurate, but also unique to this case study (see Appendices F-K). This does not render the theory inaccurate, but simply representative of the beliefs, opinions and experiences of the researched population within the case study.

In the same way, several categories and subcategories were also left out of the final theory. From the initial coding process to the concept diagramming, many categories and subcategories were combined with others or eliminated. The categories were reduced from an initial 12 to a final 4, while the subcategories were cut in half from an initial 24 to a final 12 twelve. Simply put, these categories and subcategories were left out of the final theory because the researched population did not place as much emphasis on them. And while they are
important (and worthy of further research), their absence makes for a more substantive and unified theory, which is this: Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

**Summary**

In the end, the following quote from Charmaz (2006) is quite fitting as a description of the research and data analysis process:

Grounded theory methods and theorizing [are] *social actions* that researchers construct in concert with others in particular places and times. In addition to our research participants, colleagues, teachers, students, institutional committees and untold others may live in our minds and influence how we conduct our studies long after our immediate contact with them. We interact with and create theories about it. But we do not exist in a social vacuum.

The research that took place in this case study, as well as all subsequent theorizing, was most certainly a social action. The data collection began and ended by placing particular students and a particular institution at the center of the research study. Phenomena from interview transcripts, survey data and intensive interviews was meticulously coded, compared, examined and reexamined using grounded theory methods. This process led to significant, and even redundant, triangulation of the data. This process also resulted in the formation of two theoretical concepts and one central category. What was left was the following substantive theory, which has the researched population of students at its heart: Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature. This,
therefore, is the answer to the research question, “How do college students describe college preparedness?”

It is pertinent, however, to add that such theorizing is not just a social action - it also has social consequences. In Chapter 5, the implications of the research findings are explored. Additionally, the literature on college preparedness and its four themes are revisited and connected to the research findings where possible. Finally, limitations of the research are explored, and possible topics for future study are suggested.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion and Conclusion

This case study explored the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” The concluding chapter explores the implications of the findings. It also connects the substantive theory developed through the research with the contemporary literature on college preparedness. Additionally, limitations of the research are explored and possible topics for future study are suggested.

The question at the heart of the research (“How do college students define college preparedness?”) was investigated within the qualitative paradigm, utilizing grounded theory methodology as the chosen data collection and analysis vehicle. The case study was conducted with high school graduates-turned-college-students (2011-2014), all of whom hailed from the same private high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In building a theory around the research question, focus groups, surveys, and intensive interviews were employed. The research concluded with the following substantive theory: Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

Determined to be a case study within a bounded education system, this theory is substantive in nature and applied specifically to the researched population. It is possible that the theory may be appropriately applied in other settings with institutional and demographic similarities.

Connections to the Literature

As described in Chapter 2, the literature on college preparedness can be divided into four distinct themes, which are centered on this question: In order to ensure that students are ready for
the rigors of college work, what interventions are presently deemed necessary and effective?

The four themes are skills and disciplines, content proficiency, self-efficacy and motivation, and environmental and demographic factors. In the sections that follow, each of them is examined for connections to the findings of the case study at hand. Figure 5.1 below provides an overview of the four literature themes.

Figure 5.1 Four Themes of College Preparedness Present in the Literature

Skills and disciplines.

Literature on the skills and disciplines needed for college preparedness is ample (and is reviewed in depth in Chapter 2). Relative to the former, Jansen and van der Meer (2012) break-down college readiness into six categories, all of them skills: time management, written communication, group work, information processing, verbal communication and use of technology. Similarly, Trilling and Fadel (2009) recognize general skills as essential to both academic and workforce preparedness. These include flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-
direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity, accountability, leadership and responsibility (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Wagner (2008) also acknowledges the interrelatedness between college competency and general behaviors, which he calls “survival skills.” In compiling the research for his text, Wagner consulted the work of other researchers and leaders within the business and education community. He engaged in extensive classroom observations as well. The skills to which Wagner refers in his research are as follows: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, adaptability, initiative, effective communication, accessing and analyzing information and finally, curiosity and imagination.

Relative to disciplines, Gardner (2008) writes that the demands of the 21st century workplace, and thus the requirements of 21st century education, “will demand capacities that until now have been mere options” (p. 2). For Gardner, these capacities – or disciplines – come by way of five new mindsets: the disciplined mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind, the ethical mind, and the synthesizing mind. Gardner believes that these disciplines are of the utmost important for workplace and college preparedness.

In support of this claim, Pink (2006) emphasizes the importance placed on what he calls R-Directed (or right-brain directed) thinking, at the center of which are the disciplines of creativity and empathy. Otherwise stated, Pink champions a shift toward R-Directed skills in 21st century schools and considers them a benchmark for general future-preparedness.

The findings of this case study – centered on the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?” – also determined skills and disciplines to be integral to the substantive theory. Consistent with the work of Trilling and Fadel (2009) and Wagner (2008), the case study results determined that adaptability is indeed a hallmark of college
preparedness. Trilling and Fadel’s conclusions regarding self-direction were also similar to the self-management category in the case study. One survey respondent even used the same phrase when saying, “College preparedness requires…the ability to self-direct learning.”

Additionally, two of the six categories from the research presented by Jansen and van der Meer (2012) proved to be prominent in the case study. These included time management and written communication. However, time management was categorized differently in the case study (as a function of self-management).

Absent from the case study findings were the conclusions of Gardner (2008). The participants in the study made no reference to anything like Gardner’s Five Minds, save one mention about synthesis. In the survey, a single respondent remarked that college preparedness requires, “The ability to analyze and synthesize information whether it be in the form of data, writing, or formal arguments,” though they did not elaborate on what it meant to synthesize. Also absent were the suggestions made by Pink (2006) and Wagner (2008) that creativity and imagination are driving forces and important disciplines. Across all data collection points (focus group, survey and intensive interviews), neither creativity nor imagination were mentioned or alluded to.

One possible explanation for the absence of this data is the fact that Gardner and Pink would both be considered educational philosophers rather than practitioners. They function in a realm of philosophical prediction rather than one of pragmatism and practice. That is not to say that their observations are invalid, but instead that prediction is the art of determining what may become, not what is presently in practice.
Content proficiency.

As a measurement of college preparedness, content proficiency marks the case study’s most significant point of departure from the literature. In fact, content proficiency - referred to as “content knowledge” or “basic content knowledge” throughout the case study - was intentionally discarded from the substantive theory after both the survey results and the intensive interviews justified its removal. This is different from the conclusions of some of the literature on college preparedness.

To begin, it is important to note that the literature on content proficiency is not as prolific or robust as that pertaining to skills and disciplines. This truth was also cited in the literature review. Nonetheless, Adelman (1999) found that the content of a student’s high school curriculum exhibits one of the strongest influences on successful college completion - the more rigorous and robust the content, the more likely a student is to complete college.

The Educational Testing Service recently concluded that large numbers of the nation’s student population do not possess the reading, writing and math content proficiency necessary to be successful in postsecondary education (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto & Sum, 2007). Similarly, Barnes and Slate (2014) found that in total, only 30.74% of all graduating high school students are college ready in math and English (2014, p. 71). This leaves roughly 70% of the students unprepared for the content-specific rigors of the postsecondary academic world.

One response, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), was launched with the desire of ensuring that all students are graduating high school prepared for college. To that end, the CCSSI seeks to spell out the content that students are expected to know in order to be college and career ready. Similarly, Conley (2005) lays out the “key principles and concepts of the disciplines...and key content knowledge that students must possess” (p. 169) in what he calls
the complete Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) standards. In subsequent work, Conley (2010) states that academic skills and strategies must be coupled with content in order to ensure college readiness. He writes, “successful academic preparation for college is grounded in two companion dimensions: key cognitive strategies and key content knowledge. (Conley, 2010, p. 35).

This literature on content proficiency contrasts with the findings of the case study. Basic content knowledge, as a subcategory of academic skills, received the lowest ranking (4.7906 of 7) of all measured subcategories on the forced response portion of the survey (refer to Appendix L). This was corroborated by an alternative form of survey analysis (described in Chapter 4 as the Point Value Method), wherein content knowledge was assigned the lowest aggregated point value by survey respondents, 206 (refer to Appendix M).

Intensive interview participants were also asked about basic content knowledge and its importance for college preparedness. As documented in Chapter 4, Diana (pseudonym) spoke directly about its unimportance:

General knowledge about things that you learn in high school is, unless you sort of get into what you're doing, it's pretty...a lot of it's pretty useless, I would say. So I kind of agree with the statement that, you know, basic content knowledge, it's not enough to really carry you through anything. So it kind of all gets replaced, I would say.

Other respondents echoed this opinion. Andrew (pseudonym) noted that colleges are able to help students themselves adjust to varying degrees of prior content knowledge:

But I don't think [basic content knowledge] necessarily has anything to do with your college preparedness, because I was just as prepared for my...science class than somebody who was taking a lower class. I think they have so many levels in a lot of
colleges that [basic content knowledge] doesn't really matter that much, because a lot of the time you get put into whatever is best for you.

The survey and intensive interviews provided enough justification for removing basic content knowledge from the subcategories list. As a result, basic content knowledge was also left out of the substantive theory.

One possible explanation for the disagreement between the literature and the case study is the notion that the researched population of students simply took the quality of their education for granted or were simply not cognizant of the effect that their prior educational experience had on their level of college preparedness. Given, however, the thoughtful nature of their responses demonstrated throughout the research process, such a theory is not plausible. The research at hand simply stands in opposition to this facet of the literature.

**Self-efficacy.**

Self-efficacy is generally defined as one’s belief that he or she is capable of accomplishing a goal - a belief that, in the academic world, most certainly can affect a student’s work and their college preparation (Bandura, 1997). Beyond this, self-efficacy is used as a predictor of classroom engagement in high school students (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003). Specifically, the higher one’s self-confidence and self-motivation, the more likely one is to both engage and succeed in school (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke & Hall, 2003). Bandura (1997) found that self-efficacy specifically affects effort and achievement. Bouffard-Bouchard (1991) found that regardless of cognitive ability and age, self-efficacy has an influence on such academic tasks as self-regulation, work-time monitoring, persistence and even rejecting or accepting academic hypotheses and ideas. This led Bouffard-Bouchard to conclude that self-
efficacy is indeed one form of academic competence, in the same way that academic skills represent a necessary element of college preparedness.

Relative to the research question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”, there appears to be a connection between the case study and the literature on self-efficacy, though the relationship between the two is not fully clear.

This connection was first documented in the following researcher memo, penned early in the research process after the focus group transcripts were coded:

Self-discovery is very much the precursor to self-efficacy. One learns how to handle stress, learns their own limitations and gets to know oneself via the trials and travails (both social and academic) of college. This, in turn develops self-efficacy.

The focus group participants, via the Metaplan process, used the word “confidence” to describe a form of self-discovery that also included managing stress and knowing one’s limits. Survey respondents continued to allude to the importance of confidence as an element of self-discovery, with one student stating that in order to be prepared for college, students need “enough self-efficacy to be able to do the work you need to do, even when you might not want to.” Another student response from the survey even lamented their lack of self-efficacy:

I am assuming this just speaks to my personal character - but as I saw myself struggling to understand concepts that others knew, or as I saw Cs as exam grades it was extremely easy to want to give up and not believe I could accomplish my goals.

As noted earlier, the relationship between self-discovery and self-efficacy is not fully evident. Consequently, future research is suggested to further explore the connection, and consequences, of these two categories of college preparedness.
Environmental and demographic factors.

Arnold, Lu and Armstrong (2012) note that “individuals’ interactions with their surrounding environments [can] indirectly instigate the development of college readiness” (p. 19). However, “individuals vary in their characteristic ways of selecting, experiencing and instigating responses from their environments” (Arnold, Lu & Armstrong, 2012, p. 19), which means that environmental factors do not wholly determine a student’s college readiness, but rather play a part (along with the other areas of exploration in this literature review – academic skills, content proficiency and self-efficacy).

Similarly, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) contend that human development is “a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person [and] the environment” (p. 798). The same theory can be applied to academic development. One’s academic preparation, and therefore college preparedness, can be considered a function of both the characteristics of the student, as well as their surrounding environment. This surrounding environment includes family, prior education, socioeconomic circumstances and general home-life.

Discussion of environmental and demographic variables affecting college preparedness was noticeably absent from student responses. Not a single student in the focus group discussed family, home-life, socioeconomic status or other similar factors. 1 student out of the 43 survey respondents alluded to the support of family. This begged a very important question: Are students conscious enough of their circumstances to identify them? In seeking an answer, environmental and demographic factors became a topic of further exploration for the theoretical sampling phase (intensive interviews).

During the intensive interviews, students were pointedly asked if they believed environmental and demographic factors played a role in college preparedness. In response,
Reuben (pseudonym) said, “I think it's kind of hard for someone to identify socioeconomic factors as contributing to their own success because they haven't really been exposed to other socioeconomic situations.” Christine (pseudonym) also agreed that environmental and demographic factors are often unrecognized:

I think we often take for granted the fact that our environmental factors did help us prepare for college. We probably had some of the best environmental factors that prepared us for college. And I think since not many of us really had to have anything that, like, made us struggle in environmental factors…those don't really come to mind when we think of how it prepared us for college.

That is not to say that these students disregard the effect that environment and demography have on college preparedness. On the contrary, some of them were quite aware of the fact that environmental and demographic factors do indeed play a role in the college preparedness of some students.

For example, Emma (pseudonym) made a point of saying in the intensive interview that some students “had a lot of other things going on in their lives beyond just school work and academics. And I think that that affected them more than we realize. I think that it is something that affects a lot of people.” Several other intensive interview participants articulated similar sentiments (see Appendixes F-K).

So what does that say about the alignment of the case study with the literature? Keeping in mind the research question – “How do college students define college preparedness?” – it is important to be reminded that case studies, as a research design, concern themselves primarily with becoming deeply and uniquely familiar with the experiences of a specific organization,
individual or group. For this reason, the research is not generalizable – it is specific to this case, this bounded set.

