

EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN A MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC AND DRAMA
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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AUGUST 2014

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of nontraditional college students (25 years of age or older with multiple life roles) majoring in music education. Four participants reported their university program experiences and reasons for pursuing music education in adulthood. Themes related to persistence in college were identified, such as barriers and sources of support.

Interviews, demographic questionnaires, and researcher journal notes provided data for analysis. Although catalysts for returning to school vary, findings show that nontraditional college students aspire to become music educators as a result of past experiences with music and/or teaching. Respectively, situational and institutional barriers pose the greatest threats to this population concerning program completion, but a supportive network of family and faculty helps them to endure. Suggestions for enhancing the educational experiences of nontraditional college students include more diversity in class scheduling and course format, as well as prior community college attendance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nontraditional Students in Higher Education

Over the past 40 years, a remarkable trend has surfaced within the field of higher education (Choy, 2002). The population attending college has grown increasingly diverse, especially in regard to age and life experience. Classrooms today are likely to feature a rich, intergenerational environment; young adults are learning alongside much older cohorts, many of whom bear multiple responsibilities beyond those imposed by school assignments (Choy, 2002). This evidence of changing student complexion is due to a surge in enrollment of *nontraditional students*. Nontraditional students are usually identified as adults who are older than the typical undergraduate population (i.e., 25 years of age or older) and possess life circumstances that compete with the role of student (Horn, 1996).

Although youth continue to dominate the campuses of most American colleges and universities, the number of nontraditional attendees is expected to rise. Horn (1996) concurs that "the traditional path to a college degree, broadly defined as enrolling in college immediately after high school and attending full time until graduation, has become the exception rather than the rule" (p. 1). Given these circumstances, nontraditional students are a population to be addressed in postsecondary education.

The Researcher

My interest in this subject stems from personal experience. The first nontraditional student I have ever known was my mother. Caring for three children, working full time as the family breadwinner, and attending night classes at the community college—she was the quintessential portrait of a nontraditional student. Although I was a young child at the time, I remember firsthand the effects of my mother's return to school. At that age, I may not have understood the motives behind her decision, but I will never forget the great strength she demonstrated, as well as her sacrifices.

My encounters with nontraditional students increased as I grew older. Indeed, my own collegiate odyssey began at a community college. As one could expect, numerous students in attendance there were older than usual, possessed jobs and families, and were enrolled in adult career programs tailored to their needs. When I finally transferred to a university several years later, I myself was considered a nontraditional student—if only in age and circuitous academic route. This was also the time when I met other nontraditional students in the music education program. Sharing in each other's joys, pains, and frustrations, we formed a special community within our traditional college environment.

Along the way, I witnessed several of my nontraditional classmates dropping out of the music education program. Their reasons were variable, but they seemed to echo the sentiments of nontraditional students in general. My curiosity in nontraditional student persistence was piqued after comparing personal observations at different institutions,

some of which appeared to embrace mature learners more openly than others. Furthermore, this line of investigation caused me to question the unique nature of music education programs, especially where nontraditional student persistence is concerned. Unlike the majority of university degree programs, music requires a high concentration of social interaction and individual instruction. These attributes may be partly responsible for attracting people to the field (Gavin, 2010), but they do not necessarily make a music degree more accessible to some. For instance, popular provisions for nontraditional students, in the form of online courses or evening classes, are limited in music. The youth-oriented culture of undergraduate music programs may also hold negative associations for adults returning to school. To gain a better understanding of the situation, I turned to my nontraditional colleagues for their perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to shed light upon the experiences of nontraditional students in music education. Despite their numbers, nontraditional students remain an overlooked population in postsecondary research. The literature overall has a tendency to focus on their collective characteristics and outcomes, but little is known about their individual experiences in specific programs. If developing a comprehensive assessment of the nontraditional student is one aim of higher education, investigators will need to broach more specialized venues of study.

In pursuance of that goal, this study examined the beliefs, behaviors, challenges, and support systems of nontraditional music education majors—all of whom possess

contrasting circumstances and are at different stages in their collegiate careers. A specific attempt was made to identify themes of persistence since nontraditional students appear disproportionately vulnerable to attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Knowledge ascertained through this study may positively contribute towards degree completion and student satisfaction within university music education programs.

Justification for Study

Considering present enrollment trends, mature learners are poised to wield significant influence on the collegiate community. Nevertheless, their increasing presence on campus is fraught with positive and negative implications. Nontraditional students are less predictable in their educational attainments; in fact, a high percentage of these students fails to graduate when compared to the graduation rates of their younger counterparts (Choy, 2002). This may suggest that part of the issue lies in rigid constructs of the traditional college environment. Additionally, older students appear to be highly visible participants in teacher education programs (Berg, 2004; NCES, 2012a). Greater attention to these diverse recruits would ensure the health of such programs, but more importantly, it would serve society by installing educators with maturity and life experience in schools.

Moreover, sources hail the appropriateness of this line of inquiry for music education (Conway, Edgar, Hansen, & Palmer, 2012), and specifically the necessity for qualitative investigation. A vast majority of attrition and retention studies have been quantitative in

nature, yet some believe qualitative research is desirable for uncovering contextual factors that lead to persistence (Tinto, 1997). A paucity of material in music education, in combination with the preceding issues, demands an extension of the discussion on persistence with a focus on nontraditional students.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. Why do nontraditional students seek degrees in music education?
2. How do nontraditional students describe their experiences in a music education program?
3. What sources of support exist to encourage persistence among nontraditional music education majors?
4. What barriers exist to impede matriculation within the music education program?
5. Which barrier(s) poses a significant threat overall to personal satisfaction and program completion among nontraditional music education majors?
6. What suggestions (if any) do nontraditional students have for increasing access to and/or enhancing educational experiences within music education programs?

Limitations of the Study

In contrast to other forms of research, qualitative inquiry does not require large sample sizes to enhance the value of a study. Merriam (1998) and Soy (1997) concurred that investigation of a *single unit* or *bounded system* contributes insight to an entire study while retaining each case's independent features. Nevertheless, this study's findings

relate only to a small number of nontraditional students from a single university music education program and may not be generalizable to those at other institutions. Expanding the pool of interviewees within a single program or implementing a multisite investigation would strengthen the study's relevance.

Another limitation lies in the study's interview format, from which the majority of data were drawn. Interviews allow for intensive descriptions and analyses, but they also form a potentially arbitrary medium when involving the reconstruction of personal narratives. Participants' accounts may be prone to a degree of error or distortion as a matter of subjective memory. Likewise, interviewees are inclined to share only that information with which they feel comfortable, further limiting their ability to report events with accuracy.

Moreover, the researcher's role and past interactions with nontraditional students may have unintentionally influenced the results of this study. At the time of investigation, the researcher was a graduate assistant in the music department and well acquainted with all participants. Any bias present may have been heightened by the fact that the researcher may have shared similar experiences as a nontraditional undergraduate student.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Changing Demographics in Higher Education

Statistics confirm a heightened presence of nontraditional students in recent decades. In 1970, just 28% of the total postsecondary population was 25 years of age or older. By 1999, that figure had risen to 39% (Choy, 2002). Incidentally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012a) recorded that the percentage increase during 2000-2010 was substantially higher for mature learners than for their younger counterparts. Several sources also reported nontraditional-aged students as the fastest-growing demographic in the country, with estimates teetering between 30% to 50% of the overall undergraduate population (Brown, 2002; Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Chao & Good, 2004; Kasworm, 2003; Lundberg, 2003). Projections for 2013-2021 forecast a steady increase in each age bracket for all students over 24 years of age (NCES, 2012b).

What led to this variegation of student bodies in higher education? One explanation is that low birthrates and increasing longevity have raised the median age, resulting in adults outnumbering youth for the first time in history (Howden & Meyer, 2011; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 1999). Bean and Metzner (1985) also claimed that an intricate synergy of "institutional, curricular, political, economic, and social factors led to the dramatic rise in the enrollment levels of nontraditional students" (p. 487). Many of

these forces took shape in the latter half of the 20th century, but an overview of events provides insight into the movement as a whole. Moreover, it illuminates contemporary triggers in society that continue to fuel nontraditional student enrollment.

The Rise of Nontraditional Students

From a historical perspective, the entrance of nontraditional students in higher education is not a contemporary development (Choy, 2002; Ogren, 2003). It was an evolving phenomenon decades before the enrollment surge garnered attention during the 1980s and 1990s. Some researchers credit precursors of modern public institutions for stimulating the first swell of nontraditional student attendance. Surveying an assortment of documents from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ogren (2003) reported a surprising rate of females, racial minorities, low socioeconomic classes, and older students that attended normal schools (i.e., postsecondary schools developed for the training of teachers) in various regions across the country. In an era which recognized the archetypal college student as male, Caucasian, and affluent, normal schools were among the first institutions to democratize postsecondary education by offering an affordable alternative to private universities. Despite such opportunity for adult students in that era, the option of normal schools was largely restricted to those desiring a profession in education.

Greater integration of nontraditional students into higher education occurred nearly half a century later with the Allied victory of WWII (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The occasion is often credited for galvanizing today's nontraditional student movement,

enabling successive generations to pursue college degrees for a broad array of vocational and avocational purposes. The conflict's end spurred a pervading sense of optimism in America, which led to a flurry of progressive reforms impacting political and social arenas, including governmental endorsement of higher education. In particular, introduction of the GI Bill in 1944 rendered collegiate training accessible to an unprecedented number of adults and helped facilitate officials' vision of producing an educated populace. Additional legislation followed, and both federal and state financial aid programs were established to promote extended education. Public interest in adult education was further illustrated through an expansion of community colleges beginning in the 1960s (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In comparison to other university systems, community colleges were specifically recognized for targeting nontraditional populations and thrived on their growing enrollment. Maintaining relevancy amidst changing social demographics soon became a concern for other institutions, and they followed suit in restructuring curricula, practices, and policies to accommodate older students.

Changing social norms have had a unique effect on nontraditional student enrollment, as well. Female students have experienced variable access to higher education throughout history, but never has their presence been more pronounced than at this point in time (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Horn, Peter, & Rooney, 2002; Spellman, 2009). Prior to WWII, expectations for women's work roles were rigidly bound to "feminized" occupations, such as education, nursing, childcare, and secretarial responsibilities. Their increasing involvement in the workplace during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as growing

prominence in traditionally “male” spheres, not only altered the composition of American labor, but effected an impressive shift in the sector of higher education. By 2011, females outnumbered males in undergraduate enrollment by 2.4 million (NCES, 2013). It stands to reason that a portion of these women were nontraditional students with families and jobs.

Economic factors have likewise yielded a pronounced effect on shifting college demographics. The decline of America's manufacturing culture has proven a massive alteration of the economic landscape. Dismantling industries to make way for a technologically service-driven market has consequently forced many adults into low-paying positions or unemployment. A common reaction to this new period of globalization was collegiate reentry based on the assumption that colleges are “gatekeepers” to desired work (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Recessions only serve to concentrate these numbers by flooding higher education with dislocated workers, career changers, and adults seeking to sharpen their skills for viability. Kantrowitz (2010) argued a significant correlation between the economy and nontraditional student enrollment, stating that recessions press nontraditional students to attend at nearly twice the rate of traditional students. A longitudinal study by Kimmel, Gaylor, Grubbs, and Hayes (2012) supports this idea, as nontraditional students in 2010 were more apt to view education as an essential means to remain employed, increase pay, or shift careers than those surveyed prior to an economic downturn.

Identification of Nontraditional Students

As previously stated, the definition of what it means to be a college student is swiftly changing. Society is not controlled by traditional life patterns of earlier generations; thus, recent high school graduates no longer comprise the absolute majority. Indeed, older-than-typical enrollees are poised to create a new image for postsecondary education in the future. However, if one were to consider factors other than age to characterize nontraditional college students, the tally presents a much more staggering picture. Choy (2002), for example, claimed that 3/4 of all undergraduates are considered nontraditional in some manner. Such estimates necessitate outlining the criteria used to identify nontraditional students.

Depending on the study, researchers apply different standards for recognizing nontraditional students, presenting a multifaceted—and sometimes conflicting—description of this population. Gender, race and ethnicity, place of origin, socioeconomic class, attendance patterns, residency, financial status, employment level, family educational history, military service, participation in alternative degree or certificate programs, and similar factors are frequently examined. Despite such variance, age appears to be a defining characteristic across the literature. Horn's (1996) influential analysis combining data from several governmental studies on nontraditional students established a more collective and systematic profile. Her report identified a nontraditional student as exhibiting one or more of the following: (1) delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, (2) part-time attendance, (3) financial independence, (4)

full-time employment while enrolled in school, (5) dependents other than a spouse, (6) single parenting, and (7) lack of a standard high school diploma. Horn (1996) further arranged students into three categories denoting the degree of their nontraditional status: minimally nontraditional (one characteristic), moderately nontraditional (two or three characteristics), and highly nontraditional (four or more characteristics). For the purposes of this study, nontraditional students will be defined according to age (25 years or older) and Horn's continuum of nontraditional attributes.

Models undoubtedly improve the convenience and efficiency of identifying nontraditional students, yet it is imperative to avoid clustering all persons into one mass category. Researchers caution against categorizing nontraditional students as a homogenous group because of the distortion such labeling presents (Brown, 2002; Richardson & King, 1998). This is due to the fact that characteristics which contribute to nontraditional affiliation are often highly individualized and overlapping. For example, not all nontraditional students are single parents; but for those who are, parenthood automatically establishes independence for financial aid purposes and, depending on the student's external resources, is inclined to affect both attendance and employment in varying degrees. High-risk subgroups—encompassing women, minorities, and first-generation college students—present additional factors that compound the issues surrounding a nontraditional student's experience in college. Therefore, it bears in mind to examine these variables in context when studying nontraditional students.

Characteristics of Nontraditional Students: Motivations, Goals, Barriers, and Educational Attainment

Nontraditional students are distinguished by far more than their background traits. Motivations for returning to school, orientation towards learning, academic performance, and rate of persistence are additional features that separate them from traditional-aged students. First, adults reveal greater diversity in their motivations for continuing their educations. Career enhancement is an obvious response, but as Adams and Corbett (2010) stated, "the decision to go back to school is often triggered by critical life events or reassessment of goals and priorities" (p. 4). Critical life events are marked by transitions that Chao and Good (2004) described as divorce, physical disability, or related occurrences that prompt redefinition of life goals. The consequences of some transitions are so extreme that adults are forced to seek alternative career paths.

Nontraditional students are also shown to possess stronger intrinsic goals for their educations (Bennett, Evans, & Reidle, 2007; Bye et al., 2007). Whereas both student types value postsecondary education for professional training, older students specifically pursue learning for personal development (Bourland, 2009; Chao & Good, 2004). The latter is evidenced by their independent learning styles. As self-directed learners, it seems a natural consequence that nontraditional students should excel in academic matters. Nontraditional learners consistently perform better and earn higher GPAs than younger students (Bennett et al., 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002), which disputes negative assumptions about age and cognitive functioning.

In contrast to traditional college students, adults face unique concerns in pursuit of their educations. Returning to school is a major decision for many nontraditional students and usually incurs a period of adjustment with short-term and long-term implications. Nontraditional students are typically less consumed with academic pressures than with the practical demands of negotiating school, work, and family responsibilities (Bennett et al., 2007; Mbilinyi, 2006). Three broad, categorical barriers have been attributed to nontraditional students, routinely delaying their progress in college or preventing entrance altogether. The barrier paradigm formulated by Cross (1981) asserted that nontraditional learners are controlled by forces that are largely situational, institutional, or dispositional in nature.

Situational barriers arise from the circumstantial nature of one's situation or environment at any given time. For adult students, these barriers consist of multiple life roles as partner, caregiver, employee, and community member; the availability of resources to devote towards education; the presence and strength of support systems; and the accessibility of learning opportunities (MacKeracher, Suart, & Potter, 2006). Situational barriers can be as simple as missing class due to transportation problems or as serious as withdrawing from college as a result of family illness. In comparison to other barriers, the range and complexity of situational barriers—particularly as related to time and cost—are cited as being exceptionally disruptive to adults' educational attainment (Cross, 1981; Mbilinyi, 2006).

Institutional barriers, ranking closely behind situational barriers in student complaints, consist of those practices that directly or indirectly deter adult participation. With the advent of open admissions, flexible scheduling, distance education, and career training programs, institutions have made great strides to enhance their accessibility to an adult market. Nevertheless, institutional barriers remain a legitimate concern among nontraditional students. According to Cross (1981), adults' perceptions of institutional barriers may be partly to blame, as these carry as much or more weight than the actual barriers. Furthermore, institutional barriers, real or imagined, may still pose a problem for students in smaller, specialized programs since those programs tend to cater to a larger population of traditional students.

Finally, dispositional barriers typically encompass the learner's personal views on education, including attitudes, values, beliefs, self-perceptions, and past experiences. Sometimes coined *psychosocial barriers* (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982), dispositional barriers among nontraditional students are often manifested as feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy, fear or aversion towards school, and indifference. The power of dispositional barriers is embedded in the fact that they can be imposed on the learner (MacKeracher et al., 2006), as well as emanate from within. In other words, dispositional barriers are equally constructed by people in one's social sphere, the community at large, and educational agents. Although the role of dispositional barriers may be less visible than that of either situational or institutional barriers, Cross (1981) suggested that they are more influential than data would imply.

The aforementioned barriers wield significant influence on the educational outcomes of nontraditional students. It is a disconcerting issue because low completion rates are readily predicted for this demographic (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Relative to traditional-aged students, Choy (2002) found that degree-seeking adults take longer to reach their educational goals and are at greater risk for exiting school prematurely. Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus (2010) underscored the disparity in claiming that nearly 70% of nontraditional undergraduates complete their degrees after five years or more, with only 11% of their younger counterparts requiring a similar time frame. In a study by Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005), part-time enrollment presented considerably adverse effects on nontraditional students' persistence by disrupting the continuity of their instruction, disqualifying them from financial aid, and limiting their access to classmates and professors. Bean and Metzner (1985) also cited components of the nontraditional student's environment (e.g., finances, employment, domestic duties, support systems, etc.) as being significant contributors towards attrition.

Experiences of Nontraditional Students in Music and Teacher Education Programs

Matriculation in certain programs poses another set of challenges for the nontraditional learner. Education is a popular second-career choice (Berg, 2004), but Spellman (2009) documented several issues nontraditional students encounter when choosing that academic route:

Teacher education programs differ from many academic programs in several ways.

Admission to the upper level teacher education courses usually requires a passing

score on a standardized test or basic skills assessment. Teacher education programs also require a considerable number of hours outside of class, primarily in the form of field studies and clinical practice. (p. 9)

As noted, investment in coursework beyond class time and individual study is a top concern for education majors. Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002) confirmed that many nontraditional students enter their degree programs failing to account for extra responsibilities. With time already at a premium for most nontraditional students, additional program requirements may negatively affect their persistence.

Aside from the time commitment required for completing practica, nontraditional students can be dissuaded from advancing in a teacher education program as a consequence of institutional red tape. This encompasses strict admission requirements, as well as extended time-to-degree completion due to the fact that education degrees oftentimes average more than 120 credit hours. Without question, it is both necessary and desirable for institutions to enforce high standards within professional programs; yet, one may question if some strictures created to cull poor candidates are, in effect, driving away good ones.

