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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to discover adult learners’ motivations for staying at Madison College West Campus for the next semester. Madison College, West Campus is a relatively new location whose future is undetermined. Retention rates at Madison College overall are at 55.8% and is currently implementing measures in hopes that retention will increase to 64% within three years. By using the 2x2 achievement goal framework (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), this paper seeks to identify motivations of adult students at the West Campus. This knowledge will identify characteristics that may increase retention rates across the college. Data were collected via a modified achievement goal questionnaire from 130 students in seven classrooms asking what motivates them to return to Madison College next semester. Participants ranged from 18 to over 50; 67 were 23 or younger and 63 were 24 or older. The results indicated a statistically significant correlation between performance-approach with mastery-approach and performance-avoidance. There was also a positive correlation between performance-avoidance with mastery-approach. This concludes that adult students who return to Madison College take an interest in learning the material and want to have their accomplishments recognized and limit their failures.
Acknowledgments

It takes a village to complete a project of this magnitude; it takes the work of many hearts and minds dedicated to its success over days, months and years. The professors at UW-Stout have been incredibly supportive and diligent and created an online learning environment that is an open and honest place to learn as an adult. To my fellow classmates, those I have had the honor to know in person and those I only have met in our online community: you are some of the most inspiring professionals and I feel honored to have been learning along-side you; the wisdom you have from your years of experience in education stimulates my drive to keep moving forward. Your presence has helped me to feel less alone the cyber-educational-system. To my large and complicated web that is my family, and my wonderful and crazy network of friends: thank you for being my support and my rock; thank you for pushing me when I felt like I couldn’t take one more step (or one more semester); thank you for laughing with me, believing in me, distracting me as necessary, taking on this life decision of post-secondary education with me, loving me and helping me make these past couple years a time in my life I will never forget.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Throughout American history, technical education has held a unique place within higher education. In the 19th century, technical education was established as a privatized industry and was available as a means to train workers in a certain skill (Gordon, 2014). As American education evolved, the nature of relevant hands-on technical education kept up with industry needs. In the 21st century, student demographics at the technical college level are as diverse as the programs offered. Students come from all ages, backgrounds, and histories, and are dedicated to learning and discovering new skills.

Many students enrolled in technical education are known as adult learners, defined by the Wisconsin Technical College System as students aged 25 and older (WTCS, 2013 Graduate Follow-up Report, 2014; M. Carney, personal communication, September 4, 2014). However, Madison College, located in Madison, Wisconsin, typically defines adult learners as those older than 23 (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e). Adult students aged 23 and older make up 65% of the Madison College student body (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e). Adult students make up over half of the graduating population at Madison College and throughout Wisconsin. In 2013, there were 14,654 (54%) adult students graduating throughout the state of Wisconsin (WTCS, 2013 Graduate Follow-up Report, 2014). Madison College saw 1,862 (52%) adult students graduate in 2013 (M. Carney, personal communication, September 4, 2014).

Students of all ages want to learn a new skill, get the proper training, and get a job. Other than efficient job training, there are many other documented reasons why traditional and adult students choose technical education over a four-year institution. According to the 2013 Wisconsin Technical College System graduate follow-up report (2014), 86 percent of respondents cited career change, preparing for employment, continuing their educational
journey, or brushing up on job skills as reasons for wanting to attend a technical college. Other reasons included location, cost, class time, class size, hands-on learning, and flexible schedules, according to NorthCentral Technical College's Top 10 Reasons to attend the institution (NCTC, 2014).

While published research thoroughly documents these academic factors in students’ decision to continue their educations, it does not address the reasons why students choose to stay. More specifically, these documented reasons that get students through the door fail to gain the perspective of the adult learners’ educational journeys once they have made the decision to further their education.

Madison College considers retention one of its top priorities, not only for the sake of its students, but also for the success of the surrounding community. Retention for first-year students has been built into the college’s 2011-2014 Strategic Plan (Madison College, 2014a, 2014d). Madison College divides retention into two parts, retention and persistence. To be successfully retained, a student must be enrolled in the fall remain enrolled continuously through the following fall. Madison College’s current retention rate is 55.8%, which it hopes to increase by 8.2% by the end of the 2014 school year (Madison College; 2014b, 2014c). Madison College defines persistence as “first-time, first-year students who enroll in the fall and remain enrolled the following spring” (Madison College, Definition of Retention, 2014c). The college has identified lack of motivation as one of the top seven reasons students decide not to return to college (Madison College, Student Retention Plan, 2014b). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the retention motivations of the adult learner at Madison Area Technical College in order to help the student population succeed.
For the past few decades, the principal process for measuring motivation has been the achievement goal theory (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Achievement goal theory divides motivation into what are now known as four types: mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. These motivational types comprise the 2x2 achievement goal framework created by Elliot and McGregor (2001). Published research using the 2x2 framework has utilized traditional undergraduate university learners as well as some graduate-level adult students (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Hegarty, 2011; McCollum & Kajs, 2007). Dissecting motivation using this framework has limited research into adult learners. There is no existing research that identifies adult students’ reasons to return for another semester. Due to the limited research and results of the 2x2 framework for adult learners, the results from these studies cannot be assumed for all adult learners.

**Statement of the Problem**

While there has been considerable progress in understanding the types of motivation in higher-education learners, there is little research aimed at discovering what motivates adult learners in technical education to continue to the next semester. Adult learners make up a significant portion of Madison College’s student population and the retention and persistence levels as defined by Madison College are still in need of improvement. The purpose of this study is to apply theories related to the 2x2 achievement goal framework to the adult learner's technical-education experience in order to discover the retention motivations of adult learners enrolled in at least one course at Madison College West Campus.