It is, therefore, appropriate to say that the case study does not contradict the literature on environmental and demographic factors affecting college preparedness. As noted previously, environmental factors do not wholly determine a student’s college readiness, but can play a part. For the student population in the case study, they did not feel that such factors played a role in their college preparedness. This does not invalidate the literature, in the same way that the literature does not invalidate the case study.

**Implications of the Findings**

This research and its findings are centered on the opinions and experiences of many current college students. Though they all graduated from the same independent high school in Minnesota, they represent a population of students attending 165 different colleges and universities across the nation. All of the students who participated in the research were willing, insightful, thoughtful and engaged on the topic of college preparedness.

While the substantive theory that emerged from the case study is not generalizable across all populations, the findings may still be meaningful for students and schools with similar demographic profiles. The substantive theory should also be particularly meaningful for the private Minneapolis, Minnesota high school from which all of the research participants hailed. It is therefore the intention of the researcher to formally communicate the findings with school administration, faculty and staff, as well as present the data at regional independent school conferences.

The implications of the findings are best viewed through the lens of the two theoretical concepts that led to the theory itself. Theoretical Concept I states, “When considering college
preparedness, knowing oneself supersedes knowing content.” The consequences of this are significant, in that such a belief demands revisiting the very precepts of secondary education. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, there are many answers to the question, “What is the purpose of American education?” Some of them (particularly those derived from the notion that the most useful things to study are those that will have pragmatic application for employment) are content driven, and intentionally neglect the individual mind in favor of the collective, economic good that such an educational focus cultivates. Yet, as written about in Chapter 1, there is another belief about the purpose of education - that which puts the student and their sense of self at the very center. This approach is called Critical Pedagogy, and was first championed by Paulo Freire:

Freire advocated the importance of acknowledging students’ ability to think critically about their educational situation, and allowing them to be a critical component of their own educational process. This thinking allows students to bring their own insight and experience to the educational process. They can recognize connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. (Purmensky, 2009, p. 108).

It is this approach to education that the first theoretical concept champions - one wherein a content focused curriculum takes a back seat to the student himself. The research supports such an approach to college preparedness.

Theoretical Concept II states, “When considering college preparedness, a student’s state of mind is just as critical as their academic skills.” In the case study, academic skills included reading, writing and personal study skills. The research was clear: such things are important for
college preparedness. The research was clear that elements of state of mind such as drive, adaptability, strong work ethic and analysis are also quite critical.

It is important to note that it was not the intention of the case study to determine what creates such things as drive, adaptability and a strong work ethic in students, but rather to simply identify them as integral to a theory on college preparedness. With this acknowledged, the data supports an approach to college preparedness that emphasizes and honors a student’s state of mind - their drive and work ethic, for example - just as much as a student’s reading, writing and studying capabilities. This is reflected in the research of Dr. Angela Duckworth, who notes that “educators and parents must recognize that character is at least as important as intellect” (as cited in Tough, 2012, p. 61). Duckworth uses the term “grit” to describe character traits like hard work and drive, and has conducted numerous studies verifying the fact that such things are just as important for college preparedness as intelligence - the type manifested in reading and writing scores, for example (Tough, 2012). In fact, in one study, Duckworth found that “high grit scores allowed students who had entered college with relatively low college-board scores to nonetheless achieve high GPAs” (Tough, 2012, p. 75). According to Duckworth’s research, a student’s state of mind is truly an important, even predictive facet of college preparedness.

One particular school, KIPP Infinity in New York City, has even gone so far as to issue character report cards alongside traditional academic report cards as a way of recognizing this truth. This case study offers further support and justification for recognizing that character traits such as drive, adaptability, analysis and work ethic are of the utmost importance in education, and should be treated accordingly.
Limitations of the Study

Though it has already been highlighted, one significant limitation of the study (and therefore, its findings) is the scope of the population that was sampled. While proper research and sampling methods were employed, the sample size limits the extent to which the study and its results can be generalized. Beyond that point, the fact that all the students who were interviewed and surveyed came from the same high school further underscores this limitation.

Gaps in the data.

Considering the information in the literature review, it is appropriate to draw attention to one specific gap in the data - namely the absence of exploration on the topic of environmental and demographic factors affecting college preparedness. While the goal of this case study (using grounded theory methods and analysis techniques) was to allow a theory on college preparedness to emerge from the data itself, the fact that not a single student discussed or wrote about environmental and demographic factors until prompted in the intensive interviews could be considered a gap. The depth and breadth of the literature on this topic makes this gap in the data too significant to ignore.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the findings of this case study, it seems wise to inquire further about two things. First, the subjectivity surrounding personal study skills and the manner in which they lead to college preparedness is an area of much-needed exploration. The literature on this topic is thin, with Conley (2005), Conley (2010), Trilling and Fadel (2009) and Wagner (2008) among the only individuals willing to dive into its murky waters. It is critical to determine if study skills are truly as much of a personal preference as students describe, or if particular skills and strategies have an objectively determined higher rate of return.
Second, it would be of value to further pursue data on the topic of content proficiency, since it marked the case study’s most significant disagreement with the literature. Content proficiency - referred to as “content knowledge” or “basic content knowledge” throughout the case study - was intentionally discarded from the substantive theory after the survey and intensive interviews. Yet this conclusion differs from that of some of the literature on college preparedness. What accounts for this discrepancy? Given the fact that much of the literature on this topic is coming from stakeholders who stand to gain from the sale of materials designed to aid in enhancing content proficiency for incoming college students, it would be interesting to expand the research on this topic.

**Concluding Thoughts (One Final Researcher Memo)**

The first paragraph of this manuscript began with several questions, each of which has inherent value. Collectively, however, those questions became the impetus for the entirety of this research. In asking, “How do college students define college preparedness?”, I was not just seeking to build a theory that would contribute to contemporary topical literature. I was also seeking an answer for myself as an educator. I wanted to know more about the ways in which I am preparing students for life beyond my classroom. What knowledge I am providing that will be valuable in future contexts? What, if any, are the transcendent skills that I am cultivating in my students? And I now have some answers.

Ironically, what I learned was that the most important thing I am providing for my students is not a set of academic skills. Rather, the most important thing that I am providing is context - a place and time to cultivate and explore the psychological tools they will need to be prepared for college. To be clear, reading, writing and personal study skills are most certainly valuable. The data reflects this. But as the substantive theory concludes, these things account
for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness. The majority (qualities such as self-management, self-discovery and state of mind) are not necessarily elements of college preparedness that are often initiated by a teacher in the same way that the development of writing skills can be. Elements such as a strong work ethic, discovering personal limits and maintaining balance typically have their origins outside of the classroom. But that doesn’t mean that schools can’t start to aid in the development of these qualities.

So how will I use the results of this research? What does all of this mean for me as a teacher? It means that I won’t stop being passionate about the quality of my students’ writing. It means that I won’t stop modeling deep, analytical reading strategies in my classroom. At the same time, it also means that I will take more time to help my students understand themselves as students - assessing their state of mind, talking about managing time, and perhaps facilitating some self-discovery along the way. Because those are all important answers to the question, “How do college students define college preparedness?”
References


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT (FOCUS GROUP/INTENSIVE INTERVIEW)
March 28, 2015

My name is Matt Ridenour. I am currently a doctoral student at Hamline University and I would like you to participate in my doctoral research. To complete my dissertation, I am studying how college students define college preparedness. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to college preparedness. Nonetheless, research and writing are dynamic activities that may shift focus as they occur.

Your participation in my study will involve two components. The first, attending a focus group interview lasting approximately 90 minutes, will take place with five to nine other participants. The second, a follow-up interview, will be conducted one-on-one with the researcher on a date of your choosing. It, too, will last approximately 90 minutes. Insofar as it can be difficult to coordinate multiple schedules, the dates for the aforementioned research are yet to be determined. The researcher will work with you individually to establish the most convenient date and time.

Participation in this study will require that you be open and honest about your experiences and opinions regarding college preparedness. While there is minimal risk to participants in this study, it is possible that describing your experiences and opinions could be stressful. If you experience undue stress, you can stop at any time, without consequence. As a benefit, you may receive a summary of the research results upon request.

If you agree to participate in this research, your confidentiality will be strictly protected by the researcher throughout the study, as well as after its completion. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used to identify you in the written transcript of the interview and in the dissertation. If you do not give a preferred pseudonym, the researcher will automatically assign one. Again, participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without consequence. Should you decide to withdraw, the researcher will destroy all data pertaining to you (i.e., audio files, written transcripts and computer files). All interview audio files will be transcribed by the researcher himself and securely stored in a locked office. The audio files will be destroyed two years after the completion of the dissertation.

This research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will eventually be catalogued in Hamline’s Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. Additionally, the information obtained from this project may be published or used in other scholarly ways. Also, it is worth noting that this project has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the School of Education at Hamline University.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding any of the research or methods employed therein. I am sincerely grateful for your consideration in participating in this important research. Please return the attached form indicating your agreement to participate in this study. Additionally, the attached form indicates the confidentiality that will be utilized throughout the study and the publication or presentation of the results. If you need additional information please contact me.

Sincerely,
Matt Ridenour
3100 West River Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55406
(612) 729.8321 ext 1206
mridenour01@hamline.edu
Informed Consent Signature Sheet – Researcher Copy

I, [______________________________], agree to participate in doctoral research regarding how college students define college preparedness.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to college preparedness. My participation in this study will involve attending a focus group interview lasting approximately 90 minutes with five to nine other participants, as well as an individual interview between the researcher and myself, also lasting approximately 90 minutes. My confidentiality will be strictly protected via pseudonym. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. I understand that I will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study. Participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research process at any time and for any reason without consequence.

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<th>Participate in focus group</th>
<th>Participate in individual interview</th>
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Participant Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Informed Consent Signature Sheet – Participant Copy
(Please keep this form for your records.)

I, [______________________________], agree to participate in doctoral research regarding how college students define college preparedness.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to college preparedness. My participation in this study will involve attending a focus group interview lasting approximately 90 minutes with five to nine other participants, as well as an individual interview between the researcher and myself, also lasting approximately 90 minutes. My confidentiality will be strictly protected via pseudonym. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. I understand that I will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study. Participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research process at any time and for any reason without consequence.

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Participant Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________
My research focuses on one topic, “How do college students define college preparedness?” I am interested in your interpretation of what it means to be prepared for success at the college level. Insofar as you are presently a college student, I will ask you (during this interview) to please use your college experience as the context for all answers. We will be using a process called Metaplan for organizing our thoughts today. I, as the researcher and facilitator, will explain the process in detail. The 10 Metaplan steps (adapted from Schnelle & Stoltz, 1987) are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>A question is stated.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Participants write thoughts and feelings on note cards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Participants write clearly and neatly.</td>
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<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Write one idea per card.</td>
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<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Use 7 words or less if possible.</td>
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<td>Step 6</td>
<td>The moderator collects and reads note cards aloud and displays them on the wall.</td>
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<td>Step 7</td>
<td>The moderator, with participants’ help, organizes the note cards into clusters or categories of thoughts, feelings, and opinions.</td>
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<td>Step 8</td>
<td>Participants may continue writing their thoughts during the process.</td>
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<td>Step 9</td>
<td>The moderator and participants discuss their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through the clustering process.</td>
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<td>Step 10</td>
<td>Participants conclude the process by rating the categories according to how they feel about the importance of each category. They also rank their top categories according to perceived importance.</td>
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Figure 1.2 Metaplan steps

Here are the three questions we will be exploring using Metaplan:

1. What does it take to be prepared for college?

2. In what ways were you unprepared for college?

3. Relative to college preparedness, what advice would you give to a high school student?
APPENDIX C

BLANK SURVEY FORM (LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT INCLUDED)
College Preparedness Survey

1. My name is Matt Ridenour. I am currently a doctoral student at Hamline University and I would like you to participate in my doctoral research. To complete my dissertation, I am studying how college students define college preparedness. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to college preparedness. Nonetheless, research and writing are dynamic activities that may shift focus as they occur. Your email address was obtained via Minnehaha Academy’s alumni database, per the Organizational Consent Statement provided below. Your participation in this study will involve completing the 29 point, Likert-scale style electronic survey that follows. Completing the survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please complete the survey in one sitting. Participation in this study will require that you be open and honest about your experiences and opinions regarding college preparedness. While there is minimal risk to participants in this study, it is possible that describing your experiences and opinions could be stressful. If you experience undue stress, you can stop the survey at any time. As a benefit, you may receive a summary of the research results upon request. Your survey responses are anonymous and will be aggregated with all data from other survey respondents. Therefore, if you agree to participate in this research, your confidentiality will be strictly protected by the researcher throughout the study as well as after its completion. Again, participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without consequences. Incomplete surveys will be discarded and deleted. All survey results will be aggregated by the researcher himself and securely stored within a password-protected computer. This research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will eventually be catalogued in Hamline’s Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. Additionally, the information obtained from this project may be published or used in other scholarly ways. Also, it is worth noting that this project has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the School of Education at Hamline University. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding any of the research or methods employed therein. I am sincerely grateful for your consideration in participating in this important research. Please sign the attached form indicating your agreement to participate in this study. Additionally, the attached form indicates the confidentiality that will be utilized throughout the study and the publication or presentation of the results. If you need additional information please contact me.

Sincerely,
Matt Ridenour
3100 West River Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55406
(612) 729.8321 ext 1206
mridenour01@hamline.edu
2. **Do you consent?**  
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   - [ ] I provide consent
   - [ ] I do not provide consent  
     *Stop filling out this form.*

**Required Demographic Information**

3. **First Name** *

   .................................................................

4. **Last Name** *

   .................................................................

5. **Age** *

   .................................................................

6. **High School Graduation Year** *  
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   - [ ] 2011
   - [ ] 2012
   - [ ] 2013
   - [ ] 2014

7. **Current Year in College** *  
   *(Please use your status during the 2014/2015 academic year)*  
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   - [ ] Freshman
   - [ ] Sophomore
   - [ ] Junior
   - [ ] Senior

8. **Name of College Currently Attending** *

   .................................................................
9. Years at current college (round up) *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4

10. I would identify myself as *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - European American
   - African American
   - Asian American
   - American Indian
   - Other

11. Provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the following question:
    What does it take to be prepared for college? NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21). *

    ........................................................................................................
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12. Provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the following question:
    In what ways were you unprepared for college? *

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How important are each of the following when it comes to being prepared for college?

NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit
bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21).

13. **Reading skills** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important

14. **Writing skills** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important

15. **Personal study skills** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important

16. **Basic content knowledge**
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important

17. **Managing free time** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important

18. **Finding and maintaining balance** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Not Important  Very Important
19. **Being able to prioritize**  *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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20. **Being prepared for changing social circumstances**  *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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21. **Learning how to live with roommate(s)**  *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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22. **Not being socially sheltered**  *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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23. **Knowing how and when to self advocate**  *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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24. **Knowing how and when to seek help**  *
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25. **Making helpful connections with peers** *
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26. **Managing stress** *
   *Mark only one oval.*

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27. **Determining personal limits** *
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28. **Having confidence** *
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29. **Being driven** *
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30. **Motivating yourself without rewards** *
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31. **Having a strong work ethic** *
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32. **Being optimistic** *
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33. **Being future-minded** *
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34. **Being willing to try new things** *
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35. **Being flexible** *
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36. **Being able to adapt to new situations** *
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In your experience, how important are the following broad
themes when it comes to being prepared for college?

NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21).

37. **Academic Skills** *
   (This includes such things as basic content knowledge as well as reading, writing and personal study skills)
   *Mark only one oval.*

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very Important

38. **Self-Management** *
   (This includes such things as prioritization, managing free time and maintaining balance)
   *Mark only one oval.*

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very Important

39. **Social Preparedness** *
   (This includes such things as learning to live with roommates, not being sheltered and being prepared for changing social circumstances)
   *Mark only one oval.*

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very Important

40. **Communication** *
   (This includes such things self-advocacy, seeking help and making helpful connections with peers)
   *Mark only one oval.*

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very Important
41. **Self-Discovery** *
   (This includes such things as managing stress, determining personal limits and having confidence)
   *Mark only one oval.*

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42. **State of Mind** *
   (This includes being driven, motivating yourself without rewards, having a strong work ethic and being optimistic)
   *Mark only one oval.*

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43. **Adaptability** *
   (This includes being willing to try new things, being flexible and being able to adapt to new situations)
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As you already know, my research focuses on one topic, “How do college students define college preparedness?” I am interested in your interpretation of what it means to be prepared for success at the college level. Insofar as you are presently a college student, I will ask you (during this interview) to please use your high school and college experience as the context for all answers. During this interview, we may be discussing the survey data completed by a number of your peers. The names or demographic data of the respondents will not be provided. I may ask clarifying questions as the interview progresses.

I will begin recording now.

1. No one, in the focus group or the survey, identified socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. I am curious if this is unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you have encountered in college as well?

2. In my research, I’ve found that “basic content knowledge” (a subset of academic skills) is not considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think?

3. I’ve been encountering the word “analysis” in my research. Would you call analysis an academic skill or a state of mind?

4. Are study skills personal to the individual, or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?

5. In the end, what’s more essential for college preparedness 1) knowing your content or knowing yourself 2) Having practical study skills (like notetaking), or having a particular state of mind (like being driven)?
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT
Moderator: So question one is this, what does it take to be prepared for college? Using the notecards on your desk - and if you need more I have them - write as many responses as you deem fit, with one response on each notecard. You may keep writing as I collect the data of course.

Moderator: I am going to begin to collect them. The goal is to categorize them. So as you hear themes that begin to emerge, make mental note of them. And after they have all been read, we will start to categorize. Good writing ability. Not sheltered; have life experiences beyond your comfort. Able to express ideas through words and writing. Independent; not easily influenced - gets work done. An open mind. The optimism to learn from mistakes. Maturity to adapt to new situations or people. To understand that it is not the same as high school. Confidence. Going outside of your comfort zone. Being willing to try new things. Being able to adapt. Resiliency. Ability to write a well formed analytical and or persuasive essay. Strong study skills. A goal oriented mindset. Strong work ethic. A firm foundation of general topics like math and english. Time management skills. Baseline of knowledge to build off of in more advanced classes. Understanding of how to effectively complete and understand reading assignments. Balance course loads effectively. Ability to handle academic rigor of college classes. An understanding of what is required from you. A good work ethic. Desire to be there. Flexibility with vocation, major, social groups, etcetera. Self motivation. Must know when to ask for help in understanding material. Social skills and communication with professors. Time management skills. Knowing how to study and learn, not memorize. Laundry sorting and folding skills. Ability to deal with things outside comfort. Ability to make helpful connections with peers. Ability to see things in long term. Motivating yourself without rewards. Do I have everyone’s?

Moderator: Now our task is to categorize them. What did you hear, or what did you thematically see emerging from this data?

Zack: Things like self management, like motivation or time management skills. I forget how it was phrased but there were two that were basically written as the same thing.

Moderator: Self management. Is that an acceptable category to all of you, to begin.

Moderator: What else did you hear emerge?

Lee: State of mind kind of stuff - so like resiliency or an open mind.

Moderator: Ok. What else?
Reuben: I would say something about comfort zones.

Moderator: How would we describe that as a theme or category?

Zack: Outgoing.

Moderator: Is that what was meant?

Christine: Maybe openness?

Reuben: Adaptability.

Moderator: Openness? Adaptability? Is adaptability an acceptable theme for you all? Anything else?

Lee: There’s an academic group.

Diana: Yep.

Moderator: Academic in what way?

Lee: Skills.

Moderator: Academic skills.

Reuben: There’s something above drive...how you drive yourself.

Moderator: Drive. Agreed?

Diana: And there’s the social slash communication component, whether it be with professors or with peers.

Moderator: Are those separate or the same - social, communication?

Diana: I would separate them at this point.

Moderator: Okay. So the first category would be…

Diana: General communication skills.
Moderator: And the second would be…

Diana: Social, more balance…how to balance it with the other stuff that’s going on, as far as academic, everything that’s going on, state of mind.

Moderator: Is it social balance, or simply “balance”?

Diana: I would say simply balance.


Moderator: Where does good writing ability go?

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Where does Not sheltered; have life experiences beyond your comfort go?

Roy: State of mind.

Diana: Yeah.

Moderator: Do we agree? This goes under state of mind?

Moderator: Where does Able to express ideas through words and writing go?

Edward: Academic.

Several others: Communication.

Moderator: Academic or communication? What do we think - Able to express ideas through words and writing?

All: Communication.

Moderator: Communication. Is that agreed?

Several: Yeah.

Moderator: Independent; not easily influenced - gets work done.
Edward: Balance…possibly balancing academics and social life.

Moderator: Is that the implication of “balance”?

Andrew: I kind of thought…(trailing off)

Moderator: I’m sorry, say that again.

Andrew: Self manage is what I was feeling. When they say gets work done I think it goes hand in hand with balance but getting work done component is self management.

Moderator: Alright. Do we agree that it could be self-management?

Moderator: An open mind.

All in agreement: State of mind (laughter as they realize they agree).

Moderator: The optimism to learn from mistakes. Optimism? Go ahead.

Christine: I would say, maybe, adaptability.

Moderator: Is this a character trait of adaptability? A quality of adaptability?

Andrew: I would agree.

Multiple others: Yes.

Moderator: Yes?

Moderator: The maturity to adapt to new situations.

(Laughter as the moderator knowingly places this quality in the adaptability category)

Moderator: To understand that it is not the same as high school.

Edward: State of mind.

Diana: State of mind (with several others simultaneously).
Moderator: That was well agreed upon.

Moderator: Confidence.

Zack: State of mind.

Edward: State of mind.

Moderator: Do the rest of you agree?

Moderator: Going outside of your comfort zone.

Diana: Adaptability.

Zack: Adaptability.

Edward: Adaptability.


Moderator: Being willing to try new things.

Roy: Would we say that drive and state of mind are kind of similar? In a sense they are different, but do we have any that are going to fall into the category, specifically of just drive?

Moderator: Let’s finish, and see if we want to combine any categories, including drive and state of mind. Is that agreeable to you all? Great.

Moderator: Being willing to try new things.

Roy: Adaptability (no one objects).

Moderator: Being able to adapt (as it is placed in the adaptability category).

(Laughter)

Moderator: Resiliency.
Zack: Adaptability.

Lee: State of mind.

Moderator: I’ve heard adaptability and state of mind. Which way do we lean on resiliency?

Andrew: I think resiliency is responding to situations, so it would have to be more adaptability.

Moderator: Do you agree? Resiliency is responding to situations?

Christine: Yeah. When I wrote it I was thinking about responding to situations, like the way you respond to them.

Moderator: And so this goes under adaptability. Feel free to have as much discourse as you want if you disagree. Ability to write a well formed analytical or persuasive essay.

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Strong studying skills.

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Now, if I may, could I probe a bit deeper here. What study skills are we talking about when we talk about having ‘strong study skills’?

Diana: So that’s one I wrote, and I think it would kind of go on - I think someone, I don’t know if it was written down or said out loud about being able to read and understand the material and not just memorize and things like that, so it also goes - I was thinking about it going under time management, like learning how to not study the night before every time. And also learning the material instead of memorizing the material.

Moderator: Got it.

Christine: Could it also possibly be balance? I don’t know if there’s another one like that but I think studying has a lot to do with balance.

Moderator: Perhaps balance is an academic skill in certain contexts?
Christine: Yeah.

Moderator: Great. Yeah.

Andrew: I think that you could also maybe have an argument for drive, just as far as like the strongest study skill is that you want to be doing what you’re doing and so I think that subsets of that are kind of like the academic skills we’ve been talking about, like being able to communicate effectively and those sorts of things so I think drive - not being distracted by your surroundings while you’re working - might be a strong study skill.

Moderator: So I’m hearing people say that perhaps balance and drive - and we’ll see in a little while - are a subset of academic skills. We can revisit that at the end.

Lee: I was going to say it could be adaptability because each subject that you study you need to switch up how you study. But and also the coursework is different than in high school.

Moderator: Would it be accurate or inaccurate to say then that perhaps we’re talking about skills, not just academic skills, but if we used the heading ‘skills’ that many things would fall underneath that? But we’ve identified it as ‘academic skills’. So I want to go back to this question about studying - what other academic studying skills are a response to our question, “What does it take to be prepared for college?” So far I believe I’ve heard time management, I’ve heard critical and analytical reading and I’ve heard writing. Strong writing skills - in fact, that was mentioned several times. Are there any others?

Emma: I think part of it is knowing what works and what doesn’t work for you. So if you’re studying or learning something, if you know that you work better making flash cards or notes, know that you do that - versus someone else who can study a textbook and they learn best that way.

Moderator: So it’s personal, it’s individual?

Diana: Right.

Christine: Yeah.

Moderator: Anyone else on that question? Okay. Goal oriented mindset?

All: State of mind
Moderator: Strong work ethic.

All: Drive.

Moderator: This is our first drive component. Again, we’ll revisit if we want to combine any of these in a little while. A firm foundation of general topics like math and english.

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Academic skills (placing the card in that category). Time management skills.

Moderator: Balance? Is this our first balance reference?

All: Yes.

Moderator: Baseline of knowledge to build off of in more advanced classes.

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Academic skills (placing the card in that category). Understanding of how to effectively complete and understand reading assignments.

Some: Academic skills.

Moderator: Is this an academic skill? I’m seeing heads nodding.

Edward: Yes.

Zack: Yeah.

Moderating: Balancing course loads effectively.

All: Balance.

Moderator: Was this the intention of balance (holding up the card)?

Edward: Yes.

Moderator: Okay. An ability to handle academic rigor of college classes.
Zack: Maybe balance.

Moderator: Handle academic rigor of college classes...I’ve heard balance. Do we agree.

Christine: I think it could be a lot of things.

Moderator: It could be many things?

Andrew: Adaptability?

Moderator: Adaptability maybe? Where does it best fit?

Roy: It’s specifically talking about academic work, so I would say academic skills.

Moderator: You would say academic skills - ‘an ability to handle academic rigor of college classes’ is a reference to academic skills. I’ve heard balance, I’ve heard academic skills - others want to chime in?

Zack: I’d agree with academic skills.

Moderator: You would? Okay. Alright. The rest of you?

Moderator: An understanding of what is required from you.

Edward: State of mind, perhaps?

Lee: Or self-management.

Moderator: An understanding of what is required of you…(repeating the statement).

Roy: Maybe communication? If you can effectively communicate.

Moderator: So the emphasis here is on the understanding of it - the getting of the information in order to know what is required of you.

Zack: I would agree.

Christine: Yeah.

Moderator: Was that the intention of whomever wrote this?
Edward: Yes.

Moderator: It was. Okay. So that will go under communication (placing it there). Self motivation…

Edward: Drive…

Christine: Drive…

Diana: Self-management…

Moderator: Drive...or self management.

Christine: I would say motivation is drive.

Moderator: Motivation is drive...you would consider those synonyms?

Several: Yeah.

Moderator: Flexibility with vocation, major, social groups, etcetera.

All: Adaptability.

Moderator: Adaptability...is that what I’m hearing? Okay. Work ethic - good work ethic.

All: Drive.

Moderator: Drive. Okay. And we’ve seen this one up there already before. Desire to be there…

All: State of mind.

Moderator: State of mind...this desire is a state of mind. Okay (placing it there). Knowing how to study or learn, not memorize.

Edward: Academic skills.
Moderator: Is this a reference to what was said earlier about knowing one’s individual preferences and needs and what works for them in terms of studying. Is that what we mean by knowing how to study and learn, or is there a fixed way to study and learn?

Zack: I think it is preferential, but the idea was more about just knowing that you actually have to commit to something that you’re learning and not just like Oh I’m just going to learn this to pass the test.

Moderator: Got it.

Zack: Because this is going to carry forward into my career.

Moderator: In that sense is this an academic skill or this a state of mind? I’m just asking.