Although there is no available research on nontraditional students in music education, inferences can be made from related literature. Students interviewed by Conway, Eros, Pellegrino, and West (2010) reported similar difficulties in balancing commitments as nontraditional teacher education students, describing music education as "an inordinate amount of work" in comparison to other music degrees (p. 266). Their response is

understandable given that music education majors are students of their respective colleges, as well as the colleges of education. "The behaviors and knowledge required of music teachers," according to Shellahamer (1984), "are so specialized that many music teacher education programs are organized as separate and self-sufficient departments, apart from the traditional college of education" (p. 2). Music education students essentially manage the demands of two rigorous curricula competing for a limited amount of time, energy, and resources. In addition to attending regular classes and preparing work for those courses, they routinely conduct observations or fieldwork in the schools; participate in one or more ensembles a semester; take weekly private lessons; and maintain performance standards on not only their principal instrument, but also those instruments designated by their methods courses. If nontraditional students are counted among those in a music education program, there is a greater likelihood they spend more hours on class preparation than their traditional-aged classmates (Bennett et al., 2007; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2012).

Another tension reported by music education students is feeling excluded from the larger university music program (Conway et al., 2010; Kimpton, 2005; Lesniak, 2005). Negative stigmas generally stem from the attitudes of non-education peers and faculty, but nontraditional music education students may face further stigmatization as a result of age and, for some, a lengthy absence from music. Bourland (2009) hints that nontraditional students wrestle with such subjects as math and science precisely because they involve specialized procedural skills that have deteriorated over the course of time

through disuse. In a similar vein, nontraditional students may have not engaged in systematic instruction or formal music activities for an extended period. The quality of their performance skills is thus affected, coloring the way others view their viability as music students.

In addition to these perceived deficits, university administrators and professors have been suspected of devaluing nontraditional students on the basis of learning orientation. Biases against nontraditional students prevail because adults refuse to be passive participants in their educations; instead, they are inclined to enhance their understanding of content through questioning and probing the ideas of instructors, some of whom misconstrue tenacity as an affront to authority (Bourland, 2009). Kasworm's (2010) study of adults' socially-mediated experiences in research universities highlighted their perpetual vacillation between confidence and anxiety, and their ultimate desire for respect as mature learners. In selective programs, nontraditional students keenly feel their position in the dominant, traditional-aged culture. Heightened visibility either feeds a compulsion to prove themselves worthy of their degree choices or coerces abandonment of their programs. The literature indicates that many nontraditional students suffer from insecurity upon returning to postsecondary education (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002); therefore, further marginalization only aggravates the situation. Lundberg (2003) argued that nontraditional students would benefit from a supportive learning environment that fosters positive integration with their younger classmates and professors.

With reference to nontraditional teacher candidates, implications exist beyond their immediate university training. The job outlook for teachers, for example, exposes a highly variable portrait according to position, region, and current economic condition. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2012) estimates that employment for elementary and middle school teachers will grow by 17% from 2010 to 2020, which is a rate comparable to other non-education occupations; however, the prognosis for high school teachers (which includes secondary music directors) appears less promising at 7%. Much of this growth is concentrated in the South and West, with figures holding steady or declining throughout the rest of the country. In accordance with BLS predictions, Texas fares significantly better than the national average with employment projections that are roughly 40% for elementary and middle school teachers and 29% for high school teachers (Texas Workforce Commission, 2010). Nevertheless, a struggling economy can dash even the most auspicious prospects for educators, resulting in hiring restrictions and budget cuts. Public service has customarily tempted entrants into the field with the notion of job security, but changing economic conditions are testing education's image as recession-proof employment (Hull, 2009).

Nontraditional students constitute a large percentage of those who turn to teaching as a second career. According to 2007-2008 enrollment figures, education was ranked as the 14th most popular degree program among 45 listed majors for students over 35 (NCES, 2012a). These members are usually deemed *mid-life career changers* or those who began their adult lives in one profession and are now seeking a new direction in an unrelated

field. Mid-life career changers are often viewed as having fountains of experience, maturity, and expertise—qualities which strengthen their appeal as prospective educators. Additional age has its benefits in this regard, but it may also negatively impact one's long-term position in the field. Retirement for educators is of special concern because it contrasts sharply with requirements in the private sector, especially in terms of age of eligibility and credit for years of service. In Texas alone, teachers retire on average at age 59.8 with 24.6 years of classroom experience (Teacher Retirement System of Texas, 2012). Contemporary trends in education involve an early retirement age, heavily-curved pension plan formulas, and stiff penalties for separation, which altogether translate into lesser overall earning power for older adults aspiring to teach. Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) imply that these students may opt to leave school after realizing they have fewer years to receive a return on their college investments. Conversely, this awareness could compel them to switch to less intensive areas of study.

Theoretical Models of Persistence

According to Arnold (1999), older students, ethnic minorities, students working more than 30 hours a week, and first generation college students—a composite sketch of many nontraditional students—experience problems with completing their educational objectives. The body of research on persistence is extensive; yet, the bulk of attrition and retention models are based on historical norms involving traditional-aged undergraduates at four-year residential institutions. Considering the discrepancies between these students and the more heterogeneous nontraditional population, questions abound regarding the

applicability of such models in the modern college environment. As a result, researchers have begun mining the unique experiences of nontraditional students in distinct subgroups (e.g., females and minorities), institutional settings, and degree plans to enrich the knowledge base.

Even as the literature expands to accommodate fresh perspectives, two existing frameworks hold value for examining nontraditional students. Tinto's (1993) contributions are particularly influential because they form the bedrock of university attrition studies. His *theory of individual departure* examined the actions of mostly younger students, but Corley (2003) claimed that "its focus on the holistic interaction between students and their collegiate environments . . . may provide the most flexibility for application to specific environments and student populations" (p. 6). According to Tinto's theory, student persistence is based upon successful integration in the bicameral domains of the university system. In other words, students remain in school because they have achieved some sense of equilibrium between the obligations of their institution's academic and social milieus. Integration, however, must be treated as a malleable term because membership in either domain is an individual matter, varying in degree from one student to the next, and the events in one domain are not without impact on the other. Furthermore, experiences in the formal (e.g., classroom) and informal (e.g., peer study group) manifestations of each domain underscore the interconnectivity between intellectual and social communities. Maintaining minimum academic requirements is a general condition for college attendance, but a student's compatibility with the

institutional structure and culture, as well as fulfillment of his or her need for quality interaction with peers and faculty, is equally important in determining the effectiveness of integration.

Tinto (1993) also described the force of external commitments, to which nontraditional populations are extremely susceptible:

For many such students, going to college is but one of a number of obligations they have to meet during the course of a day. In these situations, the demands of external communities and the obligations or commitments they entail may work counter to the demands of institutional life. When the academic and social systems of the institution are weak, the countervailing external demands may seriously undermine the individual's ability to persist until degree completion. In a very real sense, students may be "pulled away" from college attendance. (p. 109)

Other research supports Tinto's conclusion that the external environment trumps all other variables for persistence in older students. Bean and Metzner (1985), pioneers in the field of nontraditional student attrition, developed a conceptual model that presumes external factors hold more significance than the academic or social factors that typically affect traditional college students. According to their model, one reason the social environment holds less sway over nontraditional students is that most attend college part-time. Part-time enrollment restricts access to the college campus and its host of social activities, which in turn limits the potential for forming close ties with members of the institutional community. Bean and Metzner (1985) explained that nontraditional students

are more likely to have a preexisting network of relationships (e.g., spouses, children, coworkers, friends, etc.) that diminishes the need to develop social bonds with classmates. Support from such environmental agents as family and friends, however, is indispensable for the nontraditional student because it can remedy a list of ills, including compensating for the effects of weak academic and psychological outcomes.

Only a handful of studies (Brown & Alley, 1983; Conway et al., 2010; Corely, 2003; Gavin, 2010; George, 1969) focus on persistence in music. While valuable to the field of music education, these studies are limited in their applications to nontraditional students. The majority (Brown & Alley, 1983; Corley, 2003; George, 1969) is grounded in quantitative methodology and has found that predictors of success extend from GPA to applied lessons and jury grades. Little data has been gathered to form significant conclusions on the attrition factors of music education undergraduates in general. Subsequent qualitative research has enlightened the issue by recognizing variables that shape the core of music students' collegiate experiences. Gavin (2010) reported that negative ensemble and studio environments, waning self-confidence, and external life difficulties impacted music education majors' decisions to withdraw from the program. Recently, Gavin (n.d.) posed the value of peer support systems, citing that participants in his ongoing study underwent one or more trying periods as a music education major. His emphasis on social integration defies most theories in nontraditional student research, but considering the highly communal nature of music programs, peer support may have more significance for older music students than previously suggested. Finally, the

aforementioned studies have tended to center on students formally withdrawn from their major. Exploring the experiences of current music education students may shed light on variables that positively influence persistence.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The Research Setting

This study was conducted at a four-year public institution located in the southwestern United States. The university possesses a historical reputation for educating women, but it has accommodated a co-ed student body over recent decades. The university's music program is accredited by the National Association for Schools of Music and offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees in music education. The music education program is designed to lead to teacher certification for grades K-12, with degree tracks specializing in vocal or instrumental (band/orchestra/piano) music at the elementary or secondary levels.

The researcher's interest in persistence was piqued by the diversity of music education students enrolled at the university. While still the minority, older undergraduates constitute a visible—if not growing—population within the music education program at the university at which the researcher is enrolled. Such a phenomenon led to the development of this study, which is focused on exploring potential factors that initially draw nontraditional students towards music education and increase their chances at program completion.

Participants

This study explored the experiences of four nontraditional college students enrolled in

a music education program at a historically female university in the southwestern United States during the spring semester of 2014. Interviewees were pre-selected by the researcher and the university's Coordinator of Music Education based on age (25 years or older) and one or more criteria as outlined by Horn (1996): (1) delayed postsecondary enrollment, (2) part-time attendance, (3) financial independence, (4) full-time employment, (5) dependents other than spouse, (6) single parenthood, and (7) lack of standard high school diploma. To preserve a diversity of perspectives within the sample, additional factors were considered for participant selection. An effort was made to transcend lines of gender, race, admission profile (i.e., new, transfer, returning, etc.), vocal/instrumental track, and status within the course of study (early, middle, or late). A brief description of each participant follows:

Sophia is a female in her early thirties. She is a vocal education major who attends college full time and is employed through the university's work-study program. Sophia began her collegiate career over 10 years ago as a music education major, but left the program to earn a Bachelor's degree in Development and Family Studies. After a divorce and working multiple jobs that left her discontented, Sophia recently returned for her music education degree. Although she is enrolled as a graduate student, Sophia is only taking undergraduate music courses this semester as a part of her deficiency plan, making her experiences similar to those of undergraduate music education majors. Sophia lives with her boyfriend but has no children. According to Horn's (1996) continuum, she is a moderately nontraditional student.

Emily is a female in her mid-forties. She is an instrumental education major (band emphasis) and full time transfer student in the final stages of her degree plan. Emily has attended postsecondary institutions intermittently for almost 30 years, but she has always pursued a music education degree. During each interim, Emily worked sundry jobs while raising her son, who is now a student in college. Upon his suggestion, Emily decided it was time to finish her education. Emily is married and currently does not work outside the home. She is identified as a moderately nontraditional student.

Michael is a male in his mid-thirties with foreign heritage. He is an instrumental education major (band emphasis) who anticipates graduating within the next year. Michael attended college as a traditional student in his native country but did not complete degree requirements. Ten years later, he returned to school in the United States with the idea of seeking a career in information technology. Michael only recently changed his major to music education after a positive experience working with band students. In addition to taking 17 credit hours last semester, Michael worked in retail as a full time employee. He is married without children. Given these characteristics, Michael is considered a moderately nontraditional student.

Jacob is a male in his late thirties. He is a returning full time student and currently does not work as a result of health issues. Jacob spent most of his adult life in the military, which he joined after dropping out of high school. Since becoming a veteran, he has worked in various service industries with little personal satisfaction. Jacob's decision to pursue music education was rooted in a desire to help inner-city youth. Until recently,

he was enrolled as a vocal education major; however, financial issues pressed Jacob to leave the program prematurely to finish his music degree in Liberal Arts. Upon graduating later this year, Jacob will return as a graduate student to finish his music education requirements and seek teacher certification. Jacob is married with a young child. He is categorized as a highly nontraditional student.

Method

Approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was granted before commencement of this study (Appendix A). To garner a descriptive account of nontraditional students' experiences and perceptions in an undergraduate music education program, the researcher elected a phenomenological approach. The rationale was to illuminate the complex situation of nontraditional students in music education as viewed from their perspectives.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred through multiple sources, including demographic questionnaires, individual interviews, follow-up conversations with participants, as well as researcher journal notes. Participants were pre-selected by the researcher and the university's Coordinator of Music Education. The criteria for selection were based on age and exhibition of Horn's (1996) characteristics. Initial contact to participants was made by email to their university student accounts. Attachments included a consent form (Appendix B) and formal letter of recruitment (Appendix C).

Once consent forms were returned to the researcher, participants were emailed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D). The researcher-designed questionnaire was used to gather demographic information from participants through a series of mostly close-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into two separate sections, Background Information and Education, which were categorized into corresponding subsections. The first half of the questionnaire identified demographic features of each participant, spanning age, gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, presence of dependents, employment, and residence. The second section of the questionnaire requested information regarding participants' educational histories from high school graduation until the time of the study. Participants were asked to submit their demographic forms before the interview phase to familiarize the researcher with each person's background and educational history.

A list of interview questions (Appendix E) was included in the aforementioned email to assist participants in preparing for their interview sessions. This semi-structured interview guide was adapted from previous qualitative studies investigating persistence in music education students (Gavin, 2010) and nontraditional females within teacher education programs (Spellman, 2009). In addition to constructing a holistic account of nontraditional students' experiences in a music education program, the open-ended questions were formulated to address specific areas of inquiry: (a) reasons for pursuing a music education degree at a later age, (b) factors (external and internal) that support or impede progress, and (c) suggestions for improving persistence among nontraditional

students. Prior to the solicitation of participants, the interview guide was reviewed by five professionals in music education, and modifications were made according to their suggestions.

Interviews were conducted on campus during the spring 2014 semester. Sessions were arranged by email or in person, according to each participant's availability and preference. The researcher met with participants in her office in the Music Building for approximately one hour. Questions were posed in the order that they appear on the interview guide; however, the researcher supplemented them as needed with follow-up questions to clarify participants' answers or to extract more information. Interviews were audio recorded with a Sony ICD-PX333 digital recorder. After every session, the MP3 recordings were transferred to a flash drive for the purpose of transcription.

Accompanying recorder software, Sound Organizer Version 1.4, was utilized for playback of audio files, and interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Office Word 2007.

After the interviews were transcribed in full, care was taken to preserve the anonymity of participants. In keeping with the personal format of interviews, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. These invented names were randomly drawn from the United States Social Security Administration's list of top 10 male and female baby names for the year 2013. Pseudonyms employed in this study include Sophia, Emily, Michael, and Jacob.

Moreover, interview transcripts were edited to conceal any information that may have

served to identify participants. This information covers explicit people or places discussed by participants during the course of the interviews. Identifiable names were consequently replaced with generic terms for a person's role, location, institution, or similar circumstance (i.e., Dr. Doe was altered in the transcript to read as *Professor 1*). Capitalization of these terms was deliberate to assist the reader in acknowledging specific entities, rather than general descriptions of such.

Interview transcripts were edited to retain the coherency of participants' responses. False starts and vocal tics were omitted. Extraneous information was removed from the narrative as indicated by a bracketed ellipsis ([. . .]). The researcher used brackets as well for comments clarifying the meaning of participants' words (e.g., "I don't have to spend as much time on those [classes]"). The edited interview transcripts (Appendix F) were returned to each participant for review of accuracy, and revisions were made accordingly.

Throughout the stages of data collection and analysis, the researcher maintained notes to organize personal thoughts, questions, and observations. The researcher kept notes for each participant during interviews and the transcription process, which often spun new thoughts for investigation or clarification upon reflection of each session. These ideas were recorded as they came to mind and used to shape the trajectory of subsequent interviews. At the time of analysis, the researcher continually referred back to the notes for comparison with the other raw data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place as a four-step process: (1) organization of data, (2) generation of categories, (3) identification and reflection of emergent themes, and (4) synthesis of themes. A synthesis and interpretation of findings is presented in the discussion section of the report (see Chapter 5). In the beginning, the demographic questionnaires, interview transcripts, and researcher journal notes were examined several times to establish a sense of the whole. The researcher scanned the materials individually and then compared them against one another, deriving preliminary categories for investigation. The interview transcripts were subsequently coded, recoded, and sorted using a qualitative analysis software program, NVivo10, to spawn more defined categories and subcategories. Data were mined in this manner until themes emerged based on participants' commonalities and differences. During the process, the researcher specifically sought patterns related to participants' experiences prior to returning to school, their personal experiences as nontraditional music education students (including external/internal barriers, sources of support, etc.), and their perceptions of collective nontraditional student experience in the music education program. Information gleaned from the data was finally assembled into several major themes and used to interpret the study's findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Synthesis of Overarching Themes

During analysis, several themes began to surface from the participants' interview responses. A total of nine themes were isolated from the data. These emergent themes, each of which will be dealt individually within the text, are summarized below (see Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of Themes Related to Nontraditional Students in a Music Education Program

Themes
Pre-college musical experiences
Previous teaching experiences
Catalysts for returning to school
Reasons for pursuing music education in adulthood
Positive experiences in the music education program
Barriers affecting nontraditional students
Sources of support for nontraditional students
Traits contributing to the success of nontraditional students
Suggestions for enhancing the educational experiences of nontraditional students

Pre-College Musical Experiences of Nontraditional Students

A common thread among participants in this study was prior musical experience. Pre-college musical experiences were examined to reveal the point of origin for participants' interest in music, as well as the scope of their musical activities as youth. Results illustrate that most participants were involved in music from an early age (6 years old or younger). Environment was shown to play a role in this outcome, either through participants' direct contact with musicians in the family or through parental encouragement.

Participants also responded to taking part in formal and informal musical activities before enrolling as music education majors. Musical training at school began at the elementary level for one participant. Three out of four participants reported playing or singing in their respective ensembles at the secondary level. Half shared that their music education was augmented with private lessons. For those participants indicating musical activity beyond school or private lessons, events revolved around the church or informal music-making (see Table 2).