There were three research questions in this study:

1. What type(s) of motivation is (are) associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester?
2. What factors lead to an adult learner planning to not continue at Madison College West Campus next semester?

3. How do adult learners and traditional learners differ in terms of motivation for those returning to Madison College West Campus?

**Significance of the Problem**

The study of adult learners’ motivation for returning the next semester aligns with the National CTE Research Agenda model under Research Activities 3.1.6, Parent & Student Perceptions, Satisfaction and Retention (Joerger, Lambeth, & Elliot, 2009). The results of this study can help educators and administrators at Madison College have a better understanding of adult learners' motivations for staying at West Campus. The results of the study can bring awareness to the institution about a population that may require unique support and in doing so can increase their retention to the desired goal of 64%. The results of this paper can also have positive implications for the students surveyed, so they better understand their motivations for achieving their own educational goals. The researcher chose Madison College because it offers the most access to classrooms. Additionally, the West Campus is fairly new to the Madison College family of campuses within Madison, Wisconsin, and there is little to no published research indicating the campus’ retention rates or documented research on student motivation.

**Assumptions of the Study**

The focus of this research project was to discover the motivations of adult learners choosing to return to Madison College West campus for the Spring 2015 semester. The primary means of measuring the four types of motivation is from the Achievement Goal Questionnaire by Elliot and McGregor (2001). Researchers in the educational community tested the 2x2 framework for validity and consistency (McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Sun & Hernandez, 2012).
This research assumes that this questionnaire in its current form is the best way to measure motivation.

**Definition of Terms**

The researcher utilizes the terms below and their operational definitions for the sake of this study.

**Traditional learners.** Learners in higher education, specifically technical college, aged 23 and younger. Focus is generally on graduating from college in two to four years, as well as successful social relationships (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e).

**Adult learners.** Learners in higher education aged 24 and older, who must often maintain a balance between work, life, school, and family, and enter post-secondary education in order to learn a new skill (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e).

**Mastery motivation.** Mastery motivation is defined as a person’s internal and inherent willingness to complete a task. Mastery goals are divided into two different goals: mastery approach and mastery-avoidance. Mastery-approach is defined by a subject’s internal desire to complete a task because they enjoy the task and the challenge it represents (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Mastery-avoidance is defined by a subject’s internal motivation to avoid failing at a task (Elliot, 1999).

**Performance motivation.** Defined as a subject’s external desire to perform a task well in comparison to others. This type of motivation is broken down into two components: performance-approach and performance-avoidance. According to McCollum & Kajs (2007), performance-approach is defined as attempting to obtain favorable judgments of others while completing a task. Performance-avoidance is defined as the subject seeking to avoid negative judgments of others while completing a task.
Limitations of the Study

Within educational research, there are limitations that restrict the data’s effectiveness at providing beneficial educational information and teaching tools to a broad range of technical-college professionals.

Limitation 1. The study consisted of students at one of the 16 technical colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System. Results cannot be generalized to all Wisconsin Technical College students.

Limitation 2. The study consisted of students at one campus of Madison Area Technical College. Results should not be generalized to all Madison Area Technical College students.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to apply theories related to the 2x2 achievement goal framework to the adult learner's technical education experience in order to discover the retention motivations of adult learners enrolled in at least one course at Madison College West Campus. More specifically, it will examine whether adult learners’ motivations were mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, or performance-avoidance regarding their retention decisions. It will also compare these results to traditionally aged learners. In doing so, the researcher will survey classrooms of varying programs at the Madison College West Campus, utilizing a questionnaire adapted from Elliot and McGregor (2001) who conceptualized the 2x2 motivational framework to consist of mastery and performance motivations as having both approach and avoidance tendencies.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to apply theories related to the 2x2 achievement goal framework to the adult learner's technical education experience in order to discover the retention motivations of adult learners enrolled at Madison College West Campus. More specifically, this study will examine whether adult learners’ retention motivations were mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, or performance-avoidance. Considerable research has been conducted in the area of motivation and students enrolled in higher education; however, there is a lack of research pertaining specifically to adult learners in a technical education setting (Hegarty, 2011).

The following review will be divided into sections that will address the advancements of achievement goal theory, starting first with the goal orientation dichotomy and progressing to the goal orientation trichotomy and the 2x2 achievement goal framework. The 2x2 achievement goal framework and the instrument used will be the basis of the research instrument for this study in order to properly quantify students’ motivations at Madison College West Campus. The review will then define adult learners in technical education. Lastly, the review will address the history of Madison College West Campus and the retention goals of Madison College for the future.

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal theory has been the principal approach to systematically understanding achievement motivation since the 1970s (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Dweck (1986) noticed a shift in perspective when it came to the study of motivation away from “external contingencies” and towards a “social-cognitive” approach that was “coherent, replicable, and educationally relevant” (p. 1040). Dweck and Nicholls were some of the first to help place definitions on the
different approaches a subject could have when it came to approaching a task and became major contributors in defining the measurable methodologies to accomplishing a goal. Dweck (1986) concluded that those who approach a task with the desire to gain understanding and mastery are oriented towards enjoying the process of learning the task. On the other side of the motivational spectrum, Nicholls (1984) defined the early stages of performance goal orientation that he labeled as ego-involvement. He described it as a “focus on one’s ability and sense of self-worth” when approaching a task (Ames, 1992, p. 262). “The evidence they presented in support of the performance-mastery goal dichotomy was impressive and compelling and clearly laid the groundwork for this framework to become the dominant theoretical approach in the contemporary achievement motivation literature” (Elliot, 1999, p. 170).

Achievement goal theory has become the approach to measure the subject’s strategy for task completion. Weiner (1986) said that achievement goals are a “pattern of beliefs, attributions and affect that produces intentions of behavior and that is represented by different ways of approaching, engaging in, and responding to achievement-type activities” (as cited in Ames, 1992, p. 261). The foundation of achievement goal theory is competence.