Zack: That’s a good question.

Diana: Can you repeat what it was?

Moderator: Knowing how to study and learn, and the reference here was that - if I could paraphrase here - seeing the big picture, the purpose of it all - is that right?

Zack: Yeah.

Moderator: So is that a state of mind or an academic skill.

Zack: I would say its more state of mind then.

Moderator: Okay.

Roy: I don’t know because wouldn’t the desire be the state of mind and the knowing how be the skill?

Moderator: Knowing is the skill?

Christine: Yeah, I think it would be academic skill.
Moderator: Okay, I’ll leave it here for now, and if we want to change it we can (pointing). Ok. Time management skills. Do they go under academic skills or do they go somewhere else?

Andrew: I’d go balance. Because I think its more than academic.

Diana: Right. Yep.

Moderator: Okay. So time management is not an academic skill, it’s a form of balance?

All: Yes.

Moderator: Social skills and communication with professors. In particular with professors...

Many in unison: Communication.

Moderator: Must know how to ask for help in understanding material.

Many in unison: Communication.

Moderator: Laundry sorting and folding skills.

Lee: Time management.

Zack: I think that’s more drive…(laughter)

Zack: Because I always wait until I’m on the last…

More laughter from all.

Moderator: Well stated. Ability to deal with things outside of comfort.

Many: Adaptability.

Moderator: Ability to make helpful connections with peers.

Many: Communication
Moderator: Making the connection is a form of communication..okay. Ability to see things in long terms.

Edward: State of mind.

Diana: State of mind.

Moderator: This is a state of mind?

Moderator: And then finally, motivating yourself without reward.

All: Drive.

Moderator: Drive. Alright. Every category presently has something underneath it. Self management, communication, drive, balance, academic skills, adaptability and state of mind. There was some conversation earlier about treating drive and balance as forms of academic skills and I want to revisit that now. Would it be appropriate in your mind to combine them and put them under academic skills as a subset or should they stand alone?

Andrew: Could you read the balance one’s briefly?

Moderator: Time management skills. Time management skills (again). Balancing course loads effectively.

Reuben: I’d say balance doesn’t necessarily have to be just in an academic sense.

Diana: Right.

Moderator: So we’re referring to a bigger picture of balance.

Lee: I think we could combine them, all three of them, if we took the academic out - I mean, we have drive in our jobs and other situations so…

Moderator: So is it valuable to leave this independent of the others - do you see value in treating them separately?

Reuben: I would say, like, in my opinion that drive kind of goes more under state of mind than it does under academic skills.
Moderator: Okay. Is it correct that as we talk about it that many of these could be placed under broader categorization?

Roy: Absolutely.

Lee: Yes.

Moderator: In that sense, then, is it your opinion - or would you rather - put them under each other or treat them individual in this way?

Roy: I think we should treat them individually because no matter what list we come up with its all referring to being prepared for college, so they’re all going to be interconnected.

Moderator: Okay. Alright. These are our categories, then, as you proposed. Is there anyone who would like to move anything in particular around or are you comfortable with the categories staying as they are.

Lee: I have a clarification…

Moderator: Please.

Lee: ..for the whole group. Why self management and balance are different categories?

Andrew: Yeah, that’s a good one.

Diana: Can we go over what’s under self-management?

Moderator: Yes. Independent. Not easily influenced and gets work done. And then laundry folding skills.

Zack: Again, laundry folding could be drive (laughing).

Lee: I just feel like to have balance, that is something that every individual needs to do.

Christine: I would maybe say that balance goes under self management.

Andrew: I would agree.

Moderator: I feel there’s agreement from the group on that. Is that correct?
Heads nod, verbalize agreement.

Moderator: So we treat this (balance) as a subform of self management.

Diana: Right.

Moderator: And all of these underneath them. Are there any other proposals for changing anything else? Alright. If there are not, then, I’m going to give each of these a number. State of mind is going to be category 1. Adaptability will be category 2. Self management, under which balance falls, will be category 3. Academic skills will be category 4. Communication will be category 5. And drive is category 6. Please make note of those because now you’re going to rate each category and its importance to you and your experience as a college student. Please put your name on this - you may use your pseudonym or real name and I will make the adjustment, if you don’t remember the pseudonym you chose. And for question one only, for each category, write it in - State of mind is going to be category 1. Adaptability will be category 2. Self management, under which balance falls, will be category 3. Academic skills will be category 4. Communication will be category 5. And drive is category 6. Rank that on the ordinal scale 1-7, one being not important to you and your experience as a college student and seven being very important. You’re not comparing them against each other, you’re just putting each of them on the ordinal 1-7 scale. Is that clear?

Moderator: Question two is, in what ways have you noticed that you are not or were not prepared for college? So just as we did with the first question, write down as many individual thoughts and feelings as you want, on as many note cards as you deem necessary. I’m going to give you a few minutes to do that now.

Moderator: I’m going to begin to collect them. Feel free to write more as I do, and we can add them to the list if need be. Just as we did before we’ll be categorizing these. We can use the new categories or the same categories; feel free and please be open to new categories if they emerge. Sheltered. Did not think long term (in terms of consequences). Assumption that academic load and difficulty would be similar to high school. Needed to gain knowledge about myself. Study skills needed to improve. Management of free time was difficult. Wasn’t used to so much change. Becoming an adult. Discovering a career path was difficult at first. The breadth of responsibilities was a wake up call. Self confidence. Time management. Good basics of different subjects. Studying skills and the way I learn best. Minimal exposure to individuals of drastically different beliefs and lifestyles. Inadequate time management skills. Inability to know when to ask for help. Individual

Moderator: So just as we did before, what are some of the themes or categories that are emerging here?

Zack: Management of free time.

Reuben: I would say there’s a path component, like a…

Moderator: Say more about that.

Reuben: Yeah. So, a lot of people seemed to struggle choosing what was important for them to do, like major wise or otherwise.

Moderator: Path? Path.

Andrew: Social uncertainty.

Moderator: Social uncertainty.

Edward: Oh, ah - living. Kind of in dorm life - college life. Separate from social, but more specific to your living conditions because that’s different from social life.

Moderator: So, the most specific thing I heard you say was living conditions, is that acceptable.

Edward: Yes. Living conditions.

Diana: Prioritization.

Moderator: Say it again.

Diana: Prioritization.
Moderator: Great.

Roy: There’s definitely another academic piece in there…so maybe academic skills again.

Moderator: Anything else?

Lee: I don’t know how I would say it, but like learning or adaptability again. I feel like a lot of people said, “I needed to learn to set limits or gain knowledge about myself.” Like a challenge aspect - I don’t know how I would say it.

Moderator: Let’s explore that a bit more.

Christine: I think, or I don’t know, like I feel like for me self-knowledge...

Diana: Or I would say self-discovery or something like that.

Christine: Yeah.

Moderator: Self-discovery.

Moderator: Yes.

Reuben: I actually sort of want to question the prioritization - is that different from balance from the first session because it might be the same category.

Moderator: Sure. Great question. Relative to what you heard here, would you prefer to use prioritization or balance? Its okay if we use two different terms between questions, that’s fine, but the question on the table is, do we mean more balance, or are we talking more about prioritization? Perhaps we could process some of them and see if we want to change the category name?

Diana: Right. Yeah. The reason I suggested it is because I think I heard more of, like, the limit type thing whereas I feel like with balance it was just kind of like learning how to handle it all but now I heard more, okay, learning how to set limits whether its social or this and that and putting it in order as to what’s important.
Moderator: So perhaps we’ll revisit the category name when we sort the data. Are these our seven categories? Ok (naming them for the group). Management of free time, living conditions, prioritization, path, social uncertainty, self-discovery and academic skills.

Moderator: Sheltered. Where does it belong?

Lee: I mean, I wrote that, and I would say self-discovery.

Moderator: You meant in terms of realizing that there was more than what you previously understood. self-discovery.

Moderator: Did not think long term in terms of consequences. Could I clarify - academic consequences, social consequences…

Lee: All of the above.

Moderator: All of the above.

Andrew: Path.

Roy: Is that path, maybe?

Zack: Yeah, that would be path.

Moderator: Path? Because you’re not seeing the long term? Taking the long view?

Moderator: Assumption that academic load or difficulty would be similar to high school. So this is about the load and difficulty of the work itself. Is that correct?

Lee: Yes. Or more like the assumption part.

Moderator: The assumption component. You’re emphasizing the assumption.

Lee: Yeah.

Edward: Academic, kind of, but...it feels to have another component. Management maybe?

Moderator: It’s academic in nature?
Andrew: Yeah.

Roy: Was the person writing that intending that you had to discover how difficult it was going to be?

Lee: Yes.

Moderator: So this is another self-discovery component?

Moderator: Okay. Thanks for the clarification. Needed to gain knowledge about myself…self-discovery?

Moderator: Study skills needed to improve.

All: Academic study skills.

Moderator: Ok. Managing free time was difficult.

All: Management of free time (laughter)

Moderator: Wasn’t use to so much change.

Lee: Social uncertainty.

Moderator: Is this a social reference?

Andrew: Yeah.

Edward: Yeah.

Diana: Yeah.

Christine: Umm...

Moderator: Is this a social reference? Or is this an academic reference?

Christine: I guess I didn’t think academically - academically I felt prepared.

Moderator: So this is a social reference.
Christine: Yeah. I guess so. It was kind of just broad and general I guess. Like, everything.

Moderator: So where would you put that?

Christine: Um. I guess - what is social uncertainty again?

Moderator: Someone define [social uncertainty] as you understand it - social uncertainty.

Andrew: Using those terms, it was more of a - I think it kind of can be in line with self-discovery but more of, instead of within yourself, the external - you’re not exactly sure what college life is on a social scale and how you fit into that.

Moderator: It’s not within you, it’s how you interact with the community at large.

Christine: I would say yeah, then, social uncertainty.

Moderator: Okay. Becoming an adult.

Roy: Self-discovery.

Moderator: Discovering a career path was difficult at first.

All: Path.

Moderator: This is what we mean by “path”? The future? Ok. The breadth of responsibilities was a wake up call. May I clarify? Are we talking about academic responsibilities, responsibilities that also include outside of the academic world? Or only those outside?

Roy: I was thinking only outside the academic world.

Moderator: Only outside the academic world - this was your intention when you wrote this?

Roy: Yes.

Moderator: So, where does it belong?
Lee: Prioritization.
Roy: Yes.

Diana: Yes. Yeah..

Moderator: Self-confidence?

All: Self-discovery.

Moderator: Time management. Is this a reference to management of free time or is it something else? Is it an academic skill, for example? What is the reference here?

Emma: I think that for me it was more free time.

Moderator: More about free time - ok (placing it in time management category). Good basis of different subjects?

All: Academic skills.

Moderator: Study skills and the way I learn best?

Edward: Academic.

Christine: Academic skills.

Moderator: Minimal exposure to individuals to drastically different beliefs and lifestyles.

All: Social uncertainty.

Moderator: Inadequate time management skills. Again, is this a reference to management of free time or an academic skill reference?

Andrew: Can I ask something about free time? When I think of the free time aspect I think of it as now that you're in college, all of it is your time, so when its management of time in general I think that’s a component of it because you can choose time to mess around or you can use that time to study. So I think that it does follow…

Diana: Yeah.

Zack: That is a good point.
Many are engaged at this point.

Moderator: So it belongs here (pointing to time management). We agree?

Moderator: Unaware of personal limits in terms of obligations on my plate.

Diana: I wrote that. The thinking in my mind was prioritization and self-discovery, so I think both.

Moderator: A little bit of both. If you had to choose one category, in terms of your intention - unaware of personal limits in terms of obligations on my plate - is this more about you discovering what your limits are, or is it about learning to prioritize so you didn’t hit the limit.

Diana: Probably the second.

Moderator: The second - self-discovery. Okay. Inability to know when to ask for help.

Diana: Self-discovery…?

Roy: Social uncertainty.

Moderator: Is this a social reference - help in terms of the larger component of college or are we talking about asking professors?

Diana: Again, that was one I wrote, and it was more, definitely, academic…

Moderator: This is about asking for help in terms of...asking for help is an academic skill we learn. Is that right?

Diana: Yeah.

Moderator: Individual study skills and how I learn. Would that belong here (point to academic skills)?

Moderator: Roommate life.

All: Living conditions.
Moderator: Handling stress in a healthy manner - is this a self-discovery component or academic skill component...what do you think? Handling stress…

Zack: It’s more of a skill, I don’t know if it’s just about academics.

Andrew: For me, when I wrote it, I think it would be very much self-discovery…

Moderator: Okay. Know how “I” handle stress....and how I can do so in a healthy way (placing it in the self-discovery category).

Andrew: Yeah. Yeah.

Moderator: Academic time management. Does that belong here (point to academic skills)?

Moderator: Social choices...is this social uncertainty?

Moderator: Having more free time - belongs here I would guess (pointing to management of free time).

Edward: Yeah (others agree).

Moderator: Not knowing much outside of my life - sheltered, having a foreign roommate.

Diana: Social uncertainty…

Roy: Social uncertainty...

Moderator: Social uncertainty.

Lee: But we had sheltered under self-discovery.

Moderator: Okay. Its also here…so are we saying it’s both, or do we want to make the distinction? Is it the roommate component here that is drawing us to social uncertainty?

Christine: Yeah. Does it have to do with living conditions because I don’t know how many more we would have under living conditions?
Moderator: Right. The reference to a foreign roommate makes this quite specific, so I guess I would ask this person is this about the roommate in particular, or about being sheltered in general?

Zack: Yeah. My roommate, since Freshman year, he’s from Tunisia. So when I first emailed him it was kind of weird like I didn’t know what to expect.

Moderator: So it’s in particular referencing the situation.

Zack:....referencing the situation yeah.

Moderator: So that would belong here then (pointing to living conditions), is that right?

Zack: Yeah.

Edward: Oh, okay.

Moderator: Laundry - dealing with those who mess up and bad systems - here it is again (laughter). This is a path (laughter)! Living conditions?

Moderator: Was prepared for academic load.