Previous Teaching Experiences of Nontraditional Students

Participants described a wide range of opportunities for teaching and/or demonstrating leadership prior to returning to school. Consequently, categories were divided into musical and non-musical types of instruction. Three out of four participants possessed some form of general, non-musical teaching experience, which took place in educational

Table 2

Pre-College Musical Experiences

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Environment	Musical family	"... everybody in the family is a musician."
	Parental encouragement	"... that was the first time that my mom <i>ever</i> heard me sing. So, she started pushing me to sing more." "They were always so supportive when I was growing up."
Participation	Early childhood (≤ 6 yr. of age)	"I have done music since I was probably 3 or 4." "I was singing in the church at five years old ..."
	Formal training <i>Elementary music programs</i>	"In elementary school I was in choir ... and then also did chimes."
	<i>Secondary music organizations</i>	"I joined middle school band in 6 th grade [and played] all four years of high school."
	<i>Private lessons</i>	"In middle school, I was in Show Choir and then the Mixed Choir and then also the 8 th grade Ladies Choir ... in high school, I also was in choir all four years." "I did piano lessons for a couple of years ..."
	Informal musical activities <i>Church</i>	"I had been playing music since I was 6 years old. That's when I really started taking lessons." "I started with the children's choir at church growing up." "When I was about 8 or 9, I started singing in the choir ..."
	<i>Self-formed band</i>	"I toured the country a whole lot [playing in a band]."

settings (preschool/extracurricular) or as military training. One participant acquired leadership experience by having directed a unit of 20-30 military personnel.

Most participants additionally reported engaging in musical instruction at some point during their lives. A couple of respondents taught private instrumental lessons, but the majority of participants' music teaching experiences were embedded in standard educational settings. Two of the four participants held non-certified positions as general music/ensemble instructors, and one served as a student assistant to her middle and high school choir directors (see Table 3).

Catalysts for Returning to School

Results indicate that participants returned to school for multiple reasons. Three major catalysts were identified from the demographic questionnaires and interviews, including life transitions, career change, and economic conditions. It should be noted, however, that some catalysts were directly or indirectly influenced by others. A frequent response from participants was the desire for changing career paths. Such participants admitted personal dissatisfaction with their last positions, usually related to amount of pay, limited opportunities for advancement, or poor relationships with supervisors. A concurrent theme was participants' realization that their current career choice would not result in the same level of gratification as a career in music. The economy and critical life transitions—such as a divorce, loss of employment, and children's leaving home—were mentioned in connection to participants' reconsideration of postsecondary education (see Table 4).

Table 3

Previous Teaching Experiences

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Non-musical instruction	Educational settings <i>Preschool</i>	"I spent from about 2002 to 2009 teaching in pre-school settings . . . I've also taught art and general preK-3 and 4."
	<i>Extracurricular</i>	One participant taught color guard.
	Military <i>Leadership/training</i>	"As an E-4 in the military, you have to take the responsibility of a squad, which is about 14 to 15 people . . ."
		"I was a (<i>Supervising Officer</i>) in the military, so that was teaching everyday . . . I had to lead those types of [tactical] classes."
Musical instruction	Private lessons	"I taught private piano, little bit of guitar . . ."
		"I'd taught privately before, but I'd never taught a group or an entire (<i>percussion ensemble</i>) at once . . ."
	Educational settings <i>Long-term substitute</i>	"I was working at a school as a (<i>percussion instructor</i>) for a summer band camp . . . the person who they had hired bailed last second—two days before their band camp started—and they really thought somebody could just come in [and teach]."
	<i>Independent contractor</i>	"I, for a year, owned my own music company where I taught for four of the largest preschools in the (<i>Metrolplex</i>). I taught . . . general music classes."
	<i>Student leader</i>	"I did warm-ups everyday and then, if [choir director] was out, I conducted rehearsal."

Table 4

Catalysts for Returning to School

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Life transition	Loss of employment	"I just lost my job and needed to make a change in life."
	Divorce	"Once I got divorced and was on my feet, my boss was horrible and that was the push I needed to come back to music."
	Empty nest	One participant returned to school after raising her son.
Career change	Job dissatisfaction	"I got a job in my field of Child Development and Family Studies. I worked there for about four years and decided that it was just horrible. I was <i>not</i> doing what I was supposed to be doing."
		"I tried everything else and it wasn't what I was supposed to be doing."
		"I waited tables for a while, cleaned carpets for a while, and [decided] this is really not any way to live—paycheck to paycheck . . . So, I looked at my options and [said], 'Well, I guess I'll go back to school and do something.'"
Economic conditions	Reconsideration of career path	"I realized that I really wanted to go in the music field more than I wanted to go into the computer field . . ."
	Desire for training	"It was a commission job, and most of the jobs at that time—because of what was going on with the economy and everything—that was the only thing you could get [with my type of education]. So working those jobs—I was like, "you know what? Forget this. I just want to go to school."

Reasons for Pursuing Music Education in Adulthood

Participants articulated subtle reasons for returning to school to pursue music education; yet, their responses suggested powerful underlying motives. During the interview phase, all participants acknowledged emotional connections to music. A number of these connections were established in participants' youth, but those memories carried lingering effects into the present. Half of the participants explicitly described music as a familiar force throughout their lives and/or as an integral fiber of their existence. Past musical achievements or recognition for musicianship were associated with emotional responses, as was the support of mentors.

Moreover, achieving personal fulfillment was a regular topic of discussion. Several participants recounted negative job experiences that shaped their view of music education as a potentially more satisfying career. Some participants also revealed that their present commitment to music education was made in response to delayed aspirations. In this case, participants disclosed that they were unable to pursue music earlier in life due to other obligations.

Along with emotional connections and seeking personal fulfillment, participants spoke of becoming music educators to make an impact on others. This desire to contribute to the welfare of society typically stemmed from positive musical experiences or figures in participants' lives (see Table 5).

Table 5

Reasons for Pursuing Music Education in Adulthood

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Emotional connections	Familiarity	<p>"I decided to go back into music [because] that's all I've ever known and all I've ever wanted to do."</p> <p>"I've done music my whole life."</p>
	Past musical achievements/ recognition	<p>"I participated in State Solo and Ensemble contests, and the highest rating I ever got was second division at State."</p> <p>"... [choir director] actually let me conduct a couple of pieces on our Christmas concert, which was really cool."</p>
	Mentorship	<p>"My teacher, (<i>High School Choir Director</i>)—she influenced a part of me wanting to go back and teach ..."</p> <p>"[<i>Middle School Choir Director</i>] always used to tell me that I needed to be a music teacher."</p>
	Personal/professional satisfaction	<p>"... you get out in the workforce and you're just not happy—there's a hole. And then one day, something dawned on you and 'Oh! It's probably the fact that I miss music' and 'I miss seeing how music can affect people's lives' and 'I should probably be a music educator.'"</p> <p>"We've done everything that everybody else wanted us to do; now it's time for us to do what we want to do—and have fun at doing what we want to do ..."</p>
Social welfare	Desire to help others	<p>"I want to go somewhere where nobody else goes, so I can help those kids so they can actually have some type of aspirations and use myself as an example of that ..."</p>

Positive Experiences in the Music Education Program

When asked about the quality of their experiences within the music education program, participants responded with positive comments. At the forefront of their discussions were faculty-student relationships. Participants cited at least one professor's willingness to accommodate their needs and provide emotional or academic support. The faculty's accessibility to students was also mentioned favorably.

The departmental environment and curriculum were additional topics germane to program experience. One participant responded positive feelings of inclusion due to the high concentration of nontraditional students in her music classes and ensembles. Another participant attributed his experiences in part to the welcoming, relaxed climate of the music department. A third participant regarded the quality of instruction as an asset to the program (see Table 6).

Barriers Affecting Nontraditional Students

Participants reported a diversity of barriers affecting their program experience at one time or another. These barriers generally pertained to dispositional, institutional, and situational categories of Cross's (1981) paradigm, but a separate category was added for purely academic obstacles. Of the four categories, situational barriers were repeatedly mentioned by all participants. Limited discretionary resources (i.e., time, energy, and finances) and conflicts negotiating family roles/responsibilities were conspicuous themes in the discussion.

Table 6

Positive Experiences in the Music Education Program

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Faculty-student relationships	Accommodation	"But as far as professors accommodating schedules, they really try to help out, and they're very understanding when you have to be out."
	Support	"... my professors have been extremely supportive ... Even the professors that I don't have [are amazing]. It's the smiles that they have and the way they acknowledge you in the hallway like (<i>Professor 2</i>)."
		"The people here, the professors here, everybody here—they are working behind you at 110%."
		"[<i>Supervisor</i>] is just so encouraging. And she's an amazing musician herself, so she is a cheerleader."
Program environment	Accessibility	"I know I can contact [<i>Professor 1</i>] anytime that I need to, and she will be there to help me if it's reasonable. It's really been a good experience."
		"There's a lot easier relation there ... with the teachers in class and outside of class. There's a lot more openness."
	Inclusiveness	"I absolutely don't feel like I stick out at all."
Curriculum		"... my first semester here was a lot better than I'd anticipated it to be because everybody made me feel so comfortable. And it wasn't too stressful because the environment was very, very relaxed."
	Perception of quality	"... as far as the education itself, it is valuable and it's really good."

Academic, dispositional, and institutional barriers were reported with relatively equal frequency. Participants, however, were inclined to report a combination of real and imagined barriers from these categories. The scheduling of courses/learning activities, health, and cognitive functioning/academic performance were common sources of stress cited by participants (see Table 7).

Sources of Support for Nontraditional Students

Investigation of participants' program experiences unveiled two crucial forms of assistance: tangible and non-tangible support. Tangible support was affiliated with any financial, physical, informational, or academic service rendered for the participant's benefit. In contrast, non-tangible support manifested as actions meeting the emotional needs of participants. Family members and professors were prominent sources of both types of support (see Table 8).

Traits Contributing to the Success of Nontraditional Students

In addition to external forms of support, internal factors were found to abet participants' progress as students. Furthermore, these characteristics occasionally yielded perceptions of success for participants as future music educators. Focus/determination surfaced as a salient characteristic among all participants in their current position as music education students. Intrinsic motivation was a second recurring feature, exhibited through statements of increased drive and yearning for knowledge. In a similar vein, most participants prized maturity and life experience for shaping them into potentially better teachers (see Table 9).

Table 7

Barriers Affecting Nontraditional Students

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Academic	Technological skills	Lack of familiarity with current technology was reported as an obstacle.
	Cognitive skills	"[My first thoughts were] 'Okay, I'd been out of school for 15 years' and 'Can I really do this?'"
	Musical skills	"Being a nontraditional student, there's so much music in my head and—coming back to music after being out of it for a while—I feel like there's a learning curve. And so I have to kind of run to catch up."
Dispositional	Isolation	"That was one of my concerns coming back to school: knowing I was going to have to take Theory I with a bunch of freshmen . . . I was concerned I would stick out."
	Health	"I'm easily stressed because of the (<i>Service-Related Injury</i>), and there are some times where you want to get up and come to class, but you can't because you're just not in that mindset."
	Negative attitudes towards learning/self	"I hate reading anything that has to do with a textbook, even though I know it's important to do and I understand why it's there."
		"A lot of the time, I feel like I cut myself short . . . that I don't practice as much as I should."
Institutional	Course scheduling/rotation	". . . I actually had to quit my (<i>previous job</i>) because I couldn't (<i>work</i>) from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 in the afternoon and take Music History and Theory and those classes that I have to take . . ."
	Faculty attitudes/behaviors	"I've had those theory classes where the professor doesn't care. You either get it or you don't."
	Institutional fit	"I started thinking about [how the college's façade might relate to its teaching style], and so I was a little bit leery at first."
Situational	Discretionary resources	One participant left the music education program as a result of financial issues.
	Role conflict	"I'll do [domestic chores] instead of sitting down and playing the piano or singing through my song about 20 times."
	Relocation	"I ended up having to move in with friends. I slept on their couch for a while . . . now I am staying with another friend here right off campus to just finish up this semester."
	Transportation	"He got here [and] ended up wrecking my car, so right now I am car-less."

Table 8

Sources of Support for Nontraditional Students

Category	Thematic Category	Participant Responses
Tangible support	Financial	"And my husband has been an incredible support. He's found a job where he works incredible hours—so I don't have to—so that I can focus on school . . ."
	Physical	"So, he does the laundry and irons my black pants for recital hour. He makes sure that the house is picked up and he never complains—that's the best part."
	Informational	"[My previous colleagues] are always supporting me. I can always reach out to them for advice or, if I need anything, they're always there . . ."
	Academic	"I really feel like the faculty and staff want everyone to succeed. And if that means doing an independent study or something like that because you need to finish, then I think that [will] happen—if people will ask and if people will communicate." "I'm very lucky to have a job where my boss actually understands [my academic commitments]—and cares enough to understand."
Non-tangible support	Emotional	"My parents—just their encouragement and emotional support, and their affirmation that they think this [degree] is a good idea."
		"My son was music ed. He's [now] a music performance major at (<i>Other University</i>) and he's encouraged me like crazy."
		"... when it comes down to school, [my wife] will not stand in my way and she will be there for me if I need help . . . she's been the one constant thing that's actually been pushing me to get to where I need to get." "The support of the faculty is a big, big factor in being successful. It's helpful because you don't feel alone: you don't feel like you're lost in the sea of students and [crying] 'I'm drowning over here—please somebody help me!' . . ."

Table 9

Traits Contributing to the Success of Nontraditional Students

Category	Participant Responses
Flexibility	<p>“Being that it’s not the traditional route—you’re kind of over here on this other path—so you’re having to be flexible; you’re having to learn to make things work for you.”</p>
Focus/determination	<p>“My every day is either in a practice room, in class, or I’m studying. Sometimes it takes me a little bit longer to get stuff done than some of the younger kids, but by golly, I’m getting it done.”</p> <p>“Well, when you’re a nontraditional student, all that goes out the window. You’re not thinking about partying with anybody and having fun; your job is to come in here, go to class, and try to get the best grade that you can get within a reasonable amount of time.”</p>
Leadership skills	<p>“How many students can you say have gone overseas, have had like 20 or 30 different people under their command—or under their protection—at one time? The military does that.”</p> <p>“... we tend to be more [like] leaders and provide some leadership ...”</p>
Maturity and life experience	<p>“... I have so much more patience than I did five years ago—especially 10-12 years ago when I was a freshman. Having more patience while I am <i>becoming</i> an educator I think will translate into more patience when I <i>am</i> an educator.”</p> <p>“I think we bring experience that traditional students don’t have ... A lot of us have started and had a huge hiatus and then come back. And during that time, some of us have raised families, and being a parent gives you a wealth of experience. We’ve worked odd jobs.”</p>
Intrinsic motivation	<p>“I’m not sure why, but I want to know things now. There’s just so much more of a drive.”</p> <p>“I want to comprehend the things that are being taught. I don’t want to go, ‘Okay, that’s fine; that’s how you do that.’ I really want to comprehend it so I can actually apply it if I ever need to ...”</p>

Suggestions for Enhancing Educational Experiences of Nontraditional Students

Three out of four participants made suggestions for enhancing the educational experiences of nontraditional students in a music education program. Two-thirds of these suggestions concerned the accessibility of classes. Examples included shorter course rotations and flexibility in course scheduling, especially the addition of more afternoon and evening classes. Following thereafter was a call for greater variability in course format, such as online and hybrid courses. A third suggestion was targeted directly towards nontraditional students, suggesting community college attendance as a means for transitioning into higher education. One participant, satisfied with her experiences as a music education major, saw no need for changes in the academic program (see Table 10).

Table 10

Suggestions for Enhancing Educational Experiences of Nontraditional Students

Category	Participant Responses
Course scheduling/ rotation	<p>"I think it would be helpful if we had some of the basic classes offered from 4:00 p.m. on . . . there are minimal courses offered that are not during the day. [For] a nontraditional student trying to maintain their job <i>and</i> go back to school, that's just not an option."</p> <p>" . . . more online classes and more night classes."</p> <p>" . . . other than <i>when</i> classes are offered (specifically the times of day and the course rotation [with] things only being offered every four semesters or something like that)—those are really the only two things I can think of."</p>
Course format	<p>"Personally, I wish everything was online. I do much better on the online classes because I can pace myself. I know what's going on."</p> <p>"Talking to other people that travel a lot to come to class from other cities—the more hybrid classes, the better."</p>
Community college buffer	<p>"There are some exceptions out there, but I really don't think that, if you're coming from a career, you should go straight into a four-year university, especially if you don't have a degree [or] if you're like me, who has a GED. That would be the first thing that I would say: 'Go to a community college. See if you like it.'"</p>

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

Research indicates that adults are returning to college in record numbers (Brown, 2002; Bye et al., 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Chao & Good, 2004; Kasworm, 2003; Lundberg, 2003; NCES, 2012a; NCES, 2012b). Among them, education is a popular second-career choice (Berg, 2004; NCES, 2012a), yet the graduation rate for adult students in general is slim compared to traditional-aged peers (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Even for nontraditional students who persist, their vulnerability is evidenced by the extra time needed to complete degree requirements (Choy, 2002; Newbold et al., 2010; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). As stated by Spellman (2009), nontraditional students in education are further weighed by additional extracurricular demands. It is evident that adults possess potential for strong academic performance in college (Bennett et al., 2007; Bourland, 2009; Bye et al., 2007; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Chao & Good, 2004), but the realization of educational goals is not always determined by personal fortitude alone. Rather, success for nontraditional students is tied to a complex web of barriers and supports (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cross, 1981; Tinto, 1993).

Due to a paucity of information on nontraditional students in music education, this study was designed to examine their program experiences. As most participants were

returning music education majors at the time of this study, attempts were made to identify themes of persistence. Phenomenological analysis, grounded in experience, was chosen as the best method for analyzing these themes in context. Interviews were conducted to ascertain participants' reasons for joining the music education program, their prominent barriers, and sources for counteracting negative influences. Finally, participants provided suggestions for enhancing program experiences for mature students.

Results show that the emotional dimension of musical engagement is noticeable in adults' decisions to pursue music education. They typically have past experiences with music and/or teaching that elicited positive feelings for the profession. Before making the commitment to become music educators, however, nontraditional students usually require a catalyst for returning to school. Once there, adults benefit from receptive program environments, which are readily cultivated by quality interactions with professors. Nontraditional students face a bevy of situational, institutional, dispositional, and academic barriers in the pursuit of their educations, but a supportive network including family and faculty helps them to endure. When nontraditional students experience Tinto's (1993) positive integration in college and are simultaneously able to manage external demands, they feel empowered to finish their quests to become music educators.

Conclusions

Research Question One

Why do nontraditional students seek degrees in music education?

The data illustrate that adults pursue music education for multifaceted reasons, which are controlled by a combination of direct and indirect motives. The initial catalyst for adults returning to school is likely to be job dissatisfaction. Nearly all participants expressed the desire for changing career paths before making the decision to enroll as music education majors. Results show that people's resolve to return to college may be intensified by synchronous factors, such as a weak economic climate or momentous life transitions, giving credence to existing research (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Chao & Good, 2004; Kantrowitz, 2010; Kimmel et al., 2012).