Three different standards may be identified: absolute (the requirements of the task itself), intrapersonal (one’s own past attainment or maximum potential attainment), and normative (the performance of others). That is, competence may be evaluated, and therefore defined, according to whether one has acquired understanding or mastered a task (an absolute standard), improved one’s performance or fully developed ones’ knowledge or skills (an intrapersonal standard), or performed better than others (a normative standard). (Elliot & McGregor, 2001, p. 501)
Absolute and intrapersonal competence was combined for the sake of the achievement goal theory since they shared many of the same themes (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In today’s usages, competence is now defined and divided into these two measurable components, whether a subject’s goal is based on expanding their knowledge and skill or whether their goal is to perform better than others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Competence is how a subject orients himself towards a specific goal; either the subject chooses to demonstrate their competence in relation to others or by task mastery and working to develop their mastery of the task (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & Church 1997). These standards of competence became the foundation of mastery and performance goal orientations.

**Goal Orientation Dichotomy**

The previous research compiled to create the original dichotomy of motivation: mastery and performance. In mastery motivation, subjects would approach the task with the goal of gaining mastery over the task due to the subjects’ inherent interest and desire for a challenge. Performance-oriented students would approach a task with the goal of gaining favorable judgments of others by performing the task with as little effort as possible (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996).

Ames (1992) primary focus expounded upon the goal dichotomy that Dweck and Nicholls sought out regarding the approach orientation of contrasting motivation orientations. At the time, there were several prevailing terms that differentiated motivation achievement goals. These were learning and performance goals (Dweck, 1986), task-involvement and ego-involvement goals (Nicholls, 1984) and mastery and performance goals. Ames decisively blended all of these different types of goals that aligned with one another and labeled learning, task-involvement and mastery all mastery goals. She took performance and ego-involvement
and labeled them both performance goals. With this compilation of terms into two distinct sides to goal orientation, she set the vocabulary that would continue with the goal orientation theory for decades.

Ames (1992) defined mastery goals as being intrinsic in nature; effort and an inherent interest in the task over time will result in task success and mastery. “With a mastery goal, individuals are oriented toward developing new skills, trying to understand their work, improving their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards” (p. 262).

Subjects engaging in mastery goal orientation became characterized as having positive correlation to increased understanding and learning (McCollum & Kajs, 2007). Those with mastery-oriented goal tendencies tend to use deep level processing strategies, put in a greater effort into the task, adapt well to failure, and continue to pursue the task until successful completion. McCollum and Kajs (2007) summarized that these task strategies engage the student in the task and put the student in a positive mindset when it comes to approaching a task. The effort they put into a task and the successful output creates a “long-term and high-quality involvement in learning” as well as the feeling of belonging and a positive sense of individual self-worth (Ames, 1992, p. 263).

Performance goals are extrinsic in nature and the motivation for task completion is based on the subjects’ capability and sense of self-worth in relation to others. The primary focus is on the subjects’ ability to perform the task better than others while being observed and receiving recognition for successful completion. According to Ames (1992), “learning itself is viewed only as a way to achieve a desired goal” (p. 262). This type of learning trait originally was considered a negative trait to have since it seemed the primary goal of the person was not to learn
the material for the sake of learning, but rather to outperform the others (McCollum & Kajs, 2007). Meece, Blumenfeld, and Hoyle (1988) studied performance-orientation in a small group setting within a classroom and found that students who aligned with the performance goal orientation kept their efforts as low as possible in order to maintain optimal success and social recognition. Students used short-term memorization strategies that led to shallow information processing, low retention and a negative attitude towards a subject in a classroom (McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Meece et al., 1988).

**Goal Orientation Trichotomy**

Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) advanced Ames’ dichotomous concept of mastery and performance orientation. They called for the division of the performance orientation variable into two separate components. The concept of approach and avoidance orientations was present in literature dating back to as early as the 1890s (McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Elliot, 1999). Dweck, Nicholls, and others incorporated the distinction of avoidance motivation into their work but either abandoned the notion of avoidance motivation or placed it among approach concepts (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984; Meece et al., 1988). Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) saw that avoidance motivation was referenced often in this early literature but it “received little theoretical and no empirical attention and was soon overlooked” (p. 461).

The foundational component of competence was the reason for bringing avoidance motivation back into the conversation. In mastery approach orientation, a subject has a high level of perceived competence when approaching a task they view as a challenge. They predicted that those who enter into task engagement with high levels of perceived competence would want to demonstrate that competence and gain favorable judgments of others. Alternatively, those engaging in task involvement with a low level of perceived competence will
want to “avoid the demonstration of incompetence” or completing the task well enough out of fear of doing worse than their peers (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996, p. 462).

With the call to introduce performance-avoidance as a means of measuring goal motivation, a second mechanism, called valence, was needed for measuring goal orientation. Elliot and McGregor (2001) define valence as “a positive, desirable possibility (i.e., success) or a negative, undesirable possibility (i.e., failure)” (p. 502). This distinction between the valence of approach or avoidance in terms of competence is the central foundation of achievement motivation (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Competence and valence, when applied by the subject at the beginning of the task, creates the two foundational components of the achievement goal theory (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996).

Elliot and Church (1997) tested the legitimacy of the trichotomous framework and hypothesized that mastery and performance-approach orientations were grounded in subjects approaching a task with the goal of successfully completing the task and demonstrating a high level of perceived competence. Conversely, there are subjects who enter into task engagement with a negative mindset of how and if the task will be successfully completed. This type of subject would enter into task engagement with a low level of perceived competence and will interfere with successfully completing the task and will lead to a perceived feeling of helplessness (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). In testing their hypothesis they wanted to endorse a process of approach and avoidance goals that are “viewed as exerting their differential effects on achievement behavior by activating divergent sets of motivational processes” (p. 462).