Moderator: Skills? Ok. Didn’t know what to do with increase in free time...would it be correct to put that here (placing it in the time management area)?

Edward: Yes.

Moderator: Financially. May I clarify? Are we talking about student loans, are we talking about money management, what are we discussing here? And anyone may chime in, not just the person who wrote it.

Zack: I was thinking, when I wrote it, more like student loans....

Diana: When I, when you were reading it, I thought of saving...especially Freshman year. I was awful at it and I spent my money [inaudible], so I was thinking that was something I didn’t have going in...

Moderator: So is this about path? Understanding how the financial decisions you’re making now are affecting the future or is it about something else?
Edward: Well, I feel like either way it would fall under self-discovery, either way because student loans or spending all of your declining balance, flex dollars, whatever it is, spending late night dinner on pizza, and kind of learning not to do that - I think that falls under self-discovery (laughter)....

Moderator: It’s about self-discovery…

Edward: It’s about discovering your finances and not getting pizza when you probably shouldn’t.

Andrew: I was going to say, also like prioritization. Because like, when you have to take out an extra loan - is that worth your time now or should you spend that time working.

Moderator: Or just as was referenced earlier, should you go spend money at the pizza place or spend it on books?

Roy: I was going to say, yeah, prioritization…

Moderator: Prioritization. It sounds we’re rallying around agreement there.

Moderator: Navigating for the future.

All: Path.

Moderator: Living on my own.

Zack: Living conditions.

Moderator: Is this what we meant by living conditions or are we talking about the self-discovery component of how to do it?

Zack: I was referencing more how to do it, like, on your own.

Moderator: OK. So just those things that make it possible to live on your own.


Moderator: Ok. By that definition can we put it here (pointing to self-discovery)?

Edward: Yeah.
Diana: Yeah.

Moderator: Unable to communicate needs or wants...unable to communicate needs or wants.

Lee: Social uncertainty.

Moderator: Is this social uncertainty? Is this a social reference or is it an academic reference?

Reuben: I was viewing it as an academic reference.

Moderator: Academic. So, communicating my academic needs and wants. Okay - we saw earlier, I believe, when to ask for help, and this is in line with that. Right? Okay.

Moderator: Deciding what is important.

All: Prioritization.

Moderator: Prioritization. Difficulty making impactful decisions - those moments that you realize are going to have long term consequence, I believe that’s the reference here.

Reuben: Yeah. I believe that’s a path.

Moderator: Path. Okay (placing it there). I don’t aggressively, or didn’t aggressively, self-advocate.

Zack: Self-discovery?

Edward: Self-discovery?

Moderator: Is this an academic skill or is this self-discovery?

Roy: Or is it social uncertainty?

Moderator: When we talk about self-advocate, are we talking about with professors, teachers, other students in an academic setting, or are we talking about the skill of self-advocacy?
Reuben: So, I guess I meant it in the fact that I wasn’t ready to really be aggressively out there like, I need these things done, like, I need help in these ways…so…

Moderator: In an academic context?

Reuben: Yeah. An academic context.

Moderator: Ok. So this falls in line, again, with communicating needs and wants, is that right? So that goes here (pointing to academic skills).

Moderator: And then, finally, new social environment was initially intimidating.

All: Social uncertainty (nearly in unison).

Moderator: Ok. So we have - path, prioritization, living conditions, management of free time, social uncertainty, self-discovery, and academic skills. Does anyone, or would anyone, like to talk more about how they feel about these categories or in particular wanting to move any of these around? Do you have any other comments about these before we move on?

Edward: I just think with switching the living conditions, it can be really weird to switch into a dorm where your study space, living space, like living room and bedroom are all in one little fifteen by sixteen square little cube…

Moderator: So you would affirm this (pointing to living conditions) affirm that this is certainly an element of the question?

Edward: Yeah. I definitely think that’s a thing.

Moderator: You want to emphasize that. That’s great.

Reuben: I would say, I mean, if I was going to make a sub-category, I would do something with limitations…

Moderator: As a sub-category of what? Self-discovery?

Reuben: Yeah.

Moderator: Can you say just a bit more about that?
Reuben: I can’t remember exactly, but there were a few at the beginning that sort of seemed to fall in line with failures or disappointments.

Moderator: Handling stress and unaware of personal limitations (reading from the notes on the board). So you would define this as a subset of self-discovery?

Reuben: Yeah.

Moderator: Ok. That’s good to note. Anyone else - comments, feedback, thoughts, feelings about these?

Reuben: Just another general feeling - I think it’s kind of interesting that these categories are pretty different than the categories for question one, generally.

Moderator: Yes, they are. So what it takes to be prepared for college and how you felt you were unprepared are different.

Reuben: So it seems like this group felt pretty prepared….

Moderator: Pretty prepared, relative to question one.

Moderator: That’s a great observation. Alright, are there any other comments, thoughts, feelings?

Moderator: Great. Let’s give these a number then, and if you would please get out your sheet, we’ll write in the categories. We will call management of time category one, social uncertainty category two, living conditions category three, self-discovery category four, prioritization category five, academic skills category six, and path category seven. Write them in, and then rank them - again, separately - on the ordinal scale 1-7. One meaning not important, seven meaning very important to your experience.

Reuben: Just a clarifying question, is this how we’ve felt we’re not prepared in this category?

Moderator: Let me clarify. So, now, considering being prepared for college, how important is management of free time, etcetera? Thanks for clarifying.
APPENDIX F

INTENSIVE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT, EMMA (PSEUDONYM)
Q  So no one in the focus group or the survey talked about environmental or
demographic factors influencing college preparedness. Do you think that's unique to
graduates from your high school, or is it generally true in the lives of those whom you've
encountered in college?
A  Well, I, in college, went to also a private Catholic school. So a lot of my friends
that I interacted with more had similar demographics to me. But I think that that really
does make a difference. Even thinking about some of the students that I graduated with, I
know that they had a lot of other things going on in their lives beyond just school work
and academics. And I think that that affected them more than we realize. I think that it is
something that affects a lot of people, but is unique to our high school that we don't have
to deal with that.
Q  Could you cite one or two of those factors, those more specific environmental or
demographic factors that you think influenced some of the students that you just
referenced?
A  I think that some had family issues, either as big as parents dying or as little as it's
a one-parent household, so they had to take care of their little siblings or just had more
responsibilities in general. I don't think that things like illness and that sort of thing was
really present. I can't think of any other situations.
Q  How about one's economic background? How much do you think that can, or
have you seen it affect college preparedness?
A  I think that in some ways it definitely affects college preparedness with having to
take out a bunch of loans as soon as you start. And with that, some people have jobs and
others just focus on academics. And I know that at St. Ben's and St. John's, there, a
majority of the students have some sort of student work award. And the ones that don't, a lot of us question what they do with their time, because we seem to be busy a lot more of the times. One of my friends had a roommate who didn't, and she would just see her sitting in her room a lot of the time; whereas we would be going off to our job after classes were over.

Q  Great. Thank you.

A  Mm-hmm.

Q  Second question: In my research, I found that basic content knowledge, which we described as a subset of academic skills, is not considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think?

A  I think in some ways it is important, just because I know that others who didn't have that basic knowledge had to take extra course loads or had to work extra hard at the beginning. But I know that those students also excelled once they got going into school. And maybe even math is not something that they'd want to get into and they have to take this basic course load. So it kind of depends on what you want to do.

Q  Do you think that's why students in the survey and the focus group didn't talk as much about that, because it's so dependent on major, for example?

A  That could be, because I know for me, not much that I learned here helped with my major. We don't have anything dealing with nutrition type of things. And yes, you know what some things are, but you get that basically in your 100 level classes.

Q  Right. I've been encountering this word "analysis" quite a bit as I've conducted my research. When you think of that word, would you call that an academic skill, or is it a state of mind?
A I'd probably call that more of a state of mind. I mean, yes, it can be learned, which it can take a long time if you don't understand how to analyze things. But I know for me, I lived with three of the same majors, and one was very intelligent. But she could memorize the hard facts, and analyzing things was more difficult for her. For me, my job was I worked with health promotion, and it was also creative. And for me, I know that it helped me a lot to analyze situations and think about, okay, how is this program actually going to work, and thinking about details. So yeah, I think it's a mindset.

But I think that a lot of teachers try to teach how to analyze as well. Or professors.

Q Is that across all disciplines, or are there particular disciplines, particular times in college, where analysis is more essential? Or is it always essential.

A I think more in my, like, theory sort of classes; anthropology, gender ethics, those, analyzation was there a lot. But also in sort of, like, case studies of nutrition and what's wrong with somebody, clinical type of things, there's also analysis, but it was a different kind of analysis.

Q Great. Fourth question: Personal study skills became, both in the focus group and throughout the survey, a category that I'm interested in in terms of defining college preparedness. But I'm wondering if study skills are personal to the individual, or are there universal ways in which studying is essential. Otherwise stated: Universal ways that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college.

A I think it's definitely personal. For me, I have ADHD, and so I learn a lot differently. And I think that [our private high school] didn't help with that sort of situation. We don't have, like, personalized, anything like that. And for me, I didn't even
realize that there was this thing at my school called "Disability Services" that would help with tweaking ways and which could help you excel, like recording the class lectures, having different Notepads and just so many different ways that help. And it was probably a 45-minutes analysis when I would talk to them about what do you think would work best, do you think you have to have the books read to you, that sort of thing.

And then also with my three roommates, who were all taking the same classes, we all studied in completely different ways. One would have to be in the library the entire time. And then one couldn't be in silence, so she'd be in the room and I'd also be in there because I need personal space. But we're all different.

I think also you do have to have things like drive. That was my biggest downfall, was that I wasn't as interested in the classes we were taking because I don't want to be anything clinical. And so for me, it was hard to want to take this class and learn about it when I didn't have anything that I thought was applicable to what I want to do; whereas they want to go on and be clinical dieticians, and so they were more driven to want to excel.

Q  That leads perfectly into this last question: So in the end, what's more essential for college preparedness; knowing content and being prepared for content as you get to become a freshman, or knowing yourself? Let's start there.

A  I think knowing yourself is (inaudible). Thinking about what I learned here in school, nothing really, like world history isn't applicable to anything I have in college. I mean, granted, that could be different if you want to be an international relations sort of person and that sort of thing. But I think knowing how you work well and knowing even what makes you want to do well, even things like being alone or being with people, I think freshman year is such a large learning year. And part of me doesn't even think that
freshman year the first semester grades should be counted, in a way, because there's just so much going on that you don't know what to do and you're discovering your limits. And a lot of times you have some of your hardest classes that first semester, because they want to weed people out, which I understand from a lot of people who start pre-med. And I think a lot of them really don't end up pre-med. I think it's just really hard to know.

Q Second part to that question: So in the end, what's more essential for college preparedness; having practical study skills like note-taking, or having a particular state of mind, like being driven.

A I think in my case it was drive. Yes, study skills are important. In one of my classes, we spent the first two or three class periods talking about what's your personality type, what's the best way you learn, which is helpful for a lot of people, except for when you're me, like, I'm 50/50 everything. And but I think that if you don't have the desire to learn, it's a lot harder.

Q Wonderful. Thank you so much.

A Of course.

Q I really appreciate it.
APPENDIX G

INTENSIVE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT, CHRISTINE (PSEUDONYM)
Q  First question: No one in the focus group or the survey talked about socioeconomic status or environmental factors influencing college preparedness. So I'm curious if you would talk a bit about if you think that's unique to graduates from your high school or if that's generally true in the lives of the people that you encountered in college.

A  Okay. I would say that it's pretty unique to grads from our high school. It seems like there's a pretty similar socioeconomic class at our school, and I think we often take for granted the fact that our environmental factors did help us prepare for college. We probably had some of the best environmental factors that prepared us for college. And I think since not many of us really had to have anything that, like, made us struggle in environmental factors, that we don't really, those don't really come to mind when we think of how it prepared us for college. It kind of just seems like, well, it was there, so that's why we're prepared. I think we don't really take into consideration that that probably helped us prepare a lot for college.

And yeah, and I think it's hard for me to say because I also go to St. Olaf College, which most people there have pretty similar socioeconomic backgrounds also. So I think I don't really hear it that much either about how it influences college.

But I do think that when I went to the U for one semester I heard it a lot more. And I heard people talking, I think, about specifically socioeconomic factors, and that a lot of people that I knew were actually paying for their own college. And not all of them had, maybe, the support of their parents, or other things like that, other environmental kind of factors. And I think that can definitely hinder your college preparedness, but I don't think
it's always like the first thing that pops into our minds, because we never had to struggle
with that.

Q Are there any specific examples you can provide, even if it's something that you
could imagine would be true, not necessarily something that you have experienced
personally in terms of your relating with other students who perhaps were influenced by
socioeconomic factors negatively in college preparedness? Any specifics you can
provide?

A I think I don't know of that many specifically. But I, in my education class, it's
called "Educational Psychology." I took it at St. Olaf the fall of my sophomore year, so
this past year. And we talked a lot about socioeconomic class and how especially as, like,
high schoolers in lower socioeconomic statues, they might, it's like it might be really hard
to do their homework at home. It might be dangerous for them even to come to school
sometimes. They didn't have parents that supported them doing it. They might have had a
lot of children in their household which made it really hard to concentrate at home. And a
lot of things like that I think really influence your college preparedness and how, I mean,
how well you do in school as well.

And I think, yeah, I think that doesn't always come to mind, but I think that was -- we
read a book on that in my educational psychology class. I don't remember what it was
called.

Q But it seemed to hit home for you?

A Yeah, I think it's hard because I've never had to deal with anything so severe as
that. And I think it was called "There Are No Children Here." That's, I think, the book
that we read. And yeah, I think that children, I mean some people that are in lower
socioeconomic classes don't really strive to be, to maybe even go to college. That's not even their first priority so.

Q  Sure.

A  I think that's hard.

Q  So in my research that I have conducted I found that basic content knowledge, which was defined by the focus group as a subset of economic skills, is not considered of great importance for college preparedness relative to the many other things that we were measuring. What do you think?