The rationale for pursuing music education yielded fewer concrete responses, but inferences were obvious. A resounding theme among all interviewees was the emotional connection to music, which the researcher attributes as a driving force for adults seeking to become music educators. Participants gave numerous examples of how music positively shaped their youths, instilling within them a sense of achievement or recognition:

When I was about 8 or 9, I started singing in the choir—the *youngest* guy to sing in the choir, the *only* guy to sing in the choir, the only *kid* to sing in the choir. I was singing, going around with them to different places in (*Home State*). (Jacob, personal interview, April 17, 2014)

The tendency for people to find meaning in music also allows them to derive purpose for their lives. For instance, adults may revert to music out of familiarity. Particularly for those engaged in musical activity from early childhood, music represents an essential facet of their identities. One case in point was Michael's response: "So, I decided to go back into music [because] that's all I've ever known and all I've ever wanted to do" (personal interview, April 21, 2014). Past examples of mentorship, a strong desire for helping others, and an overall need for personal fulfillment were attending factors in adults' decisions to go into music education. Even for participants who were temporarily distanced from their art, music was described as something of a "spiritual" calling:

And it was like singing would always find me because, when I was in Iraq, I sang for the Sergeant Major, and the Sergeant Major wanted me to sing anytime we had like a funeral or something for some of the kids that died over there. So, I was pretty much singing when something happened in the unit or something happened in the battalion. I was the one that was singing the national anthem or "God Bless America" or even just "America." (Jacob, personal interview, April 17, 2014)

Finally, nontraditional students in music education exhibit pre-college experiences in teaching or leadership. This observation makes sense in that such opportunities are instrumental for helping adults to envision themselves as teachers. The experiences not only introduce students to the concept of teaching, but they also set up a system of challenges and rewards that serves to shape each individual's self-concept. When

teaching experiences meet or exceed expectations for success, adults embrace teaching as a natural career fit:

I was working at a school as a (*percussion instructor*) for a summer band camp (just as a side job) and didn't realize that I really liked it that much. Because my father was a band director, I swore that I was never going to do that—until that day. (Michael, personal interview, April 14, 2014)

Research Question Two

How do nontraditional students describe their experiences in a music education program?

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study reported positive opinions about the program. They indicated that the framework of their college experiences was founded on interactions with professors. From these findings, an important conclusion was drawn: the quality of nontraditional students' educational experiences is greatly influenced by faculty-student relationships. Specifically, professors who demonstrate the ability to empathize with and accommodate individual needs are highly esteemed by nontraditional students:

As it goes, I've had conversations with (*Advisor*) in the past semester when I've felt overwhelmed. I'd shoot her an email and [she'd respond] within 20-30 minutes, whether it was a small word of encouragement or [to set up an appointment] . . . it helps to be able to talk to somebody. It really does because then it's not just *here*—it's not just stuck inside you. (Michael, personal interview, April 21, 2014)

Accessibility to instructors—either through their demeanor or availability for assistance—is also important for cultivating students’ personal visions for success. This observation holds significance for nontraditional students, but it can obviously be applied to any student subgroup. Emily, recalling negative encounters with faculty in the past, discussed how one instructor alleviated her fear of Music Theory. With her comment in mind, it is no wonder that faculty members form an integral component of nontraditional students’ support systems:

I mean, my biggest hill to climb was Theory. I was terrified of Theory until I got into (*Professor 5’s*) class . . . [he] is so supportive and he will take every second to make sure you understand, and that’s what he concerns himself with: making sure that his students understand material more than worrying about “We’ve got to get on this next project.” (Emily, personal interview, April 11, 2014)

The departmental and/or program environment has an effect on nontraditional students’ feelings of acceptance, too. For adults returning to college, concerns of isolation or institutional fit may arise based on a program’s image. These concerns vanish when nontraditional music education majors feel welcomed in the department or see similar mature students in attendance. Sophia shared this reaction during her first semester:

That was one of my concerns coming back to school: knowing I was going to have to take Theory I, being in there with a bunch of freshmen. I was concerned I would stick out. I absolutely don’t feel like I stick out at all . . . By far I’m not the only person

over 25; there are a lot of us. It just kind of helps—whether you have a degree in music already or not. It's very welcoming. (personal interview, April 11, 2014)

Confirming Lundberg's (2003) argument, programs with inclusive environments held increased value for nontraditional students in the study. Although briefly mentioned, curricula that carry perceived relevance is considered a third element enriching the educational experiences of nontraditional students. Any negative experiences in the music education program reported by participants usually presented in the form of barriers, which are discussed under Research Question Four.

Research Question Three

What sources of support exist to encourage persistence among nontraditional music education majors?

Major sources of support for nontraditional students are family and faculty. According to interviews, both were found to give various forms of tangible and non-tangible support. Family is credited for providing tangible support in monetary form and physical/instrumental services, such maintaining the home. Family members are also viewed as significant agents of non-tangible, emotional support. University faculty and staff members deliver primarily tangible support through tutoring or other methods of academic assistance, yet they may render non-tangible support in the way of emotional counseling. Conversely, when relationships with family or faculty are impaired, one participant demonstrated that they can turn into sources of distress (situational/institutional barriers): "I was not trying to be disrespectful [towards a

professor], but my actions came across as disrespectful. I have extreme[ly] high regard for my professors and, unfortunately, one of my professors just can't seem to get through it" (Emily, personal interview, April 11, 2014).

The strength of family relationships, however, suggests that they are at the core of adults' physical and psychological well-being as college students, confirming Bean and Metzner's (1985) research. Despite problems that may have been present at home, all participants mentioned the support of one or more family members: "My wife has been supportive, even though [we've had issues]" (Michael, personal interview, April 14, 2014). Indeed, a couple of interviewees reported that family members were responsible for suggesting they return to school in the first place. Emily wrote that "[her] son decided it was time to get [her] degree finished" (demographic form). While this familial network typically consists of immediate members such as spouses/significant others and children, it can be expanded to include the student's parents. Colleagues and peers were also mentioned as sources of support, but in accordance with the literature (Bean & Metzner, 1985), they were not identified as material influences on the persistence of participants.

Apart from external sources of support, an individual's personal characteristics contribute to his or her persistence as a nontraditional student. Important personal attributes identified from the responses in the study are flexibility, focus/determination, leadership skills, maturity and life experience, and intrinsic motivation. When asked for ideas that make nontraditional students potentially better music educators, participants

responded with the preceding traits; however, their explanations actually highlight ways in which these traits make nontraditional students successful in college: “I think [being a nontraditional student] makes me a better educator because it makes me a better student. I have to be so much more proactive about my schedule and . . . how I plan my time . . .” (Michael, personal interview, April 21, 2014). Participants’ motives for achieving educational goals is of special mention here because they reinforce evidence on the potency of intrinsic motivation (Bennett et al., 2007; Bourland, 2009; Bye et al., 2007; Chao & Good, 2004). Because such internal factors aid in the psychological survival of nontraditional students, they can be viewed as additional sources of non-tangible support.

Research Question Four

What barriers exist to impede matriculation within the music education program?

As previously stated, participants’ negative experiences in the program were identified as barriers emanating from within and outside the student. Data from the study suggest that obstacles are naturally diverse across cases, but most fit within the barrier paradigm posited by Cross (1981). Results imply that situational barriers are more prevalent than others.

Situational barriers shared by participants correspond heavily to constraints on time. Educational activities must compete for the same finite discretionary time resources needed to maintain other roles in adulthood. Furthermore, budgeting appropriate time for each sector is complicated by the fact that additional, non-classroom requirements are demanded of music education majors. These include classroom observations outside the

university or other teaching assignments, which must be balanced with practice time, concert attendance, and performances. Echoing similar sentiments presented in Conway et al. (2010), Sophia stated that “there’s a lot more practice involved in those kinds of classes [than in] some of the ‘book learning’ classes . . .” and “when it’s one more thing you have to do along with trying to make sure that your adult life is taken care of, it makes for some long days—some obstacles and barriers” (personal interview, April 11, 2014). Jacob extended this idea by commenting on the length of program completion:

Long! My God, this is like the longest thing ever—especially because you know that you have so much stuff that you need to take care of, and you put everything on a back burner until this diploma gets into your hands. (personal interview, April 17, 2014)

Reinforcing Carney-Crompton and Tan’s (2002) research that nontraditional students fail to account for extra program requirements, participants suggested that some adults choose music education without fully realizing “. . . what all encompasses being a music educator” (Emily, personal interview, April 2014).

Competing life roles often culminate in the formation of another situational barrier: limited energy. Most participants felt fatigue as music education students: “Yeah, I’m tired *a lot*. I don’t remember being this tired in my undergrad, and I took 15-16 hours every semester . . .” (Sophia, personal interview, April 2014). In cyclical fashion, depleted energy and absence from home lead to extra problems. According to Michael, school and work are “. . . making my marriage very difficult because I am never home” (personal interview, April 14, 2014). Even when Michael is at home, he complains that

fatigue interferes with spending quality time with his wife (personal interview, April 14, 2014).

A third situational barrier recognized in the study is limited finances. Bean and Metzner (1985), Cross (1981), and Mbilinyi (2006) named situational barriers as being exceptionally disruptive to nontraditional students' educational attainment, and this case was true for one participant. Jacob left the music education program prematurely due to restrictions in financial aid (personal communication, June 4, 2014). Situational barriers do not always result in such extreme scenarios; nevertheless, they exert pressure in other ways. For some participants in the study, returning to school is costly because it requires daily commuting and reorganization of priorities. Michael shared that quitting his previous job was necessary to attend classes, but it "was a big money loss as far as bills and stuff, which then goes back to problems at home" (personal interview, April 14, 2014). His statement also illustrates the complexity of situational barriers as overlapping forces.

Results propose that dispositional barriers generally lead to psychological effects (e.g., fears of isolation, negative attitudes towards learning, low self-confidence), although one's health can lead to physical difficulties in completing a degree. Jacob (personal interview, April 17, 2014) cited limitations emanating from his previous injuries sustained in the military, whereas Michael acknowledged strain from negotiating school with other obligations:

I don't know that taking 17 hours—making that decision myself without talking to anybody—was really the best thing in the world because some days I feel like it's slowly killing me . . . its' not affecting my grades, which I'm surprised. It's affecting my health though, but it's only temporary. (personal interview, April 14, 2014)

Regarding institutional barriers, course availability and class scheduling are viewed as possible challenges to nontraditional students. Most participants in this study were not employed full time, so they were not directly affected by scheduling. Yet, when asked about potential issues for adults, one interviewee postulated the following: “. . . course rotation here at (*Current University*) is something that I would see as stalling progress” (Sophia, personal interview, April 2014). For nontraditional students working full time, organizing life around class schedules is difficult. Unlike some degree programs geared towards adults, the majority of undergraduate music classes meet face-to-face during the day. For various reasons, few music courses are offered during the evening, weekends, or online—scheduling options favored by working adults. Rigid schedules, nevertheless, present a general challenge to nontraditional student attendance:

I'd looked at other [local] universities and basically it was the same story everywhere: “Here's the schedule of all the classes you're going to have to take; they're only offered in these spots; and if you can't make it, then we can't help you.” (Michael, personal interview, April 14, 2014)

Although Sophia advocated flexible class scheduling, she also argued for a balanced perspective. According to her, “. . . being in music education—being a music major,

period—is just going to take some effort and commitment for nontraditional students or traditional students. There’s going to have to be some personal give on some things” (Sophia, personal interview, April 11, 2014). Given the unique properties of a music education program, nontraditional students generally need to be aware that a degree of sacrifice is necessary in order to graduate.

While not a component of Cross’s (1981) paradigm, participants spoke of barriers that fall under a separate category of academic obstacles. Data show that concerns for academic performance can usually be traced to insecurity about cognition or musical skills, as well as unfamiliarity with technology. After being out of school for 15 years, Michael wondered “if [he] still had the brains and . . . wits to be able to comprehend things and learn new things,” but his fears were allayed soon after settling into the program (personal interview, April 14, 2014). Sophia shared this sentiment regarding her musical skills: “. . . coming back to music after being out of it for a while—I feel like there’s a learning curve. And so I have to kind of run to catch up” (personal interview, April 11, 2014).

Research Question Five

Which barrier(s) poses a significant threat overall to personal satisfaction and program completion among nontraditional music education majors?

Agreeing with earlier research (Spellman, 2009), data from the study revealed that situational barriers pose the greatest threat to nontraditional students. All participants faced one or more situational barriers that negatively impacted their progress. Of them,

budgeting limited discretionary resources and juggling multiple life roles were the primary sources of anxiety.

Institutional barriers may be regarded as a secondary concern. Participants referred to several institutional barriers, which sometimes gave rise to dispositional barriers (e.g., stress, feelings of inadequacy) or resulted in further situational barriers. Significant institutional barriers in participants' lives included conflicts with class schedules and extra-classroom learning activities, such as recitals and outside classroom observations.

Research Question Six

What suggestions (if any) do nontraditional students have for increasing access to and/or enhancing educational experiences within music education programs?

Participants offered a few general comments for making music education degrees more attainable to nontraditional students. While not affecting everyone to the same extent, course scheduling, rotation, and format inhabited most participants' thoughts. From these findings, it appears that nontraditional students appreciate greater flexibility in when music classes are offered: "I think it would be cool if we could offer more [course] sections of the basics at different times" (Sophia, personal interview, April 11, 2014). Specifically, nontraditional students prefer late afternoon classes and evening classes where possible. If adults must work during the day, the desire for later courses is intensified. One interviewee commented that, in his previous job, "all the night classes would have been great for me because I didn't get out of work until 4 o'clock or 4:30" (Michael, personal interview, April 21, 2014). Another participant added that course

rotation may be a further encumbrance to nontraditional students, financially speaking: “If you’re waiting for certain courses, it might draw it out to a point that you just can’t spend [extra] years in [school]” (Sophia, personal interview, April 11, 2014).

Fortunately, participants had supervisors who were willing to accommodate their academic priorities, but this is not always the case for working nontraditional students. Most have to decide whether they will sacrifice their jobs to attend day classes, as Michael did last semester, or leave school altogether.

Some participants also suggested more nontraditional course formats, ranging from purely online classes to a mixture of face-to-face/online (hybrid) classes. Course variation facilitates nontraditional students’ access because it alleviates barriers typically associated with attending traditional college classes. For example, nontraditional classes would cut the time and expense of commuting (a situational barrier), which in turn reduces stress (a dispositional barrier) resulting from transportation challenges or a loss of time and money: “I think any commuters, nontraditional students, [or] anybody that has to travel more than—I’d say—15 miles would go for [hybrid classes]. . . . That would be very helpful and be less stressful, too . . .” (Michael, personal interview, April 21, 2014).

According to one participant, prior attendance at a community college facilitates adjustment to the university environment. Due to reasonable tuition prices and policies that are friendly to adult students, this interviewee theorized that community colleges are appropriate buffers for people who have been away from school. They provide a

comfortable, non-threatening re-introduction into higher education, which gives adults the confidence to experiment with their majors. For instance, Jacob's experiences at a community college served only to crystallize his determination to pursue music education:

I think that the right track for [nontraditional students] is to go into the community colleges first just to get their feet wet into how school is right now . . . I would think that the community college would be that buffer for them to see how they like what they're doing—like I did. I went into the music program. I wanted to see how I liked music, Music Theory, and piano. Once I felt like I was ready to come over here, I auditioned. I came over and I was accepted. (Jacob, personal interview, April 17, 2014)

Overall, participants were very satisfied with the music education program in which they were enrolled. They attributed these positive experiences to the receptive program environment and a dedicated team of faculty and staff members. In particular, data from this study accentuate that some challenges associated with educating adults can be overcome at the institutional level with initiative and care for students.

Recommendations for Further Study

One limitation of this study was that it employed a small number of participants. The researcher suggests examining a larger group to see if results yield different conclusions. The study can be replicated in a single university music education program or adapted for

conduct at several universities. The latter would be helpful in determining whether program experiences hold true for nontraditional students in general.

Another suggestion is to examine a population exhibiting greater heterogeneity. Participants for this study were comparable in age (thirties) and, to an extent, family composition (significant other, few/no children in the home), but experiences may be different for nontraditional students in their fifties or single parents with young children, for example. Furthermore, including nontraditional students from other music divisions (e.g., performance, pedagogy, music therapy, etc.) could lead to greater insight. Expanding such parameters would confirm if barriers and sources of support are predictable.

This study revealed that a major factor influencing adults' persistence is positive integration with faculty. As a final suggestion, the researcher encourages in depth investigation of the relationship between nontraditional students and their instructors. Perceptions of nontraditional students likely vary among faculty, and biases may exist that work against the persistence of nontraditional students.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Letter of Approval



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378
email: IRB@twu.edu
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: March 31, 2014

TO: Ms. Kim Ferguson
Department of Music & Drama

FROM: Institutional Review Board - Denton

Re: *Approval for Experiences of Nontraditional College Students in a Music Education Program*
(Protocol #: [REDACTED])

The above referenced study has been reviewed and approved by the Denton Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 3/27/2014 using an expedited review procedure. This approval is valid for one year and expires on 3/27/2015. The IRB will send an email notification 45 days prior to the expiration date with instructions to extend or close the study. It is your responsibility to request an extension for the study if it is not yet complete, to close the protocol file when the study is complete, and to make certain that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Pamela Youngblood, Department of Music & Drama
Dr. Vicki Baker, Department of Music & Drama
Graduate School

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

**TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title: "Experiences of Nontraditional College Students in a Music Education Program"

Investigator: Kim Forgyson kforgyson1@twu.edu
Advisor: Vicki Baker, Ph.D. vbaker@twu.edu 940/898-2724

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Ms. Forgyson's thesis at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to investigate experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students (25 years of age or older with multiple life roles) in a university music education program. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are identified as a nontraditional music education major with possible commitments beyond school.

Description of Procedures

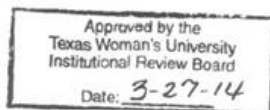
As a participant in this study, you will be asked to spend 1 to 1-1/2 hours of your time in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you questions about your personal experience as a nontraditional student balancing academic requirements with external obligations, such as family or work. You and the researcher will decide when the interview will happen, which will take place in a private location (the researcher's office). The researcher will assign a code name for you during the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. The estimated total time commitment for this study—including completion of a demographic questionnaire, interview, review of your interview transcript, and a follow-up phone conversation with the researcher—is 3 hours. In order to be a participant in this study, you must be at least 25 years of age or older and currently enrolled as a music education major at TWU.

Potential Risks

A potential risk in this study is the revelation of personal identity and data. Reporting will use pseudonyms to protect your personal information.

Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held privately in the researcher's office. A code name (pseudonym) will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. Specific names, agencies, and locations revealed during the interview will also be substituted with generic terms (High School, Band Director, etc.) in the transcript to further protect your identity. The tapes and the written interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within the researcher's office. Only the researcher and her advisor will hear the recordings or read the

Initials
Page 1 of 3



written interview. The recordings and the written interview will be shredded within 5 years after the study is concluded. Upon completion of this study, the document will be available through the TWU Library database, but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. Demographic questionnaires and interview transcripts will be kept together in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office.

Loss of anonymity may occur as a result of on-campus interviews. However, the researcher routinely provides assistance to undergraduates in her role as a graduate assistant. Students frequently enter her office for this purpose; therefore, there is no reason for anyone to suspect that you are being interviewed.

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. No reward or compensation for participation is provided. During the course of the study, the researcher will ask you questions about your background, including personal characteristics (age, etc.), educational history, family situation, occupation, and experiences as a college student. The researcher will specifically inquire about any obstacles and/or sources of support that have affected your matriculation as a nontraditional student. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with the questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset, you may take breaks as needed. You may also decline answering questions at any time or end the interview.

Loss of time is an additional risk associated with this study. The total time commitment is estimated at 3 hours, but the researcher will take steps to minimize the expense of your time. The face-to-face interview and follow-up phone conversation will be scheduled at your convenience, and the interview transcript will be returned to you in advance for review.