To test their theory, they conducted two experiments that would predict the presence of avoidance motivation. To do so, they set up situations where students were either set up to succeed in a performance or mastery setting to achieve good scores, set up to compare how poor
their score was to others, and a neutral group. They used a Nina puzzle, which had been used in previous motivational experiments and had a high degree of validity and reliability. The authors found that fear of failure stands alone as its own underlying motivational goal when performing a task (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Other experiments were conducted after publishing their findings to replicate the performance-avoidance addition to the Goal Orientation Theory (Elliot & Church, 1997). Elliot (1999) concluded that dividing performance orientations into approach and avoidance helped to gain a clearer and more consistent picture of how performance motivation works. Previously, results of performance goal orientations were mixed, some stating that they produce negative processes and outcomes and conflicting data on competence.

2x2 Achievement Goal Framework

Elliot (1999) considered the many historical references to the avoidance motivation present in research dating back to the 1890s. James (1890) described that pain has a power to inhibit a subject; Freud (1915) discussed seeking pleasure and avoiding pain; Skinner referenced positive and negative reinforcement; Maslow (1955) explained a growth or deficit motive; Mowrer (1960) examined hope learning and fear learning (as referenced in Elliot, 1999). As noted earlier, Dweck and Nicholls were also some of the first social scientists dealing with motivation to discuss the presence of avoidance orientations in their subjects (1986; 1984).

Bearing in mind the evidence of avoidance present in historical research related to the topic of self, Elliot (1999) suggested that mastery-avoidance should be incorporated into the motivational framework because “a viable account of motivated achievement behavior will not only address the way competence is defined, but also how it is valenced” (p. 170). He argued that the results from studies on the dichotomous framework have been inconclusive; perhaps due to the fact that avoidance mechanisms had not been previously taken into consideration.
Elliot (1999) described mastery-avoidance as a fear of losing the knowledge that the subject has procured, and subjects put in extra work on a task to ensure that knowledge is not lost. Mastery goals “have been linked to persistence when obstacles are encountered, elaborative processes and self-regulatory strategies during studying, long-term retention of information, …appropriate help-seeking behavior and intrinsic motivation” (Elliot, 1999, p. 173).

Because approach motivation is driven by a positive possibility or outcome, avoidance motivation must be driven by a person’s perception of a negative possibility or outcome (Elliot, 1999).

The dominant research of the goal orientation theory over time used subjects that are high-school or undergraduate college students, usually enrolled in a social-science course (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Ames, 1992; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & Church, 1997; Meece et al., 1988). McCollum and Kajs (2007) and Hegarty (2011) both looked beyond traditional learners to study motivations of adult students. However, they were looking at graduate students, which is still a different kind of student than adults enrolled in technical education. Studying motivation in adult learners within a technical-college setting can provide new insight into the academic field of motivation, offer administrations and faculty a better understanding of this unique student population, and establish an institutional recruitment and teaching process that is conducive to students’ motivations.

**Adult Learners within the Technical College Setting**

According to the 2013 Wisconsin Technical College System Follow-Up Report (2014b), career change, preparing for employment, continuing the educational journey, or brushing up on jobs skills count for 86% of students’ reasons for wanting to attend technical college. Many other reasons include: location, cost, class time, class size, hands-on learning, and flexible
schedules, according to NorthCentral Technical College’s top 10 reasons to attend their institution (2014). The students who enroll in technical colleges today are as diverse as the programs offered. Students come from all age ranges and backgrounds and are dedicated to learning and discovering new skills.

Adult learners are a very large subset of Madison College. 65% of the student population is 23 and older (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e). Unlike traditional students, adult learners come to the institution with a more established sense of self that is defined by their family, work, and community responsibilities (Chao, 2009). These are backgrounds that carry over into the enrollment process as well as the classroom setting. This study seeks a better understanding of the motivations of these students to enroll in technical college, whether for the first time or as returning students, and what keeps them in the classroom until graduation.

Madison College, located in Madison, Wisconsin, defines adults learners as those older than 23 (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e). Adult students aged 23 and older make up 65% of the Madison College student body (Madison College, Impact Initiative, 2014e). Adult students make up over half of the graduating population at Madison College and throughout Wisconsin. In 2013, there were 14,654 (54%) adult students graduating throughout the state of Wisconsin (WTCS, Graduate Follow-up Report, 2014). At Madison College had 1,862 (52%) adult students who graduated in 2013 (M. Carney, personal communication, September 4, 2014).

Retention

Even with a strong adult student population, Madison College struggles with retention. To be successfully defined as retained, a student must be enrolled in a fall semester and remain enrolled continuously through the following fall. Madison College’s current retention rate is 55.8%, which it hopes to increase by 8.2% by the end of the 2014 school year (Madison College,
2014b; Madison College, 2014c). Madison College collected data on the numbers showing a snapshot of retention rates, but these numbers and statistics still lack the information for why a student is choosing to stay. This paper seeks to find information on adult students’ educational goals when it comes to their motivation to stay. The college created The Committee on Retention Effectiveness (CORE). They are the team of faculty, staff and administrators dedicated to implementing Madison College's Retention Plan strategies (Madison College, Student Retention Plan, 2014b). The CORE group indicated that motivation is one of the primary reasons for Madison College’s high attrition rate.