A  I think that I would say content knowledge, so does that mean, are you saying like general basic skills like math and science, things like that?

Q  Yes.

A  I would say that's not as important. I think that at our high school they prepare you really well for that. And so I felt kind of academically I had a basis of that. But I also think, at least when I went to the University of Minnesota, I was really just taking higher level courses than other people, and I had friends who were taking maybe lower level math courses or something like that. But I don't think that necessarily has anything to do with your college preparedness, because I was just as prepared for my, you know, I don't know, class or something, like my science class than somebody who was taking a lower class. I think they have so many levels in a lot of colleges that content area doesn't really matter that much, because a lot of the time you get put into whatever is best for you.

Q  So if I'm hearing you correctly, colleges will find, in your experience, a space for you regardless of your content knowledge on this particular subject. And so basic content knowledge becomes moot or unimportant?
A I think so. At least if I'm understanding the question correctly, that's kind of what I have seen. And I think that in terms of for me, college preparedness, that really didn't have much to do with it. I think that a lot of people seem to be pretty prepared well for academics. And if they were put in something higher, they could go down to something lower. But I think, like, that's not really what I think of when I think of college preparedness. I think most people are prepared pretty well for whatever level they're going to be in.

Q I've been encountering this word "analysis" quite a bit. In the surveys that I've sent out, students are sending back responses that include that word. Would you call analysis an academic skill, or is analysis a state of mind?

A I would consider it an academic skill. I think when I think of analysis, I think of, I mean, pretty specifically, I guess, like a science or something like that, or analyzing data, like, for statistics. Or I took a research methods class; we did a lot of analyzing there. I think that's kind of what I typically think of when I think of the word analysis.

Q Great. So are there certain subjects in which analysis is taking -- or required, that more analysis is required?

A Yeah, I think I would say kind of statistic courses or science courses where you have to analyze data. Or yeah, or I would also say English. I think I did a lot of analyzing of literature. When I took my literary studies class, I did pretty much all analysis. Yeah, I would say probably literature, and sciences maybe.

Q Let's talk about study skills, which people talked quite a bit about in the responses I received. But I'm curious, from your perspective, are study skills personal to the
individual; meaning, they are individualized or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?

A I would say there's a little of both. I think I have seen, like, for example, reading or something, reading chapters that you're given for classes, I would say for me, something like that seems to be pretty universal. I think anybody, really, who is going to a lecture is paying attention. You know, paying attention in class, kind of getting that sort of review and going over the chapter, I would say that, in general, seems like a pretty universal study skill, and something that kind of has to happen for your basic knowledge of the class.

But I would say, really, beyond getting that basic knowledge, it's pretty individualized. I know I like to do note cards a lot, and I think that helps me. Even just doing the note cards itself, sometimes that's enough to get me to know the subject. But I think some people can really just overview the chapter, and that works for them, which I don't think that works for me. I kind of, there's too many words; I get confused. And I kind of like grouping it together. So I would say past, like, the basic knowledge of just kind of gaining knowledge on the subject, it's pretty individualized.

Q Good. Last question. In the end, and this is a two-part question: What's more essential for college preparedness, knowing your content as you arrive to college or knowing yourself?

A I would say knowing yourself for sure. I think that's not always possible to know yourself very well right after you get out of high school. I think you don't have a lot of experience, kind of, by yourself typically. I think a lot of it is, you know, you're with your friends, you're with sports, or with your parents, family members, things like that. And I
think you don't always get to be by yourself and kind of get to know yourself very well. And I would say that's really, really essential for college.

I think I got to college and thought one thing about myself; I'm going to love a big school, I'm going to go to all the games and all sorts of things like that. And within the first month I was like, well, that's not me at all. So I think getting to know yourself and kind of knowing where you fit in, and I think that's probably most essential.

And I think that can help in getting, like, a friend group, it can help in choosing a school, finding the right type of clubs for you, finding the right academics, what you want to study. And I think I would say that's probably the most basic thing that you need to know.

I think content area is really just one thing that you do in college. It's not the whole thing. 

Q And the other part of this question: In the end, what's more essential to college preparedness; having practical study skills like note-taking, for example, or having a particular state of mind, like being driven?

A I would say probably having a state of mind. I think those study skills are very important, and I think those help a lot in college. But I would say you're not necessarily going to do those study skills if you don't have a state of mind to do them. To be driven and be determined and motivated, I think that those are the state of mind that you need. I think the study skills are kind of a subset of that. But I think just the study skills, if you have a state of mind, you're going to be able to figure out the study skills that work for you and are best for you. And I think just knowing those study skills aren't going to be enough.

Q Thank you very much.

A All right.
Q  So the first question is this: No one in the focus group or the survey talked about socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. Do you think that's unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you encountered in college as well?

A  Honestly, I think that, I think it's fairly unique to grads from our high school. I think that it just comes out because it's the way that you've lived your life all the way up until that point. So it's one of those intangibles that you can't disregard, but that it's hard-wired into every person. So, like, to say that it's, like, not a factor in a place that's like semi-homogenous like [our high school] that makes sense because it's pretty equal, I think, across all persons.

But, like, realistically, I go to St. Olaf College, which is about as homogenous as you get. But you still see it because there's kids who are in, like, SSS, like I'm in, who come from a different -- which is Student Support Services. So that's literally like a group of, and they have it in, like, other colleges. I think it's called, like, TRIO as well. It just depends on how they implement it. But literally that's where all of the kids from, or a huge majority of the kids from a certain socioeconomic background, like, are located. And it's, like, not only is it a physical location, but it's a program as well. And so I think, and that definitely affects your life at St. Olaf.

And so I don't know how it gets when you have, like, diversity be the norm, like, at a college. But I know that, I think that, like, enriches the conversation. That probably enriches, like, the types of discussions that you have. And I would be, I think that that's really interesting that the group, like, that was indicating. I didn't even think about it either.
Q Talk more about the ways in which these students that are part of the SSS group, how you see socioeconomic factors affecting their preparedness.

A Well, I think in a setting like St. Olaf, it does kind of become, I think they understand their background. I think they understand the fact that they've seen a lot of hard work to get them to that point. And I wouldn't say that there is a lack of appreciativeness, if that's a word, in the converse, but, like, in the other group of people. But there definitely is a heightened, like, amount of appreciation, like drivenness, I guess you could say, in the group that is there, because they know that not only are they, there's a lot of first generation and stuff like that. And so not only are they coming from a perspective where, like, a lot is probably riding on them, but they've just seen a lot of hard work I'd say.

Q Do you see them lacking any skills or abilities or certain mindsets that they have to develop?

A That's a good question. I think that, I definitely think that opportunity, like, in general, I mean, it's kind of a buzz word, but I think that there's just some, I've heard of, like, really cool opportunities from my group of friends, like getting jobs at their parents' place or internships, like X, Y, Z through people that they've known. And I think that there might be a little bit less of that. And so I don't know exactly how that ties into the ultimate, like, the culmination of, like, their work that year into the summer and that sort of stuff, but I wouldn't be surprised if that were the case.

Q Great. Let's move on to the second question. In my research, I've found that basic content knowledge, which the focus group described as a subset of economic skills, is not
considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think about basic
content knowledge and its importance for preparedness?
A Yeah, I think it's interesting, because I haven't really thought about that in itself.
But now that I think about it, I mean, it makes a lot of sense. I'm interested because I feel
like a high school teaches you how to do college almost, and then college teaches you
how to do life after college, depending on what you do.
And so I mean, I've found that as far as the specific content, as I'm studying for the GRE,
I mean, like algebra is super important, basic vocabulary is very important. I think they
just want to know how you approach a problem. And so it makes a lot of sense that you
get a diverse amount of classes and then you just have to learn how to approach problems
in different ways.
As far as, like, the specific content, I find myself sometimes being, like, oh, I remember
that from high school, when it comes up in class; but I don't think necessarily in itself the
thing that I, like, bank on. Like, if I remember it from high school, I'll probably have to
brush up on it and then go. But if I were to say something in class or bring it up or write it
in a paper, I think it's limited in that way by the fact that it's like high school level
knowledge.
Q Great. A third question: I've been encountering the word "analysis" quite in the
surveys the students have returned. Would you call analysis, as you think about it, an
academic skill, or is it a state of mind? How would you describe analysis?
A My knee-jerk response is to say that it is an academic skill, because I think that
you can have better analysis through practicing it. And I feel like if you don't practice it
because you have, like, less of a drive or a state mind that reflects it, then maybe you get
worse analysis. But I think that a lot of times, I feel like analysis is just through practices and practice, and I think it's, like, very similar to an academic skill in that way. So I think that makes sense.

Q What other synonyms would you use for analysis? Or what are some thematically other concepts that are similar to analysis?

A Perhaps, I guess, similar to problem solving. And I think a lot of it is in the approach itself and, like, developing the proper approach to any problem. I think that's the thing that I feel, like, is most important in, like, the most important component of analysis. And so I think that's something that really just is only you can do practice to develop it.

Q Is it a skill that is used in all academic subjects or only certain types?

A I'd say that it's probably one of the most important skills that I've seen as far as how often I've encountered it. I mean, if you take, like, an English class, you have to properly analyze. And I mean, obviously, it might take different forms, but you have to analyze the problem just as you would approach a problem from, like, a calc class or something like that.

Q So it's fairly universal?

A I'd say so.

Q Fourth question: When students talk about study skills, are study skills personal to the individual, or are there universal ways of studying that every student needs to master or have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?

A That's interesting. I was just reading something that talked about learning styles. And there's a huge thing debunking personal learning styles. So I feel like I think you do
have to ultimately develop your own method. I know that I generally tend to stay up later to study rather than get up earlier to study, because otherwise I'll be comatose. But I feel like that's one thing I probably should have developed more in high school rather developing it as I was kind of forced to in college. Because I think that the main thing is when you're forced to do something, or if you're forced to learn in a specific environment, then you will adapt to that environment.

So I think I just ultimately found my personal study style out of adaptation to the college environment. But I feel like it probably would have helped if I maybe was forced to do so in high school as well, get a jump start on that.

Q So it is personal, or it's universal?

A I guess it's universal in the sense that everyone, everyone needs to develop it. But I think it manifests itself maybe more individually.

Q So if I'm hearing you correctly, everyone needs to find a way to adapt to the circumstances, but doing so is personal?

A Right. Yeah.

Q Last question, and it's a two-part question: Part one: In the end, then, what's more essential for college preparedness; knowing your content or knowing yourself? Start with that one. Knowing content or knowing yourself?

A That's a good question. I'd have to say knowing yourself. And if you know the way that you approach content, then I think that's, I think that's more important.

Q So what does it mean to know yourself, then?

A I think, I mean, similar to the last question, I think you really have to know what are going to be your pitfalls in college; if you can't study around people, or if you need
conversation to study. If you lose some of that, like, desire or something, what are the
types of, like, environmental factors that you can have around you and put those around
you and, like, set those boundaries. And I think that if you know those things, then I think
that the content that is thrown at you, you'll be able to handle better than if you did it in
the reverse.

Q  Great. And the second part to that question: What's more essential to college
preparedness; having practical study skills like note-taking, for example, or having a
particular state of mind, like being driven. Study skills or state of mind?
A  Honestly, I'd say, oh, yeah, I guess, okay, if it's what's more important, if your
state of mind is not congruent with what a college setting demands, then I don't think
you're going to be in good shape for the college. I think that the study skills are incredibly
important. And, again, that's something that if I could go back and do, I would develop
those way more. And I feel like state of mind is something that I could change more
internally and, like, more easily. But I feel like if you don't have the state of mind, then
you're kind of out of luck.

Q  State of mind, it sounds like you're saying, begets other things.
A  Yeah.

Q  They're part and parcel. They're together; is that right?
A  Yeah.

Q  Because one gives rise to the other?
A  I would say that.

Q  Got it. Great. Thank you so much.
A  Yeah, no problem.
APPENDIX I

INTENSIVE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT, EDWARD (PSEUDONYM)
Q So first question: No one in the focus group or the survey talked socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. Do you think that is unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you've encountered in college as well? Talk a bit about that.

A So socioeconomic, when we look at it, especially with our high school, a prestigious college preparatory school, I think it's a little bit less of a factor. Most of us came from prestigious neighborhoods. Most of our parents were college educated, and if they weren't, you were around kids who were so you were able to pick it up very quickly. Both my parents went to really good schools; my dad at Johns Hopkins, things like that. So it really was just kind of you had very, kids with very similar backgrounds. You never really were in a place where anybody necessarily felt that different from you. They were different and unique in their own special way, but from a socioeconomic perspective, it wasn't really anyone was different, it's just everyone was kind of in the upper class or upper middle class, and there were just rankings within that. So somebody might live in a moderately-sized house, and then someone might live in a ginormous house with a gym in the basement type deal, or two swimming pools. And that was just kind of normal; you never went outside of that vocabulary. Our high school always pushed it hard from the very start. But then also, my parents used bigger words around me. And apparently, I used them at college.

I guess in college it's been a little bit more glaring, fairly instantly, that my socioeconomic background is different, because for me, it was always kind of, you know, I'm in an upper class sense, but I'm not like the country club, two swimming pools type of kid. And then in college, all of a sudden you take their place, and all these people are like,
you use big words all the time, just talk more casually. It kind of almost felt strange to be in that position, but then also, I felt like that did provide some sense of added benefit in class and the whole just even way of approaching things was very beneficial.

And again, back to the whole of this education that we got here as a result of that socioeconomic class was really, really helpful, because people were like, oh, this class is so terrible. And I'm like, I did that in, like, 20 minutes, how is that terrible.

Q So am I hearing you say, then, that you think the lack of impact that socioeconomic status had on college preparedness is unique to your high school, but that it is a reality for other people?

A Yeah, I think it is a reality for other people, especially just with even obtaining a dream of going to college. College is very much an expectation. And not just college, but with my specific friend group it was also, you need to go to the best college that you got into, and even considering transferring to a better one after that, with my very good friends going to Harvard and St. Olaf and places like that and so.