The researcher will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and she will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

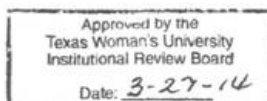
Participation and Benefits

Your participation is voluntary. There are no direct benefits associated with this study, but your shared experiences may advance research in identifying the needs of nontraditional students to develop strategies for their success in college. If you would like to know the results of this study, the researcher will email you a link to her thesis in the TWU Library database.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study, you should ask the researchers; phone numbers and email addresses are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the

Initials
Page 2 of 3



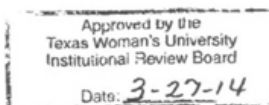
way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant

Date

*If you would like to access the results of this study, tell us where you want the link to be sent:

Email: _____



Page 3 of 3

APPENDIX C

Letter of Recruitment

Letter of Recruitment

[Participant's Name],

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to examine the experiences of nontraditional students (25 years of age or older with multiple life roles) in a university music education program. You were selected as a potential participant because you are a nontraditional undergraduate student enrolled as a music education major.

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you consent to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and take part in a face-to-face interview. You may experience personal discomfort with the content of certain questions. For example, you will be asked to provide information regarding yourself and your family (age, race/ethnicity, domestic situation, educational history, etc.) and reflect on life events that have affected your postsecondary education. You have the option to answer all or some of the questions, or you may choose to cease participation in the study.

Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions.

The researcher will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and she will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Please read the attached consent form and ask any questions before agreeing to participate. You may contact me through email, or we can arrange to meet in person to discuss your questions or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Kim Forgyson

Graduate Student
Texas Woman's University
P. O. Box 425768
Denton, Texas 76204-5768
kforgyson1@twu.edu

APPENDIX D

Student Demographic Questionnaire

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please complete this demographic questionnaire and return to the researcher before your scheduled interview. You may decline to answer any item below. The purpose of this questionnaire is to inform the researcher of which nontraditional traits describe you, and it will assist the researcher in personalizing your interview session.

Hand-deliver the completed questionnaire to the researcher. To protect participants' confidentiality, all forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher and her faculty advisor will have access to and/or view the identifiable data.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Marital Status

_____ Single

_____ Married or living with significant other How many years? _____

_____ Divorced or separated How many years? _____

Dependents (*other than spouse*)

Number of children: _____

Ages of children:

Please list other dependents (*parent, relative, etc.*) if any:

Employment

Indicate your position:

_____ Full-time employee

_____ Part-time employee

_____ Not employed

Present Occupation: _____

Previous Occupational Experience: _____

How are you financing your college education? (*check all that apply*)

_____ Federal/state loans

_____ Private loans

_____ Scholarships/grants

_____ Other

Current Residence

_____ On-campus university housing

_____ Off-campus apartment, home, etc.

On average, how many miles do you commute to school each day? _____

II. EDUCATION

High School Education

Indicate which of the following you have received:

_____ High school diploma Year of graduation: _____

_____ GED Year of completion: _____

University Education

Have you ever attended another college or university? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, which institution(s) and year(s)?

List the degree(s) you have completed:

Why did you decide to attend college at this time?

Academic Profile for 2013-2014 (*check all that apply*)

_____ New Student _____ Returning TWU student
_____ Transfer Student _____ International student

Classification

_____ Freshman _____ Senior
_____ Sophomore _____ Continuing Student (*6 yr. or more of study*)
_____ Junior

Enrollment Status

_____ Full-time (*12 or more cr. hr.*)
_____ Part-time (*9 or fewer cr. hr.*)

Degree Track

_____ Elementary Music _____ Choral _____ Band _____ Orchestra

When is your anticipated date of graduation? _____

APPENDIX E

Participant Interview Questions

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Experience

1. When did you decide to become a music educator?
 - What inspired you to seek a music education degree at this point in your life?
2. Describe your pre-college musical experiences.
3. What opportunities for teaching (if any) did you have prior to returning to school?
4. As a nontraditional student, how would you describe your experience in the music education program?
5. Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the music education program? If yes . . .
 - What obstacles were created by others or things beyond your control (external sources)?
 - What obstacles resulted from decisions you made or behaviors you displayed (internal sources)?
6. What sources of support have sustained you through your progression in the music education program?
7. What are your future plans in regard to your degree program/career?

Perceptions of Nontraditional Student Experience

1. How does being a nontraditional student potentially make one a better educator?
2. What draws nontraditional students to the field of music education?
3. What factors do you perceive as putting nontraditional students at risk for stalling

progress within and/or leaving a music education program prematurely?

4. Which factors do you perceive as being helpful to successful completion of a music education program?
5. What suggestions (if any) do you have for making a music education degree more accessible to nontraditional students?

APPENDIX F

Interview Transcriptions

Participant 1: Sophia

KF: When did you decide to become a music educator?

PARTICIPANT 1: I think I decided to become a music educator probably during my sophomore year of high school. (I kind of strayed from that when I graduated high school.) I originally got into (*Previous University 1*) as a music ed major with partial scholarship. When I went to orientation that summer, I changed my major to Business and then pursued that for a year and transferred to (*Previous University 2*) and got my Bachelor's in Child Development and Family Studies from (*Previous University 2*).

So, when I *again* decided to become a music major, it was after many years of being out of that field—out of music. I was in South Korea where my ex-husband was stationed in the military, and we ended up getting a divorce, so I moved home and I got a job actually in my field of Child Development and Family Studies. I worked there for a little over three years and decided that it was just horrible. I was *not* doing what I was supposed to be doing. Finally, I had the courage to just do it. I probably should have been a music major when I was 18, but I ran away from it. At 28-29, I decided I should go for it and then at 30, I actually auditioned.

KF: Can you describe for me your pre-college musical experiences?

PARTICIPANT 1: I have done music since I was probably 3 or 4. I started with the children's choir at church growing up. Then in elementary school, I was in choir. At that time, 5th and 6th grade choirs were the two oldest age groups in elementary school in (*Home State*). I did choir and then also did chimes, so that really taught me how to read music. I did piano lessons for a couple of years and, stubbornly, I did not practice. I stopped taking piano after I got into chimes actually. Then in middle school, I was in Show Choir and then the Mixed Choir and then also the 8th grade Ladies Choir—that was in (*Hometown*). Then in high school, I also was in choir all four years. So, I've done music my whole life.

KF: What opportunities for teaching (if any) did you have prior to returning to school?

PARTICIPANT 1: In middle school, I was student conductor 8th grade year of the Ladies Choir. That meant, when the director was out of the room or teaching a clinic or we might have a substitute, it was my responsibility to make sure that rehearsal carried on and we got through some music or whatever.

Same thing in high school, but it was definitely at a heightened level. I did warm-ups every day. I went to (*High School*) and fine arts have always been a big deal over there. So like my junior year, for example, when I was Student Conductor, it was just the director and I. So if she had to be out and we had a substitute, [I was placed in charge of the rehearsal]. We were going on tour, so we couldn't waste time. I did warm-ups every day and then, if she was out, I just conducted rehearsal. And [even though we had an assistant choir director my senior year]—because my plan at the time was to be a music ed major—she actually let me conduct a couple of pieces on our Christmas concert, which was really cool. And then we toured Europe senior year, as well; so, there were a lot of times that we were just out in the community, and somebody had to start the ensemble singing. So, I got to carry the pitch pipe and do that.

KF: And was that the time that you began to consider the idea of music education being part of your future? Is that when you decided to be a teacher?

PARTICIPANT 1: Oh, yes! It was a done deal. I think that, even when I was in elementary school, I wanted to be a teacher.

KF: Okay—so as early as that?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes. But then *music* teacher—definitely by high school, that's what I was going to do.

KF: As a nontraditional student, how would you describe your experience in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 1: Does that mean the music ed program here?

KF: Yes. Well, had you been involved in the music education program at the other universities that you attended?

PARTICIPANT 1: No. I'd had one music class at the college level before coming here. I'm basically just in the basics of music classes right now. I mean, I love (*Current University*). There are a lot of nontraditional students here, I feel like. That was one of my concerns coming back to school: knowing I was going to have to take Theory I being in there with a bunch of freshmen. I was concerned I would stick out. I absolutely don't feel like I stick out at all. [That applies not only to] your typical classes like your Aural Skills and Keyboarding and Intro and [Music] History—there's nontraditional students in there, as well— but especially in ensemble, like in Concert Choir and Chamber Singers.

By far I'm not the only person over 25; there are a lot of us. It just kind of helps—whether they have a degree in music already or not. It's very welcoming. There's not a differentiation when you're singing—you're just all singing. So, in ensemble I definitely felt included.

KF: Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in this music education program?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes.

KF: Okay. Were there any obstacles created by things that were beyond your control, [such as] external sources?

PARTICIPANT 1: You mean like personal life kind of things?

KF: Sure. It can be anything you've experienced at home, at work, or here at the school.

PARTICIPANT 1: Okay. As far as work goes, I work here in (*Current Job*). (*Supervisor*) is so okay with it if I have academic needs or something like that—that takes precedence. It's very nice that I don't have to worry about the work-end of it.

I also work as (*Assistant Children's Choir Director*). I'm actually on this wonderful journey in an endeavor with my old high school choir teacher. I don't want to say that conflicts, but it makes my days very full. We have rehearsal on Tuesday nights with the kids, but then there are also some administrative things that she and I do, as well as going over scores and preparing for the next week, preparing for the concert. So, there is a lot of music in my brain. Being a nontraditional student, there's so much music in my head and—coming back to music after being out of it for a while—I feel like there's a learning curve. And so I have to kind of run to catch up. I also have to cook dinner and mow the yard and take care of the dogs and pay the bills—things like that. [I have to go] to all these recitals and programs—which I don't mind because I'm here most of the time anyway—but when it's one more thing you have to do along with trying to make sure that your adult life is taken care of, it makes for some long days—some obstacles and barriers. Yeah, I'm tired *a lot*. I don't remember being this tired in my undergrad, and I took 15-16 hours every semester in my undergrad. Granted, it wasn't in music, and being a music major is very different.

KF: That's what I was going to ask. Do you think being in music has contributed to your time being even more limited?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes—two specific classes I would say for sure are things like piano and my voice lessons. They're very kinesthetic; they involve my body and so it just takes repetition. I have to play those scales. You have to sit and learn muscle memory. It's the same thing with the voice: you have to learn proper vocal technique. And if you sing it wrong, it's like that old saying: to undo a habit, you've got to redo it right like 10 times or whatever. So, there's a lot more practice involved in those kinds of classes [than in] some of the "book learning" classes, which was mostly all of my undergrad. And then things like Theory and even Music History—I can read the book and I actually retain things pretty well if I go to class and I hear it. I'm going to retain it, so I don't have to spend as much time on those [classes], which remind me more of my undergrad (where it was go to class, learn the material, read it in the book, take the quiz, and you're good to go). But piano and voice—I have to work hard.

KF: What obstacles resulted from decisions you made or behaviors that you displayed?

PARTICIPANT 1: That's a hard one. A lot of the time, I feel like I cut myself short, particularly in piano and voice—that I don't practice as much as I should. I will often get home and *choose* to do a load of laundry or cook dinner or put the mail away or clean the bathroom (because my mom is coming over this weekend) or something that's me being 31 and caring about how my home looks kind of thing. I'll do those things instead of sitting down and playing the piano or instead of singing through my voice song about 20 times. That's me—[trying to choose] the right priority. I have a really hard time leaving my house in a state of mess. And when the week is so busy, you just run and you drop things here and there. Then it's like, "Oh, my gosh! Mom is coming over tomorrow!" I freak out and start cleaning instead of practicing like I should.

KF: What sources of support have sustained you through your progression in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 1: The first absolutely is my boyfriend that I live with and [who] keeps a roof over my head. I surprised him after we'd been dating for two years, and said, "Hey, I'm going to go back to school—whether or not I'm going to afford this!" And he never batted an eye. I'm never home (I feel like), and he just thinks it's the coolest thing that I am going to get my music degree after years of not doing my dream. So, he does the laundry and irons my black pants for recital hour. He makes sure that the house is picked up and he never complains—that's the best part. He just does it because he's a sweetie-poo.

Next, would be my parents. They bought me a piano—I guess it’s been about three years ago now. I mean they were always so supportive when I was growing up. They paid for piano lessons. Even when I didn’t practice, they were *still* paying for piano lessons. They helped me fundraise and paid [for me] to go to Europe twice on tour in high school. They took me to (*Previous University 1*) for my music audition back in high school. Like I said, they bought me a piano three years ago kind of like “Hey, you should do music again.” They have always encouraged me to sing in church. My dad is retired now, so when I performed in recital hour, he came and heard. They’re just awesome. They’re very proud because they know it makes me a lot happier being here than out in the workforce doing something that I don’t really believe in.

And then, the faculty here—(*Advisor*) absolutely. It’s so funny [how things worked out]. I actually called in sick to work (where I was miserable) and went to (*Previous University 2*) to get some information about auditioning. I realized that I had missed the audition date, but I still wanted to get the information and maybe think about doing it a year later or something. And in the information, it said you have to get three reference letters. So on my way leaving (*Previous University 2*), I thought I’d stop at (*High School*) and just see (*Middle School Choir Director*). I thought I’d tell him, “Hey, I’m going to do it finally.” (He always used to tell me that I needed to be a music teacher.) I thought I’d stop by and just ask him if he would be willing to write a reference letter for me to go to (*Previous University 2*). Instead, he wrote down (*Advisor’s*) phone number on a piece of paper and said, “Call [her].” I said, “Yes, Sir.”—because that’s what you say to (*Middle School Choir Director*). And I called her and left her a voice mail. She called me back within two days, and she had me here on campus talking to her about coming back to school. She gave me all the information about the audition. She printed out a degree plan and said, “In the fall, this is what you’re going to take.” We went and listened to the choir, and she just kept in touch with me from that point. For five weeks [before the audition], she kept in touch with me regularly. After the audition, she still kept in touch until it was official that I was accepted and then actually got a scholarship. She still kept in touch, informing me about everything I needed to know before school started. In a very sweet way, her emails were just always very personal.

Now, that I’m here—absolutely (*Supervisor*). She’s just so encouraging. And she’s an amazing musician herself, so she is a cheerleader. And the fact that she always makes sure that, if I have academic responsibilities or needs, those take precedence. I really appreciate that.

KF: What are your future plans in regard to your degree program or your career?

PARTICIPANT 1: I want to teach either in public or private school—no preference at this point. Actually, I have no preference for age either. Probably back in high school, I really wanted to be a high school choir director. Then after taking education courses—not music-related—in my undergrad degree, I’m more attracted to a little bit older student that has got more capabilities. I’ve never been interested in Kindergarten or 1st grade because you’re still doing a lot of things [that are not related to teaching]—you’re not teaching all day long. I used to think that I wanted to teach all day long, but now that I’m back in it and also working with the (*Children’s Choir Program*), I absolutely *love* working with them. They don’t have all the capabilities of a high school choir by any means, but when an idea gets ingrained in their little heads and they get it and then they regurgitate that sound [that you had in mind], it’s just *so* cool. They’re so little and they get it! And it blows my mind. So, I could definitely work with elementary [students]. Middle school—they have a lot of attitude. High school—they know a lot. There are pros and cons to every age, but either way, I would like to teach for probably five to ten years out in the real world. Actually, the teacher that I’m working with, (*High School Choir Director*), [. . .] flat out told me that I need to hurry up and finish and go teach and get some credibility because [taking over the *Children’s Choir Program*] is going to be my next adventure. She doesn’t plan on retiring for 15 years, so she told me I’ve got 15 years before I’m ready to take over everything. I really would love to do that with her [. . .].

KF: I just want to go back and clarify something earlier that you said. When you were in high school, you had people in your life who encouraged you to pursue music education and you did try that out, but then you decided to go a different path. What caused you to go down this other path?

PARTICIPANT 1: I was 18 and stubborn. When I was graduating from high school, I had done music for so long. I had started on the All State process and Solo and Ensemble and all these things, and, being Student Conductor and also the social aspect of Choir President, I was totally burnt out. I auditioned and got into (*Previous University I*), but the reason that I even auditioned at (*Previous University I*) was to get away from Mom and Dad. I grew up in (*Hometown*). I wanted to spread my wings and do what I wanted to do without Mom and Dad having any knowledge whatsoever. And so I went to orientation, and I thought, “I’m so tired of the whole music-everything.”

I think I was also scared. I was scared that I wasn’t going to cut it. I was always a straight A student in high school, and I [worried that I] wasn’t going to make perfect grades. I knew that I would struggle in piano. Even in high school, being the Student

Conductor, there were definitely better musicians in choir than me and I knew that. I think when you finally commit to that as a major in college, you already know you're going to a big school and you're going to be a small fish, and I think it got the best of me. I think that was really the main reason, but then my boyfriend at the time went to (*Another University*), which ended up being seven hours away, and I think all that fear kind of generated at orientation. I changed my major to business—just to be weird, I guess. Then, September 11th happened during my second week of college, so that was interesting.

KF: How does being a nontraditional student potentially make one a better educator?

PARTICIPANT 1: I think that, as a nontraditional student, it's kind of twofold. Being that it's not the traditional route—you're kind of over here on this other path—so you're having to be flexible; you're having to learn to make things work for you. It's not the easy way, I guess you could say. I don't know if that would be perseverance or flexibility or anything like that, but I think that definitely would help when you're in the classroom dealing with younger children or even at the college level. Having not been your normal Type A route, it just gives you a little more perspective.

The other part of that: to me, *nontraditional* means probably a little bit older than some of the others. Especially with that [idea] personally, I have so much more patience than I did five years ago—especially 10-12 years ago when I was a freshman. Having more patience while I am *becoming* an educator I think will translate into more patience when I *am* an educator. I have more patience with my classmates now. Sometimes, I'm fairly amused at some of them, but I think I just take it all in stride. So, I think that's something that just comes with maturity and age.

KF: What do you think draws nontraditional students to this field? That's a part of the previous question.

PARTICIPANT 1: I think that one reason someone might want to come back to music education is probably because they've had a similar situation like mine. They were probably involved in music previously, and then picked a degree and went with it, and then had to keep pressing on for whatever their life situation necessitated. You picked business, and then you get out in the workforce and you're just not happy—there's a hole. And then one day, something dawns on you and "Oh! It's probably the fact that I miss music," and "I miss seeing how music can affect people's lives," and "I should probably be a music educator."

KF: What factors do you perceive as putting nontraditional students at risk for stalling progress within and/or leaving a music education program prematurely?

PARTICIPANT 1: I think that [it's due to] personal lives, family (especially). I don't want to say I'm fortunate not to have children, but at this point in my life, I think that it has worked out very well for me that I don't have to worry about kids getting sick. I don't know how [single parents] could go back to school—not just for music ed, but for anything—if you had kids and were trying to support them on one income. That just blows my mind. Even if you're a dual parent household, if someone gives up their income to go back to school, that's some major family changes. I think that, even if a nontraditional student did end up going back to school to try that out, I can see that stalling progress or leaving the field before they actually graduate would definitely be a high risk, especially if they have kids. Even if you get to start and go back to school, the car [may] break down and you end up needing to go back to work to pay for it. I guess that life just gets in the way.