**Summary**

While motivation can be a reason for why a student does not succeed, it can also be why a student chooses to stay and is successful; this paper seeks to apply the achievement goal theory and ask students what their goals are when it comes to remaining in college for another semester. Asking these questions and discovering this information can provide the college with a wealth of information about our students, their goal orientations and why a student wants to succeed. It can only help staff, faculty and administrators help our students in achieving their goal.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover adult learners’ retention motivations at Madison College West Campus. Madison College West Campus is a relatively new location and lacks statistical information about its student population. Beyond what the college already lacks in long-term statistical information on its West Campus students, the college does not look deeper into its student population to see why students are returning to Madison College beyond quantifiable reasons such as convenience, location, and cost.

This study seeks to understand the student demographic at the West Campus on a level beyond its statistics and obtain insights into students’ motivations for returning. Adult students make up a significant portion of Madison College’s student population (Madison College, 2014e) and West Campus is no different. However, their motivations for returning to school and staying in school may be significantly different from traditionally aged students. This study will seek out that information. This study’s results and conclusions can help faculty, staff, and administration understand students’ motivations for returning to Madison College and begin to consider methods of keeping students enrolled.

The first question this study addressed was: What type(s) of motivation is (are) associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester? More specifically, the study sought to find the following sub-questions:

a) Which motivational goals were correlated with other goals of the adult learner?

b) Which motivational achievement goals are least likely to be correlated with other goals?

c) What themes emerge from the students when asked about their motivations for returning to college?
The second question addressed in this study was: What factors are associated with the adult learner who does not plan to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester? One-hundred-percent retention is not possible at any college or university. There are many valid reasons why students are unable to continue classes the next semester. This study pursued information about what percentage of students were choosing not to return to Madison College. This study sought to find the contributing factors at West Campus for a student not graduating at the end of the term. By providing a snapshot of information about the student population during the Fall 2014 semester, this data could help instructors and advisors better understand the limitations and barriers that adult students face when deciding whether to return to school. If certain barriers can be identified prior to the end of the semester, retention can be increased.

The last question this study asked was: How do adult learners and traditional learners differ in terms of motivation to return to Madison College West Campus? More specifically, the study sought to find the same sub-questions related to adult learners and compare and contrast the results.

To gain a better understanding of the motivational types, a survey was distributed composed of questions modified from the 2x2 achievement goal framework as previously utilized by Elliot and McGregor (2001).

**Subject Selection and Description**

Fourteen full-time instructors are based at the West Campus. They were contacted via email requesting their students’ participation in a short survey about motivation and retention that would be completed in class. Instructors were contacted within the first two weeks of the Fall 2014 semester, and given one week to decide whether to participate. Full-time instructors were chosen because most of their classes are based on the West Campus; therefore, they have a
greater impetus to learn more about students’ motivations for returning to Madison College. They are the most interested in learning why students are not returning the next semester because they want to see the West Campus succeed and increase retention.

The full-time instructors at the West Campus work under different schools within the college, such as Health Education, Business & Applied Arts, Arts & Sciences, and Human & Protective Services. The subject matter of the classes they teach is distinct; examples include insurance, basic math, human resources, event management and psychology. The types of students who would take each of these classes are as diverse as their subject matter. The student population enrolled in these varying class types varied by type and age of the student, creating a more random sample population.

Because the study involved only consenting, full-time instructors, required participating students to be enrolled in at least one class at West with one of these instructors, and required students to participate in the in-class survey, the study’s population of subjects was composed of five instructors and 130 students.

Instrumentation

Elliot and Church (1997) were the first to utilize the Achievement Goal Questionnaire that sought out the motivational types within the trichotomous framework; this was replicated by Elliot (1999). The original survey consisted of 18 items, or six questions that aligned, respectively, with each of the three achievement goals of performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery-approach. Elliot and McGregor (2001) further refined the survey by adding 12 statements related to mastery-avoidance, or three from each of the four goal orientations. Researchers in the educational community tested the 2x2 framework for validity and consistency (McCollum & Kajs, 2007; Sun & Hernandez, 2012).
For the purposes of this study, one statement from each goal orientation was selected and modified. The statements were adapted from the originals in order to align with students’ goal of graduating from Madison College and obtaining employment in their desired fields. This goal was selected because the mission of technical education is to train its students in a skill or trade that employs the student within six or fewer months after graduation (Wisconsin Tech Colleges, Graduate and Get a Job, 2014).

This survey utilized the leading phrase “I plan to go back to school next semester because…” Students were asked to read each statement that followed the leading phrase and rate each on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Each statement aligned with one of the achievement goals of performance-avoidance, performance-approach, mastery-avoidance, and mastery-approach. The statements remained true to the original goal orientation but were modified so the relevant task or goal was graduation and job acquisition, rather than simply success in one class.

Students were initially asked to indicate whether they planned to attend Madison College next semester. Respondents who answered yes were prompted to complete the 5-point Likert scale questionnaire as well as a section asking them to state in their own words what was motivating them to continue at Madison College. This provided the researcher an opportunity to further categorize their goals and see whether they aligned with their stated goal orientation preferences on the 5-point Likert scale. Students who answered no were prompted to indicate whether they planned on graduating from the institution at the end of the term. Those who answered no were prompted to indicate why they were not returning next semester by circling one of the reasons provided, or providing a reason of their own. All survey respondents were required to provide demographic information of age, enrollment status, and gender.
Data Collection Procedures

The nine-question survey was administered at Madison College West Campus in the classrooms of full-time instructors based on the West Campus in a mixed-mode format. The researcher used email to make initial contact with the 14 full-time instructors at the West Campus, inquiring whether they would ask students in at least one of their classes to participate in a short survey about motivation. Of the 14 instructors who were initially contacted, five participated, for a 35% response rate. Overall, seven classes were included in the survey, which yielded a total of 130 responses.