Q Great. Second question: In my research, I've found that basic content knowledge, which the focus group described as a subset of academic skills, is not considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think?

A Is this going to be about the whole, kind of, basic understanding before we go into school, kind of subsets like with the whole pre-K thing at the legislature this year? Or is this a little bit different?

Q I believe the focus group defined it as basic content knowledge that might be useful for college in terms of a basic understanding of American history, a basic understanding of physics, a basic understanding of biology.
When you're finishing up, especially, like, 3000 level history classes, they expect you to know a little bit about stuff, and not just, we're going to tell you everything. This had one of -- oh, sorry. And the whole, just even way of, like I said in the previous question, just the way of thinking it, so not necessarily, like, the actual pieces, but how you go about thinking in that way for college is extremely useful.

Then also just for having discussion in those higher level classes, you can take the basics in college and get it, but you're going to be off to a faster start in college if you have that baseline, because I was able to take a 3000 level class. People told me they thought I was a junior. I'm a freshman in those classes, where they were kind of surprised. But there's other people who did APs, those type of things.

So is that about content, or is that about a mindset and a way of thinking that allowed you --

I think it was a little bit of a combination, where going into classes even, there were a couple basics I had to take, whereas the mindset of how to approach a college class not necessarily, like, this is how you approach a college class, but just kind of getting in there and saying, oh, I know how to do, I know what the professor is asking me to do.

And then for the basic level knowledge, I think it's a separate piece where it's useful, but it's not make it or break it. I think it's more the mindset is where you will make it or break it is having that when you start out.

Good. The third question: I've been encountering the word "analysis" in my research. Students have talked quite a bit about that in the survey that I've sent out. Would you call analysis an academic skill or a state of mind?
That's a tough one, because, you know, debate always made me, you know, you'd have to analyze all the evidence that Mr. Johnson would give you. And you would have to break down, is this affirmative, negative, could we technically use it on both, depending on what parts we're using. That happened a lot, and I think it could really go both ways.

You can say it's a state of mind by how you're approaching something. But also, you can learn in classes how to be better at it. So I think you need to have a little bit where you should have the state of mind to do it, but I also think classes can make it into an academic skill, where it can either give you the tools or help refine your analytical mindset over time.

Q Are there certain courses or subject content areas in which analysis is more essential?

A I think history is definitely extremely important, and also political science. They're my double major, so I might be a little bit biased with it. But I feel like especially with history now, it's like, okay, here's what we think happened, but can we actually break it down and find truth and see how we can trace it through and analyze the evidence. Was this source biased, was this source a little bit trying too hard to make the, you know, the Conquistadors look absolutely evil.

And then with political science, you read people's opinions, and you can kind of break them down and see trends and things and stuff like that.

Q Another question: Are study skills personal to the individual, or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?
A I really think that there's been ways that have been proven to be successful for studying. There's, we talked about Mozart, like, the first two weeks of college. Listening to Mozart has been proven to up your scores. But I think it's also, you know, there's things where it's kind of a general consensus of, like, you need to read, you need to know the material to do it. But I think the way you can get to that can be more tailored to individuals.

So I think there's a very broad thing, broad umbrella of you kind of have to do these things to generally be successful, but under that umbrella, you can kind of find your way to be comfortable. If it's your favorite chair in the lounge, if it's listening to Mozart or going outside when you take your breaks, if you study in your room or if you study in the library, or do you mix it up? Do you have food, do you have coffee, do you just block out all distraction? And I think it's each person kind of can find their own individual way to do the things that are necessary to study. But I don't think you can necessarily say you can just say my way of studying is just watching Netflix either. And that won't work in the end.

Q Sure. That takes us to the last question, actually. So in the end, what you think is more essential -- and this is two-part question. Part one: What's more essential; knowing content or knowing yourself? Knowing content or knowing yourself?

A I think for college preparedness you can, you know, you want some level of content to know when you go in. And you can't just go in completely oblivious to things. But you also, I think you need to know what you need to do to be successful, like I said, under that umbrella. If you can find what you need to do to be successful, then I think that is much more key than just saying, I know a bunch of random facts.
Q And then the second part to that question: What do you think is more essential; having practical study skills, like note-taking, or having a particular state of mind, like being driven?

A You know, I think you can kind of drive note-taking into people, or people will hopefully catch up with it. Because if you have drive, I would hope you would figure it out. I think you need a little bit of skill to be able to do it, but I think drive to do things is much more important. Because you can be fantastic at taking notes, but if you don't have drive, you know, there's a lot less emphasis on your purpose for doing things. And I think people who have drive have proven themselves even though their grades might not be the shiniest, they might not be graduating summa cum laude, but they have the drive to go through and succeed.

Q Okay. Thank you so much.
APPENDIX J

INTENSIVE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT, REUBEN (PSEUDONYM)
Q  The first question is this: No one in the focus group or the survey identified socioeconomic factors influencing college preparedness. Do you think that is unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you've encountered in college as well?
A  Well, so I think it's kind of hard for someone to identify socioeconomic factors as contributing to their own success because they haven't really been exposed to other socioeconomic situations. They've only lived in their situation. So they, they kind of maybe assume that other people had a similar situation, or not that they maybe, they don't necessarily assume that they did, but they can't really account for what other people had socioeconomically.
Q  So have you, as an observer in terms of knowing your socioeconomic background, and then perhaps observing others at college, what would you say in response to that question?
A  Whether my socioeconomic background has contributed to my success?
Q  Yes.
A  I definitely think that, you know, it's maybe not socioeconomic as much as it is having role models who are successful in their career. And it doesn't have to be my parents. That was my role model for a while; but, you know, as I've gotten into college, my models have changed, like people in school and things like that. So I would say that my parents were really my role models in high school, but in college, you know, I don't think that it's as important anymore. I think you kind of mature enough to, you know, create your own role models. So as you sort of become an adult, you have to decide what drives you more. I'm kind of rambling.
Q  No, it's fine. It's interesting. One more subsequent question in response to your response: At the University of Minnesota, have you or are you aware of students who come from or presently live in poverty?
A  I'm not incredibly aware of that, really. Obviously, there's some people who did, and if you ask them about it, they, like, I would say with one exception, there's one kid I know who can't afford housing on campus. And I know that has been a bit of a challenge for him. But other than that, like, most people, as long as they can, you know, afford on-campus housing, everyone's living a pretty similar lifestyle, I would say.
Q  Okay. Thank you. Second question: In the research, I found that basic content knowledge, which the focus group described as a subset of academic skills, is not considered of great importance to college preparedness. What do you think about that?
A  Well, obviously, you need to develop basic content knowledge at some point. But just general knowledge about things that you learn in high school is, unless you sort of get into what you're doing, it's pretty, a lot of it's pretty useless, I would say. So I kind of agree with the statement that, you know, basic content knowledge, it's not enough to really carry you through anything. So it kind of all gets replaced, I would say. But it can give you a bit of a leg up at the start, I would say, but it becomes less and less important.
Q  So am I hearing you say it's a function of differentiation? The students start to focus, and differentiation is based on content areas like majors?
A  I think so.
Q  Okay. Great. Next question: I've encountered the word "analysis" quite a bit in the research, in particular the survey responses. Would you call analysis an academic skill or
a state of mind? Just out of context, but not in terms of not having seen the results of it, but in context in your own experience.

A I think analysis is a skill, because I think anyone can kind of do it, you know, once they, you know, learn how. It's just something that comes with experience that's kind of more of a skill generally, I find, like, things that you can pick up. So you have to really learn to analyze. Obviously, some people pick it up better than other people, but it's definitely something that, you know, you can pick up and get better at and improve.

Q Are there certain subject areas in which it's more essential, that skill?
A Yeah, absolutely.

Q Can you tell me more?
A Well, I mean, I guess some form of analysis is probably important in a lot of things. But, you know, I guess I think of analysis like analyzing data and looking at information and trying to draw conclusions. So a lot of things don't have a whole lot of information that you deal with, so anything that you're dealing with massive quantities of information or data, those are going to be the most important areas for it.

Q Are there subject areas where analysis is less important or used, less used?
A I mean, I think, like, definitely the arts, what they do I couldn't really call analysis. I mean, not to, like, pinpoint something out, but there are probably other things where you do less analysis.

Q In terms of the definition you provided?
A Yeah, in terms of what I...
Great. Fourth question: Are study skills personal to the individual, or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?

So I think that I've seen people succeed with a lot of different approaches. Like, myself, I'm definitely a bit of a less organized kind of person. But it works for me, and so I don't think there's necessarily a right way to do it. There are definitely better ways to do it for an individual, but I would say that my opinion is that it's pretty individualized.

It's relative? Would that be another way to describe it?

Yeah.

Are there any study skills that you think are universally necessary for college preparedness?

Well, I mean, maybe just like, hmm. Not really, I don't think. No.

Great. Good. All right. The last question is a two-part question. Part one: In the end, what's more essential for college preparedness; knowing your content or knowing yourself? And keep in mind we're talking about being prepared for college. Going into college knowing your content or knowing yourself?

So, like, in preparation?

Correct. As you graduate from high school and you prepare to move into your college years.

Well, I would say that they're both similarly equal. I mean, I know that we previously established that maybe, like, the background information wasn't as useful. But there's a lot more content, I would say, that you learn in high school besides background information.
Q  Talk more about that.
A  Some just basic skills like analysis or writing skills, like, I mean, just lots of, like, understandings of how people work, I would say that's a big thing, is understanding social stuff.
Q  So am I hearing you correctly that if you were given a third option, if I said what's more important, knowing your content or knowing yourself or knowing academic skills, you would elevate academic skills out of all of those things?
A  Yeah, I think so.
Q  All right. Interesting. And then the other part of this question: In the end, what's more essential; having practical study skills like note-taking or having a particular state of mind like being driven?
A  Yeah, for me, I think it's all about, well, I would say that in high school, it's more about having a state of, or I mean having your skills. Then in college you really need to have a good state of mind as well as some academic skills to succeed. So on balance, it's more important to have drive in college than it is in high school, I think. You can kind of float by in high school with pretty mediocre effort sometimes. But you know, that's not to say that either of them, like, I think you definitely need to have both, both sets, because I know a lot of people really try too hard almost, where they're not, you know, relying on kind of instinct anymore.
Q  Interesting.
A  I don't know.
Q  So is instinct some form of drive, or is instinct an academic skill?
A I guess I'm, so maybe everyone doesn't have the right instinct. Maybe this is just me sometimes.

Q Will you talk just a bit more about how, I'm just fascinated here. I haven't heard anyone talk about instinct yet, but I really want to know more. Tell me about how instinct plays a role in your academic success.

A Well, I mean, a lot of people will sort of, they'll, like, follow the rules a lot of the time. And they'll, like, too closely look at text and that kind of thing. And they're not really as willing to just, like, take a step back, look at the big picture and just be like what makes sense, like how does this have a, especially like in the, when you're talking about like nanosciences or something like that, where it's just like these all follow the same rules as, like, macro things. So a lot of people will just get bogged down by the details, I guess, and you got to just choose to simplify.

Q Can you give me some synonyms for instinct? Or as close as you can come? Other similar words or conceptually, the concepts?

A A single word?

Q Is that the best word?

A I don't know if I can think of any.

Q That's all right. Instinct is a fantastic word. I was just curious if there are ways to connect that to some of the things I've heard other students talk about.

A Yeah, I mean, I guess, like, you know, like, we have to acknowledge here that there are really differences in the intellect of different students. And I'm not trying be confident here, but, like, I think I am pretty intelligent and I think, like, you know, a lot of
people just, like, I feel like there's something they could tap into that they're maybe not tapping into.

Q Is that possibly because they don't have a fundamental understanding of basic content? Do you follow instinct because you get the rules in the first place?

A Maybe. It's, well, it's, for me it's like I found, like, the more you know, the more easily you can make connections between things that you do know.

Q Is that what you mean by instinct?

A Sort of, yeah. It's just like...

Q Connections? Making connections?

A Yeah, like, how do you process the information so that you're making, like, valid connections I guess. But it's so hard to talk about these things because I don't know how other people think.

Q Right. That's my job, to figure out what you mean and connect that to what someone else means.

A Yeah.

Q So you don't have to worry about that. Can I give you one more word and tell me if this also describes, and you can say no, please do.

A Sure.

Q So we're talking about instinct. You're maybe making connections is in part, not in whole, but in part what you mean by that would be an example of it, of instinct? Is that right?

A Yeah.
Q: What about the word "synthesis," taking things that seem disparate and separate and putting them together? Is that similar to instinct, saying I think this might be connected to this?

A: Yeah, I mean I guess it's, like, a little bit about creativity. And I would say yes, so you got to just try different ways of thinking. And I guess this word, like, you can't really learn things in the same way that everyone else learns them, like, so that's where it sort of, like, you want to do it your own way, so I guess, like, synthesis, you're sort of like naturally combining what you know to make what you want to know. So, like, I'd say it's valid.

Q: All right. Great. Thank you. I appreciate it.
Q  So the first question is this: No one in the focus group or the survey identified socioeconomic factors as influencing college preparedness. Do you think that is unique to graduates from your high school, or is it less of a factor in the lives of those whom you've encountered in college as well?

A  I don't know much about the socioeconomic status or background of most of the people I've encountered at school. Acquaintances and people I know well, it's just, I guess, not something that really comes up much. But I don't know if I would consider it something that is specific to [our high school], although I may -- thinking on that question, I think it might be something that could be specific to maybe private schools where, you know, it tends to be, the student body tends to come from higher socioeconomic status.

And I say that just because I read in the news of, oh, you know, this such and such public school in this sort of neighborhood or this sort of district that might look down upon or be considered poor or ghetto or whatever terms people use, it's like kids at the top of the class in those type of schools go to college and they feel totally unprepared. So I think maybe it's like a -- and I don't think it's necessarily specific to private schools because I think there are very, very good public schools out there. And they can provide a really high level of education, you know, on the same par as private schools can. So I don't know. I feel like it's a difficult question to answer, but I definitely would not say it's specific to MA.