Specifically here at (*Current University*), I would say that most of the music education graduate-level courses, at least are in the evening, so that does help when someone is trying to work *and* go to school. But the course rotation here at (*Current University*) is something that I would see as stalling progress. If you're waiting for certain courses, it might draw it out to a point that you just can't spend four years in grad school. Whereas, you're expecting two years or something like that, then four years is just not feasible for being without an income. So, an income is the biggie, I guess.

KF: Back to what you were saying about the courses: you said graduate-level courses are offered in the evenings, so that seems to accommodate nontraditional students. Most music courses that you're taking happen in the day. Does that cause any trouble for you?

PARTICIPANT 1: For me, no, because I'm able to be a full time student. So, I'm not trying to maintain a previous job and take classes, which are offered during the daytime. If I were to need to maintain a previous job or a normal job, [it would not be as feasible]. Taking classes during the day is a necessity as a music major, especially [when] finishing your undergraduate courses. So, I guess it wouldn't even be an option to be a music major if you couldn't devote some time during the day to being a student. I've worked retail before, I've waited tables before—I don't want to have to go back and work until 2:00 a.m. again. Fortunately, I don't have to, but I could see how that would be hard. It would be an obstacle for someone, and it could also stall their progress or make them leave their studies because it's hard to work and go to school.

KF: Which factors do you perceive as being helpful to successful completion of a music education program?

PARTICIPANT 1: Which factors—here at (*Current University*) or just as a nontraditional student?

KF: Any or all. Anything that comes to mind.

PARTICIPANT 1: As a nontraditional student having some work experience out in the work force, I really think that a lot of those things that I learned in the workforce are helping me: work *and* go to school (timing that, specifically), deadlines (those are not foreign concepts to me), and then—specifically for the music ed program—I’m more appreciative. Being a nontraditional student and being out of music for a while, there’s more of a yearning for the knowledge. I want to practice more. I feel like I’m cheating myself when I don’t put the effort into really learning the Theory concepts or into knowing my voice songs and being able to perform them to [my] best ability. I think those factors would have been missing if, personally, I was doing this at 18-19-20 years old.

And because of being a nontraditional student, I am kind of on a timeline. I want to finish and have a real paycheck again. So, I’m fairly motivated to take as many hours as I physically can to be able to get the work done and work part-time to pay my minimal bills. I think that those things will help me finish this [degree].

KF: Is there anything specifically here at the university that has contributed to your success in progressing [through the program]?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes. That’s hard to pinpoint. I feel like my support system is definitely one [factor]—of course, (*Boyfriend*), my parents. (*Boyfriend*) is more like in the monetary or substantial part of it because I have a roof over my head so I can do this. My parents—just their encouragement and emotional support and their affirmation that they think this [degree] is a good idea. That means a lot to me.

Also, the faculty being willing to sit down with me, especially when it comes to advising and “let’s figure this huge puzzle out.” And then them being willing to answer questions. You’ve even done that—you’ve helped me with some Theory homework and that definitely is going to help me finish that course. It’s the same thing with piano. (*Professor 6*) has taken the time to explain a couple of the V7 chords and why we are doing this chord progression—those kinds of things mean a lot to me. I don’t know that

I'd have asked them when I was younger—if I was doing this the first time around. I'm not sure why, but I want to know things now. There's just so much more of a drive. I just really want to understand—I do. I'm worried that I won't be able to effectively convey it to my students at some point, so I want to have the absolute best grasp of the concepts that I can. So, the support for helping me to understand those [concepts] is probably the biggest factor that will help me finish this.

KF: What suggestions (if any) do you have for making a music education degree more accessible to nontraditional students?

PARTICIPANT 1: I love (*Current University*), but they would be specifically related to how we have things set up. As you know, we're growing, which is a wonderful thing. I feel like, a lot of the time, we're kind of stuck in the way we used to do things—which worked when we were smaller. Specifically as a nontraditional student trying to get a Music Education degree, I think it would be helpful if we had some of the basic classes offered from 4:00 p.m. on—and there are a couple. I mean, I know (*Professor 7*) has a piano class at 4:30, but there are minimal courses offered that are not during the day. [For] a nontraditional student used to having [worked], or trying to maintain their job *and* go back to school, that's just not an option. Now, would offering more classes in the evening be an option here at (*Current University*)? The way we are right now, probably not. But in a perfect world, I think it would be cool if we could offer more [course] sections of the basics at different times.

Maybe this is a narrow point of view, but—other than *when* classes are offered (specifically the times of day and the course rotation [with] things only being offered every four semesters or something like that)—those are really the only two things I can think of. I really feel like the faculty and staff want everyone to succeed. And if that means doing an independent study or something like that because you need to finish, then I think that [will] happen—if people will ask and if people will communicate.

This may sound hard-nosed, but being in music education—being a music major, period—is just going to take some effort and commitment for nontraditional students or traditional students. There's going to have to be some personal give on some things. You're just going to have to commit to being a music major. And then, specifically [for a] music ed person, there's going to be semesters where you're doing student teaching. Realistically, you can't be working an 8:00 to 5:00 [job] *and* do student teaching. At some point, you have to have the personal commitment—so that's not really a

suggestion; that's just the way it is. I'm trying to think of more suggestions, but I can't really think of any.

KF: That's fine. Thank you again for talking with me.

Participant 2: Emily

KF: When did you decide to become a music educator?

PARTICIPANT 2: Probably in the fourth grade. I was chosen to conduct the middle school band that had come over for lack of recruitment process, and from that moment I knew that's what I wanted to do. And right out of high school, I went straight to (*Previous University*) and started that process.

KF: So when you went to college, [music] was your major? You weren't in another program?

PARTICIPANT 2: No, I've always been a music education major.

KF: Would you describe your pre-college musical experiences?

PARTICIPANT 2: I joined middle school band in 6th grade. I started on (*primary woodwind*); they moved me to (*secondary woodwind*) in the 8th grade. I fought it like crazy because I didn't really want to play it—I thought it was horrible!—but it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I absolutely loved playing that. I was a member of All-Region and did All-District, Region, Area Band and Orchestra. I played in the (*Local Symphony*) and I participated in State Solo and Ensemble contests, and the highest rating I ever got was second division at State. But, yeah, all four years of high school.

KF: What opportunities for teaching, if any, did you have prior to returning to school?

PARTICIPANT 2: Actually, I spent from about 2002 to 2009 teaching in preschool settings. I taught music and I've also taught art and just general pre-K3 and 4. I, for a year, owned my own music company where I taught for four of the largest pre-schools in the (*Metroplex*). I taught private piano, little bit of guitar, and general music classes.

KF: As a nontraditional student, how would you describe your experience in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 2: Here, it's very accommodating. I don't feel that I have to miss a lot of things. Well, let me back up a little bit. It was that way last semester, then my husband got a job (*elsewhere in the state*) and now I am at school six hours away from where my husband is working. And that's been the situation where I'm kind of stuck here because I am so far into the program. Between that and financial aid, I can't leave—not that I want to leave, but that's just where I am at right now. But as far as professors

accommodating schedules, they really try to help out, and they're very understanding when you have to be out.

KF: How would you describe [the experiences at your previous university]?

PARTICIPANT 2: When I was at (*Previous University 1*), it was a little bit more rigid just because it's a different department. The whole feel of the department is completely different. It's much more stringent there as opposed to here. And then again I was 18-19 at the time, so I didn't have as many responsibilities. I was more of a traditional student there.

KF: Can you eliminate what kept you from getting a degree a little bit earlier?

PARTICIPANT 2: Yeah. My father became ill. He had a heart attack. I was there for a year and then I returned and my dad had his heart attack. My dad and I were really close and, between me needing to go home and help out, it was very mentally draining. My grades slipped and so I went on probation for a little while, and then I returned once again. I just needed to be home to help my parents out. I went back home and then that's when I went to (*Community College 1*). But there at (*Community College 1*), it was very similar to here where they're very helpful if you needed to be out for stuff and very supportive. So, it was easier being there.

KF: We'll fast forward to your experience at present. Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 2: Not really. I've had an issue, but I'm hoping it's working itself out. Other than that, it's been wonderful. This semester has been kind of difficult with (*Advisor*) being out because she's such a strong presence here in the music department, and I know several of my peers feel the same way, but I love being here.

KF: Do you think with your husband being away, have there been any obstacles at home?

PARTICIPANT 2: Oh, yeah. We've got obstacles going on right now. Everything happened so quickly. He got the job in November. He had to report to work like the very next week. There was no time; I got stuck at the house and we had to quickly pack everything up while we were on Christmas break and get everything back into storage. He had to drive up on a weekend—he works 12- to 14-hour shifts—and he had worked, like, a double shift to 9:00 and then wasn't able to have any sleep. He got here [and] ended up wrecking my car, so right now I am car-less.

I ended up having to move in with friends. I slept on their couch for a while and then things went awry there, and so now I am staying with another friend here right off campus to just finish up this semester. That house that [husband] ended up moving into down there [has] electrical wiring problems. The city wants to condemn the house, so we found a house while I was down there last weekend, and right now he's having to deal with the former landlord and trying to get everything set up—things that he's used to me taking care of—on top of working a 12- to 14-hour shift and taking care of things at home.

He's really having a hard time. He knows that I'm dealing with a lot of stress right now up here with certain things, and his stress and my stress aren't matching right now.

KF: Would you say that it's a fair assumption that what's going on at home is affecting [specifically] the things going on here?

PARTICIPANT 2: Oh, yeah—totally.

KF: Were there any obstacles that resulted from a decision you made or behavior you displayed?

PARTICIPANT 2: Unfortunately, I was not trying to be disrespectful [towards a professor], but my actions came across as disrespectful. I have extreme[ly] high regard for my professors and, unfortunately, one of my professors just can't seem to get through it. Sorry. . .

KF: Would you like a break?

PARTICIPANT 2: No, it's okay. We can go on.

KF: We'll go to the next question: what sources of support have sustained you through your progression in music education program?

PARTICIPANT 2: My son, my husband. My son was music ed. He's [now] a music performance major at (*Other University*) and he's encouraged me like crazy and actually got to see me perform for the first time on my recital (*recently*) which was really a neat experience. And my husband has been an incredible support. And he's found a job where he works incredible hours—so that I don't have to—so that I can focus on school because he knew that the semesters were getting more difficult closer to graduation.

And then, my professors have been extremely supportive. (*Professor 1* and *Advisor*) are amazing. Even the professors that I don't have [are amazing]. It's the smiles that they have and the way they acknowledge you in the hallway like (*Professor 2*). I don't have a class with her and she always [has a smile]. (*Professor 3*)—it's the same way. (*Professor 4*)—he's hard as nails and he's really hard on me, but I know in the end, I'll be a better person for it.

KF: What are your future plans in regard to your degree program or your career?

PARTICIPANT 2: I can see the light at the end of the tunnel! I'm supposed to graduate Fall 2015. I plan on trying to find a job (*Elsewhere in State*) where we're located now, which in a way is not a bad thing because I have a lot of connections (*there*) since that's where I'm from. Back when I was at (*State Music Educators' Convention*), I was able to meet up with a lot of former directors and former peers who are teaching in that area, and they got their planners out and they know when I'm graduating and trying to help out in that manner. But I also plan on going to graduate school at (*Another University*) most likely. The only reason I wouldn't be here is because we're down there, and my husband said "That's it. You got to come home." I plan on pursuing a degree in conducting.

KF: How does being a nontraditional student potentially make one a better educator?

PARTICIPANT 2: I think we bring experience that traditional students don't have. Many nontraditional students have had a wealth of experience in areas that they probably would not have normally gone down. A lot of us have started and had a huge hiatus and then come back. And during that time, some of us have raised families and being a parent gives you a wealth of experience. We've worked odd jobs. For myself, I've been a 911 dispatcher, I've worked in a convenience store, I've worked in a call center—things that I never saw myself doing when I was 18-19-20 years old.

KF: Do you think that skills you've learned in other careers—your other positions—have contributed [to your pursuit of a music education degree]?

PARTICIPANT 2: Oh, yeah—definitely. [Take for instance, being a 911 operator]—I mean in that kind of position you have to be focused. You have to be organized and those things I have carried over. Something as simple as counting back change, I never was really good at. I learned that when I was working at the convenience store. And I know it sounds silly, but I feel like just that has helped out with everyday applications in my degree.

KF: Why do you think that nontraditional students are drawn to this field?

PARTICIPANT 2: You mean to music?

KF: Yes, specifically to music education.

PARTICIPANT 2: There are some that are out there that have degrees, and they've gone out in those fields and they're just not [satisfied]. They had some bit of music and they got out there and they're like "This isn't what I wanted to do."

I can't say that [music education] doesn't have an age limit because obviously physical factors come into play, but in a way it doesn't. Being a music educator doesn't mean that everybody is going to be on a podium; but, by golly, they can bring stuff to older students—other nontraditional students—via lessons. They can bring a lot to elementary students because a lot of times elementary students gravitate to those older instructors. So, I think the ability that we have to earn a degree in something that encases so many ages is what is appealing to nontraditional students.

KF: What factors do you perceive as putting nontraditional students at risk for stalling progress within and/or leaving the program prematurely?

PARTICIPANT 2: If it is in fact that you have been out for so long, I don't know that some nontraditional students come back in realizing exactly what all encompasses being a music educator. I can tell you the program has changed drastically since I was out 16-17 years ago. It's changed in good ways. There are things that we study now that we didn't when I was in before, and I have friends that are either instructors at other universities or students that are going to other schools and I know it's pretty much the same across the board. So I think that there are physical limitations sometimes. You've got to have energy to be a music educator, and sometimes the energy level may not be there. And there may be [age-related diseases] that thwart things. Older students may have those when they are coming into this program. So I think physical limitations can really halt things or put an early end to things.

KF: What factors, in contrast, do you perceive as being helpful to successful completion of a music education program?

PARTICIPANT 2: Experience—the fact that we tend to be more focused. I can sit in the lounge and listen to the kids: "Oh, we're going to go out and do *this* this weekend!" and "Oh, I got so drunk!" And I'm sitting there going, "Oh, yeah—I was there, like, 20 some

odd years ago,” but that’s not my weekend. My every day is either in a practice room, in class, or I’m studying. Sometimes it takes me a little bit longer to get stuff done than some of the younger kids and stuff, but by golly, I’m getting it done. So I’m focused. I’m getting it done. I have a lot of friends that are like “Oh, what was due?” and we’re more on the game of what is due and when it’s due and it has to be dealt with. So we meet the deadlines and stuff like that. And we tend to be more [like] leaders and provide some leadership, and I think that helps out, too.

KF: What suggestions, if any, do you have for making a music education degree more accessible to nontraditional students?

PARTICIPANT 2: Gee, I don’t know. That’s a hard question because, primarily here, everything is pretty accessible and everybody is willing to help—even the professors. I mean, my biggest hill to climb was theory. I was terrified of theory until I got into (*Professor 5’s*) class. I absolutely love the class now. I eat it up. I did get a little panicked when we did the 12 tone rows, but it’s all good! And he’s so supportive and he will take every second to make sure you understand, and that’s what he concerns himself with: making sure that his students understand material more than worrying about “We’ve got to get on this next project” because I’ve had those theory classes where the professor doesn’t care. You either get it or you don’t. But that’s not just (*Professor 5*)—that carries throughout this department. So I don’t really know how to make things better when it’s pretty accessible—everybody you can talk to.

KF: All right. Well, that concludes our interview.

Participant 3: Michael

KF: When did you decide to become a music educator?

PARTICIPANT 3: About six months before I enrolled. I was working at a school as a (*percussion instructor*) for a summer band camp (just as a side job) and didn't realize that I really liked it that much. Because my father was a band director, I swore that I was never going to do that—until that day.

KF: When you say six months—is that before you enrolled [at this institution]?

PARTICIPANT 3: Yes.

KF: What, exactly, inspired you to seek a music education degree at this point in your life (if previously you thought you weren't going to go down this path)?

PARTICIPANT 3: I had been playing music since I was 6 years old. That's when I really started taking lessons. I've always had music in my life. I'm constantly listening to music. If there's no music playing, I go absolutely insane. I can't sit in the room with no noise; there has to be some kind of something going on. It drives me insane.

So, I was in school for IT basically—the IT field, as far as working in Help Desk and stuff like that. I was kind of thinking about [music], and as I was teaching this summer band camp, I really started thinking more deeply about “Do I really want to do this computer thing or is [music] more in the alley of something that I would like to do?” And after a couple of conversations with some other people, I realized that I really wanted to go in the music field more than I wanted to go into the computer field—even though in the computer field, I could probably make a ton more money. But I don't think I'd be as happy as if I was in the music field.

KF: You've already described some of your pre-college musical experiences, but do you have anything else to add?

PARTICIPANT 3: I toured the country a whole lot. I didn't make a whole lot of money, and that's basically how I ended up wanting to go back to school—because I realized I wasn't going to make a living off of just playing and being in a band all the time, just driving around aimlessly. Well, not aimlessly—we drove from town to town—but it wasn't going to pay the bills. And it's not that I'm going into this to just make money—that's not what I'm saying—but I needed something more concrete if I wanted to have a

family and hopefully one day to be able to afford a house and a car that's not 15 years old with 250,000 miles. That'd be nice.

KF: What opportunities for teaching did you have prior to returning to school?

PARTICIPANT 3: Teaching that summer band camp was basically my first real teaching experience. I'd taught privately before, but I'd never taught a group or an entire (*percussion ensemble*) at once, so the first day was pretty challenging for me. But I had the support of the band directors there, and they were helping me out and kind of guiding me through the first couple of days. And after that they were like, "You're good. Just go for it. Just do what you think is best and just get them to play." It basically was one of those things where the person who they had hired just kind of bailed last second—two days before their band camp started—and they really thought somebody could just come in. And they basically said, "If you can just get them to play enough through it—they can get from Point A to Point B without stopping, even if it's not the cleanest playing—and it sounds decent, then that's your goal." Well, I was like, "That's a pretty low goal, so I think that I could probably meet that." That was my first concrete teaching experience, and hopefully I got them a little further than just playing from Point A to Point B.

KF: Did you have any other opportunities after that point?

PARTICIPANT 3: Yeah. The year after I taught that band camp, I was actually hired full time with the band as their (*Percussion Instructor*). I was there for two years after that.

KF: As a nontraditional student, how would you describe your experience in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 3: I'd say very good actually—surprisingly better than I thought it was going to be when I first enrolled.

KF: Can you elaborate on what your expectations were and how they were changed?

PARTICIPANT 3: Let me talk about my first impression. I came up here to meet (*Advisor*). Because of my work schedule—and I was working at the school at that point—my schedule was very constricted as far as "when can I take classes?", "which classes do I need to take?", "what scheduling here at (*Current University*) will work with my work schedule?" And I'd looked at other [local] universities and basically it was the same story everywhere: "Here's the schedule of all the classes you're going have to take;

they're only offered in these spots; and if you can't make it, then we can't help you." Came here, talked to (*Advisor*) and basically her answer was

"Well, that's unacceptable. If you want an education, we're here to educate you and we're going make it work. There might be some classes you're going to have to take during the day, and if we cannot, there's no way to accommodate you for that. But everything else, we can work something out."