Instructors who agreed to ask their students to participate were given paper copies of the survey and emailed a link to a YouTube clip of the researcher describing the premise of the primary research question, survey confidentiality, and instructions for completing the survey. The delivery of instructions and information via video ensured consistency across classrooms to assure that all participants received the same information. Consenting students received a paper copy of the survey from their instructors and were given unlimited time for completion. The surveys were then collected by the instructors and returned to the researcher. The timeline for instructors to complete the survey in class was four weeks, from the initial email inquiry to final receipt of the survey results.

The researcher favored paper surveys over an emailed survey link, so as not to presume that all students had reliable computer and Internet access. By providing the surveys on paper, the researcher had real-time access to students in the classroom. This also afforded the students total anonymity, since the researcher did not have access to any student information via email distribution lists.
Data Analysis

A number of statistical analyses were used in this study. The Statistical Program for Social Sciences, Version 10.0 was used to analyze segments of the data. Pearson’s r was conducted to analyze the correlation between the four achievement goal motivations for students aged 23 and younger and 24 and older. Descriptive statistics were used to find the frequency and percentage of responses for certain segments of data. Lastly, thematic analysis was conducted to provide a motivational context for the free-form question provided.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. First, the researcher was only able to ask students to participate in classrooms where instructors first granted consent. Because the researcher surveyed only West Campus students, the population was not a random sample. While the study was designed to make the student population as random as possible, it still created a convenience sample that cannot be generalizable to any campus other than West Campus, or any college other than Madison Area Technical College. This means that the data set of 130 students did not accurately portray an actual random sample of the students enrolled at the West Campus. The participating population may or may not have been an ideal representation of the entire student body.

Furthermore, survey respondents were encouraged to complete the survey as honestly as possible in order to provide accurate data. They were assured that the survey was entirely voluntary and confidential, with no results traceable back to them. It can only be assumed that subjects completed the survey as truthfully as possible.

Finally, the researcher did not test the validity of the modified achievement goal questionnaire statements used for the purpose of this study. The researcher only used one of
three possible statements from the original questionnaire. These statements were chosen for their relevant alignment with technical college students’ goals of completing college and obtaining employment. It is possible that the questions selected at the researchers’ discretion were not the ideal options for obtaining honest feedback from the subjects.

It must also be noted that Elliot and Murayama (2008) revised the Achievement Goal Questionnaire to standardize the three questions related to each framework to exclusively goal-based statements like “My goal is to…” “My aim is to…” and “I am striving to…” This study did not strictly adhere to this standardization of statements in the questionnaire, and the researcher is uncertain whether doing so would have obtained different responses from the population.
Chapter IV: Results

Retention rates at Madison College are at 55.8%. This places the college within the 50th percentile in comparison to the rates of other colleges’ similar in size and scope (Madison College, Higher Learning Commission Action Directory, 2013). Increasing the retention of students of all ages has become one of the college’s top priorities and it hopes to reach a retention rate of 64% by 2016 (Madison College, 2014b). Madison College has taken steps toward acquiring more information about its student population in hopes to gain a better understanding of their reasons to stay or leave, which in turn will increase retention.

The Committee on Retention Effectiveness (CORE) has provided the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) with several outcomes to measure the success of student retention. This paper aligns with the HLC’s Strategy 8 of Madison College’s Project Outcome Measures: “Identify characteristics and create profile of students that complete and those who do not to retain through completion/academic goals” (Madison College, HLC Directory, 2013, p. 2). By uncovering the goals and motivations of those who choose to return to college, this paper will provide the college with measurable data it can utilize to identify students’ successes. Specifically looking at students at the West Campus can help by providing the college with data to educate administrators who are currently deciding the college’s future direction.

The methodology used to address these questions consisted of a survey to document whether a student who has decided to return aligned with one of the goal orientations within the 2x2 achievement goal framework (mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance). Those who stated they were not returning to Madison College for the Spring 2015 semester were prompted with several options to identify as their reason for not returning.
Demographic

Data was extracted from the survey results to compile non-identifiable information about the student body selected to complete the study. One hundred and thirty students completed the survey in its entirety (n=130). Sixty-seven students identified as 24 and older, for a total of 51.5%. Sixty-three identified as 23 or younger, for a total of 48.5%. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were female and 32% of the respondents were male. Students were fairly evenly enrolled as full-time students with 12 or more credits, or less than full time with 11 or fewer credits in the Fall 2014 semester.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What type(s) of motivation is (are) associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester? Additionally, which motivational goals were correlated with other goals of the adult learner? Which motivational achievement goals are least likely to be correlated with other goals? What themes emerge from the students when asked about their motivations for returning to college?

Research Question 2: What factors are associated with the adult learner who does not plan to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester?

Research Question 3: How do adult learners and traditional learners differ in terms of their motivation to return to Madison College West Campus?

These questions were asked in order to discover more about our adult student population’s motivations for returning to Madison College. The college has made student retention a priority in its strategic plan and this paper can help identify student goals for success that can be key factors in retention. By comparing adult students’ motivations to traditionally
aged students’ motivations, we can see if each body of students is unique in their motivational goals or if the two groups share some fundamental traits.

**Item Analysis**

The first question this paper sought to answer was: What type(s) of motivation is (are) associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester? The data was restricted to respondents aged 24 and older who will be attending next semester. Out of the 67 students aged 24 and older, 58 plan to return, for a retention rate of 86.6%. See Tables 1 through 4 for a breakdown of the data.

Students were asked to respond on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to indicate their level of agreement with a statement describing a reason for returning to Madison College for another semester. The first statement was a performance-approach goal orientation and stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because it is important for me to have my accomplishments recognized, so continuing to go to school achieves that goal.” Seventy-five percent of students indicated that they either somewhat or strongly agreed. Almost 14% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and just over 10% of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean response was 4.10, with a standard deviation of 1.238.
Table 1

*Performance-Approach Response for Adult Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (N=58)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second statement was a mastery-approach goal orientation that stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because my goal is to continue building my knowledge from one semester to the next in order to do my best when I am employed.” Ninety-four point nine percent of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement, only 5.2% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and 0.0% of the respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed. The mean response was 4.71, with a standard deviation of .562.