Q  Just to be clear, it's difficult to answer because you simply haven't been able to ascertain what socioeconomic status your peers at school are coming from; is that right?

A  Yeah.
Q  Because it hasn't been obvious to you?

A  No. I mean, you can make generalized, okay, this person's a little wealthier than this person or whatever. Or this person, in passing, they talk about, oh, my mom does this job as opposed to this person, my dad does this job. And you can kind of, I don't know, generally place people I guess. But I don't really have, I've never asked my peers, "Do you consider yourself middle class, do you consider yourself upper class?" And it's not something I've been really able to tell, you know, right off the bat or anything like that so.

Q  Great. Thank you. Second question: In my research, I found that basic content knowledge, which the focus group described as a subset of academic skills, is not considered of great importance for college preparedness. What do you think about basic content knowledge?

A  I think basic content knowledge is important, but kind of like the question suggests, I don't think it's as important as you may think it is going into college, because I think the point of it, at least in the liberal arts kind of education, they want you to have a broad variety of classes you take, so you have all your generals. So that's what generals are for. So I think for those courses, having that basic content knowledge is helpful. Once you get into your major, and your major should be something you're passionate about, and your major may not necessarily be related to something general that you learned in high school. So I think that for me, the point of college is for, you know, to focus on what you're passionate about, a.k.a., your major, because if you're just doing generals, you kind of do that in high school already.

So I think in the grand scheme of, in my mind, what the purpose of college is, I don't think that basic content knowledge is, you know, isn't really useful for anything besides
your generals, which are usually, oh, freshman year classes, sophomore year classes. And then when you get to the meat of college, you know, unless you're majoring in something like physics or hard science courses or English type literature, things that you took in high school, then they could be. I can't really say, because my major, there was not a whole lot of preparedness in high school for what I majored in. So in my experience, I don't think it was that helpful.

Q  Do you think that most college students would agree with you, or is it just wholly dependent on your major?
A  I think it's more dependent on your major, yeah.

Q  Great. Third question: I've been encountering the word "analysis" quite a bit, in particular in response to the survey that I sent out. Would you call analysis an academic skill, or is it a state of mind?
A  Would it be okay if I said a little of both? I do consider it a skill, because I do think you can get better at it and I think it's something that you start to learn, at least in my case started to learn, you know, in middle school, high school. And you bring it with you into college. And so I think you can definitely improve on that. Then in college, you get all types of data that you have to analyze that you don't get in high school. It's more advanced data, different types of data than the type of data that you see in high school.

But I also do think it's a state of mind, so to speak, because I feel when you consider it that way, there are people who when you say it's an analytical person, they're like that about everything. And I definitely think that that can also almost be a personality trait or a state of mind that people can be analytical about everything. And I think that can be a
personality trait, or if you want to call it that, that you can almost obtain for yourself. It's like when you go through college, you, it's like comparing, you know, the final year of high school to the middle of college. It's like, okay, I'm becoming more analytical about everything around me, not just this class or that class.

Q  Are there particular subjects where being analytical or having that skill is more helpful?

A  I don't think so. I think it's helpful for all subject matters. I don't think there's one where you need it more. I think you need it in everything.

Q  All right. Fourth question: Are study skills personal to the individual, relative if you will, or are there universal ways of studying that everyone must have a handle on in order to be prepared for college?

A  In my opinion, I feel like it's definitely individual. I know there's, you know, all types of tips that you can see on the internet, but then also tips you get from professors, from your advisors, all that kind of thing in college, and high school type study tips. And like me, like, for example, the whole flash card thing, flash cards have never really been my thing. But I've been told over and over again to use flash cards to study for vocab and study for this and study for that, and that's just kind of not how I study.

So I think it's definitely individual, and I think it might take a while for you to find what works best for you. So that whole trial and error process can be difficult as far like, you know, feeling prepared for an exam, like when you're studying for an exam or something like that. But I don't really think that there's one size fits all or some universal formula that works for the masses.
Q  Do you think that most students, few students, a moderate number of students have a sense of what works for them by the time they get to college?

A  I feel like that might be a little difficult to tell. Students, you mean from, like, my high school, or high school students in general?

Q  High school students in general.

A  I would say I feel like that's something that you might have a slight, okay, like this particular, like, for me, I knew before, college flash cards just don't work for me. But I think you have a more general idea going into college than while you're in college. It's kind of like it kind of becomes more of a rigid formula, okay, this is what my routine is when I need to study.

Q  Great. That takes us to our final question, which is two parts. So here's part one: In the end, what's more essential for college preparedness; knowing content or knowing yourself? Keeping in mind we're talking about being prepared for college and that transition period. Knowing yourself or knowing content?

A  I'm actually going to say knowing content would be more important, because I feel like the whole knowing yourself thing is very, very much a process. And I think a bulk of the process happens during college, and a lot of people (inaudible) finding themselves before college. And I think so much finding out who you are happens in college. So I think before college, the content knowledge would be more helpful. Going from, thinking about going from your senior year into your freshman year when you take all those generals, that content knowledge is going to be useful right then and there.
Q And similar question, but the second part: When it comes to college preparedness, what's more essential; having practical study skills like note-taking, for example, or having a particular state of mind, like being driven?

A In this case, I would say the particular state of mind, I think, because something like being driven or being determined or being hard-working, those other practical skills are going to fall into place with that. So if you're driven, obviously, you're going to find a way to take notes for things. Or if you're hard working, you're going to find a way to study for your exams and your projects and this and that in a way that works for you. So I think that the mindset comes first, and then all the practical stuff comes from that.

Q Great. Wonderful. Thank you.
APPENDIX L

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ALL FORCED RESPONSE SURVEY ITEMS

(ALPHABETICAL BY CATEGORY)
*Bolded items indicate subcategories that were integrated into the substantive theory

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<th>Subcategory</th>
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<th>Standard Deviation (N=43)</th>
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APPENDIX M

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND AGGREGATE RESPONSES USING POINT TOTAL METHOD
1. My name is Matt Ridenour. I am currently a doctoral student at Hamline University and I would like you to participate in my doctoral research. To complete my dissertation, I am studying how college students define college preparedness. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that college students believe contribute to college preparedness. Nonetheless, research and writing are dynamic activities that may shift focus as they occur. Your email address was obtained via Minnehaha Academy’s alumni database, per the Organizational Consent Statement provided below. Your participation in this study will involve completing the 29 point, Likert-scale style electronic survey that follows. Completing the survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please complete the survey in one sitting. Participation in this study will require that you be open and honest about your experiences and opinions regarding college preparedness. While there is minimal risk to participants in this study, it is possible that describing your experiences and opinions could be stressful. If you experience undue stress, you can stop the survey at any time. As a benefit, you may receive a summary of the research results upon request. Your survey responses are anonymous and will be aggregated with all data from other survey respondents. Therefore, if you agree to participate in this research, your confidentiality will be strictly protected by the researcher throughout the study as well as after its completion. Again, participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without consequences. Incomplete surveys will be discarded and deleted. All survey results will be aggregated by the researcher himself and securely stored within a password-protected computer. This research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will eventually be catalogued in Hamline’s Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. Additionally, the information obtained from this project may be published or used in other scholarly ways. Also, it is worth noting that this project has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the School of Education at Hamline University. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns regarding any of the research or methods employed therein. I am sincerely grateful for your consideration in participating in this important research. Please sign the attached form indicating your agreement to participate in this study. Additionally, the attached form indicates the confidentiality that will be utilized throughout the study and the publication or presentation of the results. If you need additional information please contact me.

Sincerely,
Matt Ridenour
3100 West River Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55406
(612) 729.8321 ext 1206
mridenour01@hamline.edu
2. **Do you consent?**
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] I provide consent
   - [ ] I do not provide consent  *Stop filling out this form.*

**Required Demographic Information**

3. **First Name** *
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

4. **Last Name** *
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

5. **Age** *
   
   [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

6. **High School Graduation Year** *
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [10] 2011

7. **Current Year in College** *
   *(Please use your status during the 2014/2015 academic year)*
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [10] Senior

8. **Name of College Currently Attending** *
   
   There were 36 different colleges represented in the survey.
9. Years at current college (round up) *  
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   [ ] 10
   [X] 15
   [ ] 10
   [ ] 8

10. I would identify myself as *  
   *Mark only one oval.*
   
   [X] European American
   [ ] African American
   [ ] Asian American
   [ ] American Indian
   [ ] Other

11. Provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the following question: What does it take to be prepared for college? NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21). *

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
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12. Provide at least one, but no more than three, distinct responses to the following question: In what ways were you unprepared for college? *

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

How important are each of the following when it comes to being prepared for college?

NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit
bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21).

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<th>15. <strong>Personal study skills</strong> *</th>
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<th>18. <strong>Finding and maintaining balance</strong> *</th>
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19. **Being able to prioritize** *

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20. **Being prepared for changing social circumstances** *

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21. **Learning how to live with roommate(s)** *

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22. **Not being socially sheltered** *

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23. **Knowing how and when to self advocate** *

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24. **Knowing how and when to seek help** *

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Not Important | Very Important 277
25. **Making helpful connections with peers** *
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26. **Managing stress** *
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27. **Determining personal limits** *
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28. **Having confidence** *
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29. **Being driven** *
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30. **Motivating yourself without rewards** *
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31. Having a strong work ethic *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  0  0  0  20 10 78 161  Very Important

32. Being optimistic *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  0  0  9 16 40 72 112  Very Important

33. Being future-minded *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  0  6  6 20 55 78 63  Very Important

34. Being willing to try new things *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  1  4  0  8 50 84 98  Very Important

35. Being flexible *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  0  0  0 24 60 66 98  Very Important

36. Being able to adapt to new situations *
   Mark only one oval.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not Important  0  0  0 12 25 84 147  Very Important

In your experience, how important are the following broad
themes when it comes to being prepared for college?

NOTE: College preparedness is defined as the ability to “succeed - without remediation - in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2010, p.21).

37. **Academic Skills** *
   (This includes such things as basic content knowledge as well as reading, writing and personal study skills)
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38. **Self-Management** *
   (This includes such things as prioritization, managing free time and maintaining balance)
   *Mark only one oval.*

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39. **Social Preparedness** *
   (This includes such things as learning to live with roommates, not being sheltered and being prepared for changing social circumstances)
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<td>40</td>
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40. **Communication** *
   (This includes such things self-advocacy, seeking help and making helpful connections with peers)
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41. **Self-Discovery** *
   (This includes such things as managing stress, determining personal limits and having confidence)
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42. **State of Mind** *
   (This includes being driven, motivating yourself without rewards, having a strong work ethic and being optimistic)
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43. **Adaptability** *
   (This includes being willing to try new things, being flexible and being able to adapt to new situations)
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APPENDIX N

FINAL CATEGORIES, SUBCATEGORIES, PROPERTIES AND INTEGRATED MEMO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUBCATEGORY</th>
<th>PROPERTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Academic Skills</td>
<td>A. Reading Skills</td>
<td>A1. Deep, analytical reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Writing Skills</td>
<td>A2. Prepared for volume of reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Study Skills</td>
<td>B1. Clear written expression</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B2. Analytical written expression</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C1. Study skills are highly subjective and personal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C2. Finding what works for the individual and for different subject matter/disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Self-Management</td>
<td>A. Managing free time</td>
<td>A1. Temptation to waste time, avoid distractions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Balance</td>
<td>A2. Amount of time necessary for success is greater than high school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B1. Balancing social time with study time.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B2. Because time is finite, balancing time within subjects and disciplines is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Self-Discovery</td>
<td>A. Discovering and</td>
<td>A1. Stress is normal and typical; too much is worrisome for personal health</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing Stressors</td>
<td>A2. Managing stress in a healthy way is critical to college preparedness</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Discovering Personal</td>
<td>A3. Sources of stress are not just academic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Limits and Boundaries</td>
<td>B1. Personal limits and boundaries in relation to time spent on academic work, relationships and personal care.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Learning to Seek Help</td>
<td>C1. Knowing how and when to seek academic help; academic self-advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. State of Mind</td>
<td>A. Drive</td>
<td>A1. Not being distracted while working.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Strong work ethic</td>
<td>A2. Perseverance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Analytical</td>
<td>B1. Working hard even when it is difficult</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D. Adaptable</td>
<td>B2. Self-motivation (without rewards)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C1. Break down and/or connect information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D1. Adapting to a new paradigm with new rules, definitions and expectations.</td>
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**INTEGRATED MEMO**

**Academic skills** are both universal and personal; both objective and subjective. The universal/objective academic skills that students describe revolve around reading and writing. However, when students are pushed to describe more specific studying skills, their answers revolve around “knowing how you learn best.”

**Self-Management** is a category that revolves almost exclusively around time. It’s about how time is used in an environment (college) where time is both an abundant and deceiving resource. Students talked about managing free time nearly as much as any other topic. Their use of other terms like balance and prioritization were derivatives of this very same idea.

**Self-Discovery** is very much the precursor to self-efficacy. One learns how to handle stress, learns their own limitations and gets to know oneself via the trials and travails (both social and academic) of college. This, in turn develops self-efficacy. Many of the students are very much still in the process of discovery, so articulating what they are learning was naturally foggy.

**State of Mind.** Unlike self-discovery, was quite concrete for the students to describe. Mindset implies a way of thinking that students feel is essential to being prepared for college. Initially, “drive” was even its own category – this is how strongly students felt about it as a factor in college preparedness. Adaptability was certainly not restricted primarily to the academic context. Students described needing to be adaptable with living conditions, with roommates, and generally with new situations. The students spoke several times about the willingness to “try new things” as a form of adaptability.
APPENDIX O

CONCEPT DIAGRAM
Academic skills account for only a fraction of the properties necessary for college preparedness; the majority of the qualities necessary for postsecondary work transcend the academic realm and are of a psychological nature.

Theoretical Concept I: When considering college preparedness, knowing oneself supersedes knowing content.

Theoretical Concept II: When considering college preparedness, a student’s state of mind is just as critical as their academic skills.