So that was, for me, a big relief right away. I will actually be able to do this and hopefully achieve my dream in an okay amount of time and graduate and have my certificate and everything else and be able to go out and teach. [. . .] So meeting her was a very good impression.

Then I walked around the campus a little bit and realized it was kind of an older campus and it's kind of neat, but is the teaching style going to be reflected and is it going to be an old style of teaching or new style of teaching? I started thinking about that, and so I was a little bit leery at first. As I started seeing some of the faculty walking around and I was "Okay, I'd been out of school for 15 years" and "Can I really do this?" So, I was pretty nervous at first. But after the first couple of days—first couple of classes—I realized all the teachers were very down to earth. They're very much like us. There's always a separation obviously between teacher and students—more separations in different levels. Obviously, you don't want to be too friendly with high school kids because then they'll just walk all over you, they'll think you're just their friend, and there's no discipline. But there's also a level you have to connect with them, so you have to have *some* friendship there. But for college students, I think that the line is a little bit less strict. So, you realize that the teachers are really working people and they're trying to educate you to become a working person, so there's a lot easier relation there as far as conversations to be had with the teacher in class and outside of class. There's a lot more openness. If I go to a teacher and say, "I have this specific problem," in high school my teacher [would have said] "Here's how to solve that." In college they might say, "Well, I had the same kind of experience. Here's what happened when I went through it." It made me feel a lot more at ease. So, my first semester here was a lot better than I'd anticipated it to be because everybody made me feel so comfortable. And it wasn't too stressful because the environment was very, very relaxed.

KF: I just want to clarify a couple of things you said. When you mentioned an *older* campus, exactly what did you mean by that—physically or the population?

PARTICIPANT 3: Physically—well, some of the population, but, I mean, that's with every campus—but physically: the appearance of the building and you see the plaques of when this building was built and everything else. I liked the mystique of it. It looks a little old, but then that question arises: "Is it old fashioned?" I'm not a very old-fashioned person. Sure, in some areas I can agree with it and might even like it, but I'm more of "the times are changing; let's move it along."

KF: Right. One other thing: you said you were nervous coming back to school, especially having been out a few years. What in particular made you nervous?

PARTICIPANT 3: If I was going to be capable of doing it. If I still had the brains and, I guess, the wits to be able to comprehend things and learn new things. Not so much learn new things—you can learn new things until you die—but am I going to be able to comprehend things as fast as everybody else and am I actually going to succeed? Those were my biggest concerns: Am I actually going to succeed?

KF: Were any self-esteem issues at play there?

PARTICIPANT 3: No, I mean, it was purely just with the schedule I was in and everything else:

A) Am I going to have enough time to study when I need to study? I hate reading anything that has to do with a textbook, even though I know it's important to do and I understand why it's there. I just don't like doing it.

B) Am I going to have that much reading to do that I'm going to hate myself for coming back to school? And am I going to be able to succeed and be successful? Not just do okay enough to graduate—I want to comprehend the things that are being taught. I don't want to go, "Okay, that's fine; that's how you do that." I really want to comprehend it so I can actually apply it if I ever need to, even though I don't think I'll ever need it.

KF: Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 3: Yes.

Kim: Okay. What obstacles were created by others or things beyond your control (external sources)? These can be at home, at work, or here at the school.

PARTICIPANT 3: I'm going to go through all three. At home, it's making my marriage very difficult because I am never home—because I work 40 hours a week. Especially this semester taking 17 hours, I leave my house at 6:30-6:45. (I live an hour away.) So I leave my house to get to class at 8:00 in the morning Monday through Thursday. I have classes every morning. Then if I am out of class, for example, today I would leave class and go directly back to work. I don't go home to go change; I bring my work clothes with me and I just go directly to work. And I'll actually get there probably 20 minutes late, but my boss is okay with it. He knows where I am and he understands. But I work until 9:00 p.m.—so basically I'm gone 6:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.—then it takes me about 15 minutes to get home. [When] I get home at 9:15, I'm incredibly tired. I'm starving to death, so I'll eat something. [I] basically hang out for about 10 to 15 minutes and go to bed. So, I'm usually in bed about 10:00-10:30 to do it all over again the next day, and that's basically my Monday through Thursday. The issue I'm having, as far as scheduling with all that, is I don't get to work enough because on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I have class literally from 8:00 a.m. until about 5:00 p.m. [and] on Thursday until 9:00. I have to work most of my hours Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; so I end up working a 10-hour shift on Friday and Saturday and working an 8-hour shift on Sunday. It really doesn't leave me any time to see my wife. And she also works a full time job (but she doesn't go to school), so she's taking care of the house and the dogs and everything else. We never get to see each other. I never have the time to talk to her on the phone. I'm either at work or she's at work or something like that, so it's creating some problems.

Basically, obstacles at work—it's just a scheduling issue. I just have to make sure that my boss understands. And I'm very lucky to have a job where my boss actually understands—and cares enough to understand—and not just go, "I don't care. Go away." Because I do work a retail job, he could be like that. He could just go, [imitates *whoosh*] "Out the door and I'll just hire the next guy and he can work open availability." I've worked really hard at my job to make myself very valuable to the company I work for so that there's something there that they want to keep me around for. So, I'm very lucky in that [work] is not really an obstacle. I just have to have constant conversations with them about "Okay, this week I have this, this week I have this" (you know, with concerts and everything else, and I have to go do observations and sometimes teaching assignments that pop up left and right), and I'm very lucky that they're letting me do that. The biggest thing this semester and the previous semester with here at school was I actually had to quit my (*previous job*) because I couldn't (*work*) from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 in the afternoon and take Music History and Theory and those classes that I have to take

because [each] are such a specialized field that there's only a couple of people that teach [them]. And I can understand with scheduling here, as far as all those classes, they have to schedule it during the day. And the people that teach it only teach it during the day because they have other things going on, too. So, that was a problem, but it was one of those obstacles I had to just kind of go, "Okay. If I ever want to graduate, I have to do this." That obstacle wasn't too bad; it was just the quitting of the (*previous job*) was a big money loss as far as bills and stuff, which then goes back to problems at home.

KF: What obstacles were created as a result of a decision you made or behavior you displayed? This would be more internal sources. Did you have any?

PARTICIPANT 3: I don't think so. I get pretty rambunctious and sometimes I can go over the line, but I usually could catch myself going over the line and at least salvage whatever is left. No, I don't think that I've created obstacles from within. I don't know that taking 17 hours—making that decision myself without talking to anybody—was really the best thing in the world because some days I feel like it's slowly killing me; but at the same time, I'm at the point where I just want to be finished. I want to graduate so I'm trying to get it done. It's not affecting my grades, which I'm surprised. It's affecting my health though, but it's only temporary. So, it is one of those things where it's a bad thing for a good thing. I don't know what the expression is I'm looking for here, but I think you know.

KF: Okay. What sources of support have sustained you through your progression in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 3: My wife has been very supportive, even though [we've had issues]. All my (*colleagues*) from (*previous job*)—which I still talk to quite a lot—they're always supporting me. I can always reach out to them for advice or, if I need anything, they're always there, even though I know that [they're] incredibly busy with their families and their (*work*) and everything else. Here at the school, everybody in the faculty is always available; even if, at that one moment, you might catch some that might not have the time right away, they'll make the time for you or they'll say, "Just send me an email, and let's schedule something together when we can sit down and talk." And I think everybody is very good about if they notice that it's something that needs to be taken care of right away. They'll push everything else aside and kind of stop and take a minute to really make sure that person is okay. So, support is basically anywhere you want to look for it or anywhere you want to ask. I think anybody is willing to support anybody else, as long as you're willing to ask for the help. And that's a great thing here: as long as you ask for

the help, they'll help you. If you don't ask, they won't seek you out. They've got a million things going on. They might not know you need the help; that's why you need to ask.

KF: What are your future plans in regard to your degree program or career?

PARTICIPANT 3: Get a job. Teach. Have some fun, some heartaches, and all that other stuff. And hopefully not have to move from school to school to school to school. Hopefully, I'll find somewhere where I can get comfortable—not complacent—and be there for a number of years and really build a program. That would be fantastic.

KF: What emphasis are you seeking?

PARTICIPANT 3: Band. I don't really necessarily want to be a head band director. That's not one of the things I really want *right now*. I'm not saying in 10 years, I might [not] want that. I might get sick of having to work for somebody else and really want to be the guy in charge. I would like to start off just as a 3rd or 4th assistant. I don't want to have my own band or direct it much. I want to deal with (*percussion*); that's all I really want to do, like (*High School Band Assistant*) in (*School District*). I think that type of job is what I want. He deals with all poly-ensembles, but he's not in charge of any of them other than (*percussion*) ensembles. He really focuses on just (*percussion*). Some people—for example, in (*Nearby City*) their second band director [is] in charge of all the (*percussion*) and everything else, but he also teaches the second band, the jazz band, and all the beginners' ensembles and stuff like that. So, he has a lot of responsibility, but I don't want all of that right now. So, that's kind of my goal: just find a 3rd or 4th assistant [position], deal with all that, and that's really all I want.

KF: How does being a nontraditional student potentially make one a better educator?

PARTICIPANT 3: That's a very interesting question actually. I don't really see myself as a nontraditional student, but I guess it kind of falls under that, so I can understand why.

I think it makes me a better educator because it makes me a better student. I have to be so much more pro-active about my schedule and how I schedule things—how I plan my time—which has always been a big struggle for me. Time management is not my forte by any means, so this kind of forces me to focus more on that and make sure I achieve the things that I need to achieve in the time I need to plan for them—because that's the only time I have to do them. So, if I leave here and go to work, when I get home, even if I'm tired, I know that I have to do at least this piece of homework that's due tomorrow or

start planning for this presentation that I have that is due next week because I only have 20 minutes here, 10 minutes there, 30 minutes over here. And maybe I'll have two hours by the end of the week that I can actually [collectively] put on it and get it completed. So, I think it will help me become a better educator because I'll be able to plan better and it helps my time management skills. So, it's kind of a learning process that I'm forcing myself to go through to make it work. If not, I'll just fail every class because I won't be able to turn in any homework. I'll fail juries because I won't be able to practice and everything else.

KF: This question is sort of related to the first one, but why do you think that nontraditional students are drawn to this field?

PARTICIPANT 3: Because we all have parents. I guess there's two ways [to think] about this: one is parents of children that just want to be musicians and go on the road and blah, blah, blah. And the parents will see that as "Oh, that's not a goal in life and you just want to go out and have fun. Fine—if you want to do that for a couple of years, do it. But then you come back and you're going to go into science or something. This is the family thing that we do: you're going to become a doctor." They kind of get forced into that, and then they realize later on in life that they're really unhappy and that's really not what they want to do. But now they're in their mid-thirties, early forties—whatever age it might be—and they realize that "I really want to go back into music," but they have family and two or three kids and [question,] "How can I go back into music and actually be able to support this family?" They've had a thing for education in the past, and so they think, "I'll kind of go into that."

I think the other side is the family (more like mine) where everybody in the family is a musician, and both my sisters are educators and musicians at the same time. I have one that is a musician [and] on the side is an educator, and one that is an educator and on the side she plays with the Alumni Band from her university. So, I think it's one of those things where that's a field I was not expected to go into by any means by my parents. They didn't force that upon me, but it's one of those things when you're a child and your parents say, "Let's put you in baseball for a summer to see if you like that" or "Let's put you in this for this period of time to see if you like that"—and just kind of throw you around a little bit with activities to see if you can get your interest piqued a little bit and see what happens. And when I started doing music, I was 6 years old and that was all I wanted to do. I never planned on becoming an educator, but after touring for 12-13 years and really not making any money, I decided, "Okay, I'm done with that. I'll just go work over here." I waited tables for a while, cleaned carpets for a while, and you're like,

“Okay, this is really not any way to live—paycheck to paycheck” or anything like that. So, I kind of looked at my options and [said], “Well, I guess I’ll go back to school and do something.” I started doing computer classes and stuff and realized that really wasn’t going to make me happy. So, I decided to go back into music [because] that’s all I’ve ever known and all I ever wanted to do.

KF: What factors do you perceive as putting nontraditional students at risk for stalling progress within and/or leaving a music education program prematurely?

PARTICIPANT 3: Health would be a big factor for leaving. It could be very stressful. I’ll just take myself for the example: I guess it all comes back to time management, and I’ve been talking about that the whole time now. It’s very stressful to figure out “How I’m going to do *this*? How am I going to be able to achieve everything I need to achieve for every class and do a good job at it?”—not “I’ll just do good enough job to get a passing grade” and then not to worry about it. Because then you’re just flying by and that’s not good enough, so it becomes very stressful. If you’re not good at stress management, you’re not going to succeed. And that’s also going into the job of being a music educator. [. . .] Stress is a big part of everybody’s life, especially educators. [. . .] I know stress is a big thing as far as people just leaving in the education field in general, whether it’s stress from teaching the class or pressure put on by the district or they just don’t agree with the way the Texas government or federal government deals with education in general.

I think, for a nontraditional student, stalling progress again is just a time management thing. Working 40 hours a week and taking 17 hours a semester is tough—I’m not going to lie. There are a lot of times I’ve really had a hard time actually completing things on time. Somehow, I always end up doing it. I don’t know how most of the time, but it gets done. It’s just a question of [needing] to sit down and get it done; it doesn’t matter what else is going on around you. A lot of times I have to tell everybody, “No, I’m going to go into this room here for the next 2 hours and don’t talk to me or don’t bother me. Leave me alone.” And that’s how I get it done, but at the same time it’s tough. It’s pretty stressful.

I can see there’s a money thing, too. I mean, if you have to work more than you have time for (because you can’t pay your bills), I can see somebody leaving school for that because you have to have somewhere to live. They might come back to [finish their degree]—I would hope that they’d come back to it. Maybe they’d just take a semester off to kind of get themselves a second job so they can save up for 6-7 months and be able

to go back to school and do that. Maybe they'd just [alternate] one semester on and one semester off. Or maybe they just, half way through it, realize [teaching] is really not the job for them. I'm sure there are people that do that, too. They thought it was going to be something, and, as they're studying it and getting into it, realize it's really not something that they want to do. It's not for them or they're just not cut out for it.

KF: Do you think any institutional factors play a role in that?

PARTICIPANT 3: I'm sure—if there are some disagreements with certain teachers or they just don't like the teaching style. I guess they *could* leave the program, but I would think that those people would go somewhere else. So, they really wouldn't leave the field; they would just leave that university. Yeah, I can possibly see that—either tuition prices or, I guess, it would probably be more faculty than anything else. But that's just a personality thing. You're going to have disagreements with people all the time. I mean, even after you get a job, you might not get along with your principal or the person in the room next to you, but that's just life [. . .].

KF: What factors do you perceive as being helpful to successful completion of a music education program?

PARTICIPANT 3: That's got to do with faculty. The support of the faculty is a big, big factor in being helpful and being successful. It's helpful because you don't feel alone: you don't feel like you're lost in the sea of students and [crying,] "I'm drowning over here—please somebody help me!" and they just walk by going, "Oh, that's too bad for you."

KF: Do you speak of that as a nontraditional student?

PARTICIPANT 3: Just any student in general. I mean, just as a human being, if I'm in trouble, I want somebody to help me. Hopefully, I'll have the right state of mind that I can actually ask for the help and not wait until it's too late, but I don't think anybody should have to go through life without anybody's help. [As] teachers, faculty, educators, that's your job: you're there to help somebody learn something new. If that person doesn't understand it, it's your responsibility to make sure that you help them understand it [. . .]. So, that's your job to help them, whether it's from an educational point of view as far as the material, or they're stressed out and feeling overwhelmed by all of the work in their classes and you just need to talk to them for five minutes [. . .]—just as a support system type of thing. As it goes, I've had conversations with (*Advisor*) in the past semesters when I've felt overwhelmed. I'd shoot her an email and she responds within

20-30 minutes, whether it's just a small word of encouragement or "Hey, let me know what time works for you" or "I can just give you a call whenever you want to and we can just talk about it." I've had conversations with (*Professor 4*). I've had conversations with (*Professor 6*). I've had conversations with a lot of teachers [. . .] and it helps to be able to talk to somebody. It really does because then it's not just *here*—it's not just stuck inside you. You get it out; you feel automatically better because you let it out [. . .].

KF: What suggestions (if any) do you have for making a music education degree more accessible to nontraditional students?

PARTICIPANT 3: That's a good question. Actually it's a pretty easy answer. The answer is easy, but the process to make the answer actually happen is not: more online classes and more night classes.

KF: So classes that would be more flexible in scheduling?

PARTICIPANT 3: Right. And that's difficult to happen because you'd need more faculty for that, and there are restrictions for that and budget issues—it is what it is. I also understand why certain classes cannot be taught online. I mean, I don't know that you could take Theory IV online. I don't know if that would work unless it was the teacher filming themselves giving the lecture, posting it online, and you [watching] it. I guess [it could work] if it were more of an interactive classroom like the live classroom, but, then again, that wouldn't work because it wouldn't be like a true online class [. . .]. Intro to Music Ed, Secondary Music, and stuff like that—I can also see [them] probably not being able to work that well online. So, that would take a lot of development to make them work. But that would help a nontraditional student because then [there's fewer] schedule restrictions and the stress level doesn't go as far up because then you're not [trying to negotiate school, work, and other obligations].

The more flexible the schedule, obviously the easier it is for anybody in general. Some people prefer to take the classes all in the morning and have the rest of the day; some people don't like to get up that early and prefer to take them at night. In my previous job, I was working at a (*place of employment*). All the night classes would have been great for me because I didn't get out of work until 4 o'clock or 4:30. Getting here at 5:30, I can take any class from 6:00 to 9:00. But I do understand that it doesn't work for 2,000 people—it works for me and that's just for me—but it's not going to work necessarily for the other 1,999 people. [Flexible course schedules] would help, but I do understand that probably is not going to happen. It's not really that feasible [. . .].

KF: Well, this question you could apply to *other* people who are nontraditional: what you've heard them go through or what you think they go through. This is just a general, open-ended question.

PARTICIPANT 3: Talking to other people that travel a lot to come to class from other cities and stuff—the more hybrid classes, the better. I have one education class which is hybrid: one week on, one week off, one week on, one week off. So, the week off is a Blackboard type of thing—either discussion or we have to write an essay and post-date it or there's a quiz or something like that. Those are nice because then I don't have to come that week. And if I didn't have any other class that day, I wouldn't have to come here at all. I drive a (*Car Model*), which is not fuel efficient by any means. It costs me \$60.00 a week in gas, because I come here four days a week and it's an hour here and an hour there [. . .]. So, having hybrid classes where one week is here and one week is not (you know, week on-week off), I'm saving money [. . .]. I think any commuters, nontraditional students, [or] anybody that has to travel more than—I'd say— 15 miles would go for that. I can definitely see that happening. That would be very helpful and be less stressful, too [. . .].

Personally, I wish everything was online. I do much better on the online classes because I can pace myself. I know what's going on. I make myself neat little calendars, which I don't do for anything else: everything is due here, this due here, I'll do this part here [. . .]. I got [it] planned out, it gets done, it's fine, I always make As, and that's good. Everything else that I have to show up for is like “Maybe I'll do this *this* day, maybe I'll do it over there, maybe it'll get done hopefully in my sleep, or something.”