Table 2

*Mastery-Approach Response for Adult Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (N=58)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third statement was a performance-avoidance goal orientation that stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because I just want to avoid doing poorly in life.” Fifty-eight point six percent of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement, while 24.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 17.2% either somewhat or strongly disagreed. The mean response was 3.76, with a standard deviation of 1.443.

Table 3

**Performance-Avoidance Response for Adult Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (N=58)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last statement was a mastery-avoidance goal orientation that stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because I’m often afraid that I haven’t understood the content of my classes as thoroughly as I’d like. If I don’t understand then I won’t accomplish my goal of getting employed after I’ve graduated.” Twenty-five point eight percent of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed, while 19% were neutral, and 55.2% of the respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed. The mean response was 2.4, with a standard deviation of 1.388.
Table 4

*Mastery-Avoidance Response for Adult Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (N=58)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for the second component to the first question revealed that there were statistically significant correlations between several of the motivational goals selected by the adult learner. Pearson’s r-data analysis reveals positive correlational relationships between performance-avoidance and mastery-approach at .301, performance-approach and mastery-approach at .372, and performance-approach and performance-avoidance at .437. The next component of the first question asked which goal orientations were negatively correlated with each other in adult students. In Table 5, Pearson’s r-data analysis reveals negative correlational relationships between mastery-avoidance and all other goal orientations.
Table 5

*Correlations between Goal Orientations for the Adult Learner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance-approach Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.372**</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery-approach Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery-avoidance Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.301*</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance-avoidance Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.437**</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery-avoidance Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last component of the first question sought to find themes among the survey results when students were asked to describe in their own words what motivated them to continue for another semester. The open-ended question allowed the survey respondents to complete the section in whole, in part, or not at all. Of the 58 respondents aged 24 and older who planned to continue to the next semester, 49 students responded. The majority of the responses were not related to the students’ motivational goals for returning to school. Many students indicated cost, location, convenience, and a general goal of wanting to earn their degree. These responses did not provide any further insight into the motivational goals of the students. Ten of the adults that responded had themes of mastery-approach-oriented goals for returning to school. Eight of the adults that responded had themes of performance-approach-oriented goals for returning to
school. Three students responded with performance-avoidance-oriented goals. No respondents expressed themes of mastery-avoidance.

The second research question asked why some adult students are not continuing at Madison College West Campus next semester. Of the 67 students aged 24 and older, nine respondents (13.4%) were not planning on continuing at Madison College. Those not attending the next semester were prompted to answer why they were not attending in the spring semester. Four of the students planned on graduating, two students were transferring to another college or university, two were not planning on attending the next semester for financial reasons, and one student was not attending for personal reasons.

The last research question asked how traditional learners compared or contrasted with adult learners in areas of motivational goals, correlation of motivational goals, and reasons for not returning the following semester. To be able to contrast, we must look at the makeup of the population of the survey younger than 23. The data that follows is restricted to respondents who indicated their age was 23 and younger and will be attending the next semester. Sixty-three respondents were aged 23 and younger, making up 48.5% of the survey respondents. Out of the 63 students aged 23 and younger, 55 plan to return next semester, for a retention rate of 87.3%. See Tables 6 through 9 for a breakdown of motivational data for this population in comparison to the adult population.

Students were asked to respond on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to indicate their level of agreement with a statement asking them why they plan on returning to Madison College for another semester. The first statement expressed a performance-approach goal orientation and stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because it is important for me to have my accomplishments recognized, so continuing to go to school achieves that goal.”
See Table 6 for results. Both adult and traditional students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. It is significant to note that only 1% of traditional learners strongly disagreed with the statement while over 10% of adult students disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean response for both was close: 4.10 for adult learners and 4.38 for traditional. However, traditional learners’ responses had a lesser degree of variability, with a standard deviation of .850 for adult learners.

Table 6

Performance-Approach Response for Traditional Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-23</th>
<th>24+</th>
<th>-23</th>
<th>24+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (N=55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second statement expressed a mastery-approach goal orientation and stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because my goal is to continue building my knowledge from one semester to the next in order to do my best when I am employed.” See Table 7 for a full breakdown of results. Both adult and traditional learners overwhelmingly agreed somewhat or strongly with the statement. Three point six percent of the traditional learners either somewhat or strongly disagreed, while no adult learners disagreed with this statement. The mean response was 4.55 for traditional learners and 4.71 for adult learners. Adults had a lesser degree of
variability; their responses had a standard deviation of .562 compared to .857 for traditional students.

Table 7

*Mastery-Approach Response for Traditional Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-23</th>
<th>24+</th>
<th>-23</th>
<th>24+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>(N=55)</td>
<td>(N=58)</td>
<td>(N=55)</td>
<td>(N=58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third statement expressed a performance-avoidance goal orientation and stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because I just want to avoid doing poorly in life.”