KF: Okay. That's all the questions I have. Thank you.

Participant 4: Jacob

KF: When did you decide to become a music educator?

PARTICIPANT 4: I'm going to say—really *seriously* thinking about it—about three years ago. That's when I first got into (*Community College*). I was talking to my wife, and I had just quit a job working as a (*Previous Job*). It was a commission job, and most of the jobs at that time—because of what was going on with the economy and everything—that was the only thing you could get [with my type of education]. So working those jobs—I was like, “You know what? Forget this. I just want to go to school.” And I was used to singing anyways, so I'm like, “Hey, why don't I just go with music?” And then, I remembered my teacher, (*High School Choir Director*). [. . .] I was a bad kid, but she was the only one that actually took the time to say, “Okay, [music] can be a relief for you. This can be an outlet for you.” So, I just remembered the things she did and was like, “Okay, I can do that.” So, it was because of somebody else—the reason why three years ago I *really* decided that I wanted to do [music education].

KF: And when you returned to school, this was at (*Community College*)?

PARTICIPANT 4: Right.

KF: Were you [majoring in music education] at that time?

PARTICIPANT 4: Well, they don't have a music education program. They have a music program there: Associate's in Music Studies or what not. It pretty much takes care of all the basics that I would be taking here—your Theory [classes], your juries, all of that stuff. So, they didn't have it there, but—just to try to get to where I needed to be—I had to take those classes there. Does that make sense?

KF: That does. But, you had [music education] in mind, even at that point?

PARTICIPANT 4: Yes. Even at that point, I wanted to go ahead and teach music to high school kids—no little kids [*laughs*].

KF: Describe your pre-college musical experiences.

PARTICIPANT 4: I mean—how far do you want to go back?

KF: As far as you want to take it.

PARTICIPANT 4: I was singing in the church at five years old in (*Hometown*). That was my mom's first time to hear that I could actually sing. There was a lady called Mattie Moss Clark. Have you ever heard of her?

KF: No, I haven't.

PARTICIPANT 4: Mattie Moss Clark was the Director of Music for the Church of God in Christ, but she was famous because she took those choirs and, instead of singing in unison, they actually had three-part harmony. She pioneered the way for churches to sing in three-part harmony and, at that time, she was in (*Hometown*) and she was doing a little workshop for all the conductors. And then we had like this musical, if you will, or choir concert there, and that was the first time that my mom *ever* heard me sing. So, she started pushing me to sing more.

We moved to (*Another City*)—I think I was like 7 or 8—and we went to this other church. (Most of the times I've been singing have been in the church.) We met this pastor and I joined his choir—I'd say about two or three years [after moving there]. When I was about 8 or 9, I started singing in the choir—the *youngest* guy to sing in the choir, the *only* guy to sing in the choir, the only *kid* to sing in the choir. I was singing, going around with them and stuff to different places in (*Home State*).

Just to fast forward a little bit more: high school was the first time I got into a classically-trained choir or doing the type of music that we were doing. That was the first time I really took classical singing seriously. After that, I dropped out of school. I went into the military. And it was like singing would always find me because, when I was in Iraq, I sang for the Sergeant Major, and the Sergeant Major wanted me to sing anytime we had like a funeral or something for some of the kids that died over there. So, I was pretty much singing when something happened in the unit or something happened in the battalion. I was the one that was singing the national anthem or "God Bless America" or even just "America."

KF: What opportunities for teaching (if any) did you have prior to returning to school?

PARTICIPANT 4: As far as music teaching or just any type of teaching?

KF: Either one.

PARTICIPANT 4: I was a (*Supervising Officer*) in the military, so that was teaching every day. As an E-4 in the military, you have to take the responsibility of a squad,

which is about 14 to 15 people. [There were classes every Thursday, where I instructed squad members primarily on the maintenance of trucks.] [We would cover] tactical things, like what would happen if you were being ambushed or what to do if you were under fire and things like that. I had to lead those types of classes.

When I became an E-6, I became the EO operator for the battalion. The EO operator is the Equal Opportunity person, and he has to go and give different classes for Equal Opportunity. Harassment, for instance: if there was a problem with harassment in one of the units, we would go in and teach things on how to prevent it, how to know if it was a lie or if they were telling the truth—things like that. That's pretty much the stuff that I did as far as training.

KF: Did you have any opportunities to teach music?

PARTICIPANT 4: *No*. Music was far away from me at that time. I wasn't thinking about anything but getting away from (*Home State*) and serving in the military. And wherever the military brought me, that's where I went. If they took me to Germany, I went to Germany. If they took me to any other place, that's all I thought about. Music was like a distant memory for me.

KF: So, doubling back to a previous question that I asked you: the reason that you went on to become a music educator was, again, support from previous teachers and then the circumstances you'd gotten yourself into?

PARTICIPANT 4: Right. Just to sum it up: the reason why I wanted to become a music educator, first of all, was because I needed a job. I wanted to get training. I didn't want a job—I wanted a *career*. Know what I'm saying? I was good at music; I thought I was good at singing. So, I wanted to learn more about that. My teacher, (*High School Choir Director*)—she influenced a part of me wanting to go back and [teach] somebody so they don't have to go through the things that I went through so they can actually make their own path. Me, I took the *long* path. I took the path of "I'm going to drop out of school. I'm going to go into the military. I'm going to be 37 years old before I get back into school, and *then* I'm going to try to learn." Does that answer what you mean? I took the long path, man.

KF: All right. As a nontraditional student, how would you describe your experience in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 4: Long! My God, this is like the longest thing ever—especially because you know that you have so much stuff that you need to take care of, and you put everything on a back burner until this diploma gets into your hands. Oh, my God, it is *long*. I mean, as far as the education itself, it is valuable and it's really good. The people here, the professors here, the texts here, everybody here—they are working behind you at 110%. For instance, (*Professor I*)—if I have a problem or anything, I know that I can contact her. (*Advisor*), of course—God, bless her soul. But (*Professor I*), I know I can contact her anytime that I need to, and she will be there to help me if it's reasonable. It's really been a good experience.

KF: When you talk about it taking long, you just mean the amount of course work that's required? Just want to clarify that.

PARTICIPANT 4: Yeah. For instance, with the Liberal Arts [degree], you have everything that Music Education will have except for the education part and the music education part. You still have to get your 22 credit hours, which I already had before I even came here; so, [switching tracks] just made it a little easier for me to graduate in the fall. Let's say it like this: if I was still in the Music Education track as a Bachelor's degree, then I wouldn't be graduating until Fall of 2016. Whereas I'm fixing to graduate, hopefully, in the Fall of 2014.

KF: Have you encountered any obstacles or barriers while enrolled in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 4: I mean, what are we [talking about]?

KF: Well, if you have, were there any that were created by external sources—so, things that were beyond your control?

PARTICIPANT 4: Oh. Well, let me ask you like this: as far as school itself, as far as the curriculum and everything? No. Personally? Yes, there's been a lot of personal stuff that's been going on and stuff that will put roadblocks in your way. Granted, I've been doing everything that I can do to try to stay in [school] and try to keep a reasonable grade, but I just can't help but think, if I didn't have these personal problems that I'm having, then I probably would be doing better.

KF: Are these issues at home or work?

PARTICIPANT 4: It's at home. I don't work, and that's for another reason.

KF: What obstacles were a result of a decision you made or behavior you displayed? These would be internal sources.

PARTICIPANT 4: As far as why it's difficult to complete [my degree] or what makes it difficult being a nontraditional student? What type of obstacles am I facing or have I done myself? Is that what you're asking?

KF: Sure—just any kind of obstacle you're experiencing or have experienced [in that way].

PARTICIPANT 4: Health. I'm going to give you an example. I have (*service-related injuries*). I have high blood pressure—that's the reason why I don't work right now. I'm easily stressed because of the (*Service-Related Injury*), and there are some times where you want to get up and come to class, but you can't because you're just not in that mindset. I'm not on any type of medication right now because, if I was on medication, I probably wouldn't be here right now. A lot of it is due to health problems.

KF: What sources of support have sustained you through your progression in the music education program?

PARTICIPANT 4: Oh, my God! Even though [there have been issues at home], the one thing I can say is that, when it comes down to school, [my wife] will not stand in my way and she will be there for me if I need help. I don't have [other] family—she and my daughter are my only family. My relatives are doing their thing and I'm doing mine, but she's been the one constant thing that's actually been pushing me to get to where I need to get. Yeah—most definitely her.

KF: Any others?

PARTICIPANT 4: I mean, people at the school, but my real inspiration is my [wife]. That's my true inspiration—the one that is in support of me.

KF: What are your future plans in regard to your degree program or career?

PARTICIPANT 4: Hopefully, I can get into somebody's school. I mean, I want to get into a school where they don't have a defined music program (like your inner-city schools or something like that) that really doesn't go into it as far as teaching the classical aspects of choir. I want to try to build one from [scratch]. I know it's going take some years for me to do it, but I want to go somewhere where nobody else goes, so I can help those kids so they can actually have some type of aspirations and use myself as an

example of that. Like I said, to have some type of aspirations so they can go on to college—to let them know that anybody can do it; all you have to do is put your mind to it. And help them use music as a source of trying to get into that way, especially if you're talented. That's one of the things that I hate so much: seeing a talented person going down the *wrong* track. That just eats me up. So, I want to be that one that tries to help, at least, somebody. If I know that I helped one person or two people, I think I'm good or I will feel better.

KF: Of course, you said earlier that you're on a Liberal Arts track at this point. Are you going to go directly back to school afterwards so that you can get your Music Education degree?

PARTICIPANT 4: Yes. I'm getting a job and going to school. [. . .] I think that this is one of the things that separates a nontraditional student [from] a person that has come out of high school because, when you get into this type of environment, the only thing that you know is music, music, music, music, music—especially if you're learning that stuff. Yeah, when you're in school, you're looking at jobs just to make money; but when you get out of school, the first thing you're going to try to find is *what*? Teaching jobs or vocal pedagogy jobs or vocal [coaching jobs]. Just because [nontraditional students] have a degree in music—right there, right now—doesn't mean to me that you're going to get that job when you get out. So, you have to have a Plan B. What I mean by that is you have to actually go look at other jobs and still work at what you're doing. Get a job until you can make money and take care of your family. Work at what you learned in school—for instance, go out there and do some teaching or do some private lessons and things like that—but that can't be your primary focus (just trying to get that job). You have to get something to help you sustain, so you can take care of your family and then be able to look at that [music teaching job]. [. . .] I guess that's some of the differences between a nontraditional student and traditional student (or a younger student). They have this time. That's all they think about: "I'm going to get out and I'm going to get that job"—which is a good thing, but sometimes reality hits and you're not going to be able to get that job that you wanted, and you'll have to go somewhere else first. Does that make sense?

KF: It does. It's keeping realistic expectations and being able to diversify as needed.

PARTICIPANT 4: Right. Of course, [nontraditional students] live in the reality every day. It's harder as far as trying to maintain a certain grade point or a certain grade to try to make sure you're able to go out there and get that job and you are marketable for those

people out there. That's what it falls down to: marketability. "Are you that type of person that we want to send in there to teach our kids?"

KF: This is getting into the next half of the interview: your perceptions of nontraditional student experience. How do you think being a nontraditional student potentially makes one a better educator?

PARTICIPANT 4: Life! *Life!* And I'm not bragging on myself, but you wanted me to interview—so here we go. How many students can you say have gone overseas, have had like 20 or 30 different people under their command—or under their protection—at one time? The military does that. A lot of nontraditional students are coming from different backgrounds. For instance, I was talking to one person in my Music History class, and I think she got her degree in Business and she's coming to get a Bachelor's in Music. She already knows what's going on with school. She knows that [Business] is not working for her, so she's coming back. She has to change, so she knows what she has to do in school to get what she needs. For instance, I think (*Classmate 1*) studied Pre-Law or something like that, but she's coming back for music. We all know that, because of the way the economy is now, we have to change. If it's not working for us, we're still young enough that we can change. And even older cats—(*Classmate 2*)—he's like 50-something years old, and still he knows that he has to get out there and do something else (and this is something that he wants to do). We have the knowledge of what's out there already. We're bringing it in and trying to apply it to what we're learning right now so that, when we get back out there, we can apply what we've learned from previous experience to what we learned (as far as the school [goes]) to help us become a better professional—a better person—out there.

I'm not saying that traditional students don't have that because, I mean, everybody has their own situation; but I really think that because we're more experienced, we can go out there and apply everything else and teach other people how to be that experienced person or to be an example for other people out there. It's never too late to go school—you haven't heard that phrase in a long time. We're a living example of that.

KF: Why do think nontraditional students are drawn to the field of music education?

PARTICIPANT 4: I have no idea. I can tell you why I was: I tried everything else and it wasn't what I was supposed to be doing. If I was supposed to still be in the military, guess what? I'd be in the military right now. If I was supposed to be an account manager, I would still be an account manager. But for some reason—through all the

sickness, the tough stuff that I've been going through, all the personal stuff that I've been going through with my family and things—it seems like I'm still doing well here. So, this is something that I think that I was meant to do—say, some Higher Power. I think that, if [nontraditional students] are doing music, then this is something they want to do. We've done everything that everybody else wanted us to do; now it's time for us to do what we want to do—and have fun at doing what we want to do—because we have to change anyway, right?

KF: What factors do you perceive as putting nontraditional students at risk for stalling their progress within a music program or leaving it prematurely?

PARTICIPANT 4: What do you mean?

KF: What factors do you think cause them to not progress in the program or decide to leave?

PARTICIPANT 4: Themselves. We put so much stress on what we need to do. When you think about college kids and the college life, you think about parties, fun, and all this other stuff, right? Well, when you're a nontraditional student, all that goes out the window. You're not thinking about partying with anybody and having fun; your job is to come in here, go to class, and try to get the best grade that you can get within a reasonable amount of time. So, if they're telling us that it's to going to take four years to complete a degree, we're trying to complete that degree in at least 3½ years. The sooner we get out of here, the better—so we can get out there before the younger crowd. Some [employers] are going to be looking for the young because they can mold them. Whereas, [nontraditional students] have to get out there before them.

I think that we stop ourselves because we stress out so much and don't take the time to just look at how blessed we truly are, [having] the opportunity to go and do something that we didn't do before.

KF: What factors do you perceive as being helpful to their successful completion?

PARTICIPANT 4: The fact that we need to go out there and get jobs—the fact that we already know what we need to do. So, when I'm going in [to see my advisor], I already know what it is that I want to take. It's just for her to okay it and tell me if I'm doing right. But I'm thinking about not only what I need to do for the next semester, it's “what classes do I need once I graduate?” I think we're just moving forward and trying to make sure we're on the right track so once we do get out of school, we're out in a reasonable

amount of time. Plus we've taken the stuff that we need to take. So, I think the stuff that really helps us is actually knowing what we need to do.

KF: What suggestions (if any) do you have for making a music education degree more accessible to nontraditional students?

PARTICIPANT 4: I don't think that a nontraditional student should come straight into a four-year university—I'm just being honest. I think that the right track for them is to go into the community colleges first just to get their feet wet into how school is right now because some people [remember school as if it were 1970]. [. . .] The curriculum and the way that college is have changed from 1980 or 1990 to now. So, I would think that the community college would be that buffer for them to see how they like what they're doing—like I did. I went into the music program. I wanted to see how I liked music, Music Theory, and piano. Once I felt like I was ready to come over here, I auditioned. I came over and I was accepted. There are some exceptions out there, but I really don't think that, if you're coming from a career, you go should straight into a four-year university, especially if you don't have a degree [or] if you're like me, who has a GED. That would be the first thing that I would say: "Go to a community college. See if you like it."

[. . .] At (*Community College*), for example, they're really good with us. They tell us what we need to do. It's a free application and stuff. You get in there and you go to your classes. It's easier. It gives you that transition because, when I came from (*Community College*) to here, it wasn't like I was really ready. I mean, I was good, but I wasn't really ready for what happened. For instance, at (*Community College*), we have private lessons; we didn't have studios. So, you did your private lesson for an hour and there you were. Here, I signed up for a 2-hour lesson, and my first week of studio, I didn't show up. So, (*Voice Instructor*) was like "Hey! You didn't come to studio!" I was like, "What's studio?" Honestly, I think they should go through something first before they come over here, and that's one suggestion.

KF: Since you have been in the community college environment and also experienced a university, are there [other] differences between them? Especially in regard to nontraditional students?

PARTICIPANT 4: Yes! Yes—Lord, yes! It is so different. First off, I want to say that (*Community College*) overall is a good school for a music department, but there are a lot of things that they leave out. When you get over here, you're just like "Oh, my God!"

(For instance, the studio classes.) When I came over here, I was a tenor. Well, (*Previous Voice Instructor*) wanted me to be a tenor, [but] I wasn't a tenor—I was a baritone. And finally knowing that I'm a baritone now is something that actually helps me even more, and makes me want to go ahead and take those classes that I never wanted to take before or to look at the difference. I know that might sound crazy, but that's just the truth. It's just the slightest thing of they're teaching you wrong, but you're getting taught right *here*. And so it opens your mind to a lot of other possibilities that you can actually be doing once you find that one thing out. That's just my experience.

KF: I still want to keep on going with this line of inquiry because I think it is fascinating. When you were at community college, did you have very many nontraditional students there?

PARTICIPANT 4: Oh, my goodness—yes. Most of them were nontraditional. I mean, some of them were people who came from (*Another University*) who couldn't make it over there. They got accepted into the music program, but saw how big and overwhelming it was. And they came over to (*Community College*) to try to get that stability [and] the cheaper prices from the community college. I'm telling you—a credit hour was \$88 when I first got there, per semester. That's really attractive. And then you have a place that offers you an Associate's degree that lets you know that you've got that first boundary out of your way. That's totally awesome, especially for nontraditional students, because we want to see that paper that says we completed something. My thing was, I didn't care about the paper itself; I just wanted to hurry up and get over here so I could get my stuff right because I knew this was where I was going to be at anyway [. . .].

KF: And when you transferred here, how did you feel among the student population? How did it compare to the nontraditional students that were at (*Community College*) and here at this university?

PARTICIPANT 4: People here were nice. The population was nice. I mean, I'm really shy when I don't know you. When you know me, I'm like this card; but if you don't know me, then I'm *really* reserved, I'm laid back, and I'm watching. That was one of the things that I had to do: I had to sit back and watch. (*Advisor*) and (*Graduate Assistant*) had to pull me out of my shell. When I first got here, I didn't want to deal with anybody. It was like "Okay. There are only a couple of people that I want to talk to." [. . .] Like I said, everybody was cool, but you could tell that there are young adults and then there's the older generation. And you could tell that type of divide, even though people are nice to you. For instance, if somebody is going out to a party, do you think they're going to

invite (*Participant 4*) to a party? No, man. (*Participant 4*) is an old man; he's not coming to any party. And then most of the time, I'm going to tell you, "No, I'm not coming out because I've got to go home and make sure my baby's asleep or [she's] got something to eat and things like that. I've got stuff at home to do." Yeah, you can tell there is a divide, but everybody is friendly, especially here in the music department. It's like one big happy friendship. I won't say family, but friendship.

KF: All right. Thank you.