Eighty-seven percent of traditional learners responded as either somewhat or strongly agreeing with the statement, compared to 58.6% of adult students. Seven percent of traditional students had no opinion on this question, while 24% of adult students didn’t agree or disagree with the statement. Five point four percent of traditional students either somewhat or strongly disagreed, compared to 17.2% of adult students. The mean response was 4.42 traditional students, compared to 3.76 for adults. The adults had a greater degree of variability, with a standard deviation of 1.443 compared to traditional students who, were at .917.
Table 8

Performance-Avoidance Response for Traditional Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency (N=55)</th>
<th>Percentage (N=58)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last statement expressed a mastery-avoidance goal orientation and stated, “I plan to go back to school next semester because I’m often afraid that I haven’t understood the content of my classes as thoroughly as I’d like. If I don’t understand then I won’t accomplish my goal of getting employed after I’ve graduated.” Forty-one point eight percent of traditional students indicated that they either somewhat or strongly agreed, compared to just 25.8% of adult students. Both groups of students contained an equal amount of students who neither agreed nor disagreed. Thirty-six point four percent of the traditional students either somewhat or strongly disagreed, while 55.2% of adult students disagreed with the statement. The mean response was 3.00 for traditional learners, compared to 2.40 for adult students. Both had a similar standard deviation of 1.319 for traditional students, and 1.388 for adults.
Table 9

*Mastery-Avoidance Response for Traditional Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-23 Frequency</th>
<th>24+ Frequency</th>
<th>-23 Percentage</th>
<th>24+ Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those students who indicated they were not returning to Madison College next semester were asked why. Of the 63 students aged 23 and younger, 8 respondents (12.6%) were not planning on continuing at Madison College, compared to 9 of 67 students (13.4%) aged 24 and older who were not planning on continuing. Combining the two groups of students, 130 students completed the survey. Seventeen students, or 13% of the sample population, are not planning on returning to Madison College, which makes the expected retention rate 87%.

The data reveals that there are statistically significant correlations between several of the motivational goals selected by the traditional learner. Pearson’s r-data analysis reveals positive correlational relationships between performance-avoidance and mastery-approach at .301, performance-approach and mastery-approach at .372, and performance-approach and performance-avoidance at .437. The next component of the first question asked which goal orientations were negatively correlated with each other in adult students. In Table 10, Pearson’s
r-data analysis reveals negative correlational relationships between mastery-avoidance and all other goal orientations.

Table 10

**Correlations Between Goal Orientations for Adult and Traditional Learners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Mastery-approach</th>
<th>Performance-avoidance</th>
<th>Mastery-avoidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.497*</td>
<td>.437*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach</td>
<td></td>
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Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to apply theories of the 2x2 achievement goal framework to the adult learner's technical education experience in order to discover the retention motivations of adult learners enrolled at Madison College West Campus. More specifically, this study examined whether adult learners’ retention motivations were mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, or performance-avoidance.

Motivation is a valuable characteristic to study when looking at college retention rates. Motivation can be one of the reasons a student chooses not to return to college for the next semester, but it can also provide valuable insight to college personnel who decide what kind of student Madison College retains. Currently, Madison College’s retention rates are within the 50th percentile of 2-year colleges at 55.8% (Madison College, Action Project Directory, 2013). Increasing the retention of students of all ages has become one of the college’s top priorities, and it hopes to reach a retention rate of 64% by 2016 (Madison College, 2014b).

The Committee on Retention Effectiveness (CORE) has provided the Higher Learning Commission with several outcomes to measure the success of student retention. The research on student motivation that was conducted in this paper aligned with Strategy 8 of Madison College’s Outcome Measures with the Higher Learning Commission: “Identify characteristics and create profile of students that complete and those who do not to retain through completion/academic goals” (Madison College, 2013, p. 2). By uncovering the goals and motivations of those who choose to return to college, this paper will use its conclusions to provide the college with measurable data on motivation that can be utilized to identify students’ successes.
Studying students only at the West Campus will separate this population from the rest of the Madison College student body. In doing so, the college can use motivation as a tool to understand the retention motivations of those at West Campus, but also as a means to increase retention at West. This will provide administrators with data to help guide their decision about the future of the West Campus, and an opportunity to employ the methods used in this paper to better identify student motivations at other campuses in order to gauge potential retention for the next semester.

**Purpose**

Considerable research in the area of motivation has documented advancement of the achievement goal theory in higher-education learners. Dweck (1986) and Nicholls (1984) were some of the first to identify a mastery and performance approach. Ames (1992) was the first to put together all of the previous research, look at the goal-orientation dichotomy, and test whether mastery goals promoted more effective learning in certain classroom situations than those who were performance-oriented. Ames (1992) concluded that those with performance-goal orientations were only interested in how they compared to the group and if they were viewed as favorable amongst the crowd; in doing so, there was an “avoidance of risk taking, use of less effective or superficial learning strategies, and negative affect directed toward self” (p. 264).

As the achievement goal theory continued to be tested, there were considerable inconsistencies in the evidence that performance-goal orientations were viewed as the opposite of mastery-approach and it was not an effective way to approach a goal (Elliot, 1999). Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) called for reconsideration of the dichotomous approach by splitting up the performance goal into performance-approach and performance-avoidance. The differing and therefore unreliable conclusions of the performance orientation were due to people approaching a
goal with the desire to both gain competence and the favor of others, or the desire to avoid incompetence. This induces an anxiety-based situation that interrupts the focus and cognitive processing of the subject (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996).

Additionally, previous research showed that performance and mastery goals have been viewed as independent of each other (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Using the 2x2 achievement goal framework proposed by Elliot (1999), Elliot and McGregor (2001) conducted two studies using the achievement goal questionnaire to test the independency or interdependency of the four motivational goals. This author sought to test whether these same motivational goals are independent or interdependent in students at the West Campus.

The prevailing studies in the area of achievement motivation conducted most of their research either on children in K-12 education or college-age students attending a university. Very little research has been conducted on adult learners, and even more specifically, adult learners in a technical education setting (Hegarty, 2011). A survey of students at the West Campus using an adapted achievement goal questionnaire with the 2x2 achievement goal framework would expand the knowledge of the discipline. Three questions were crafted to seek answers on achievement goal motivation for technical college adult learners.

1. What type(s) of motivation is (are) associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College West Campus next semester?
   
a) Which motivational goals were correlated with other goals of the adult learner?

b) Which motivational achievement goals are least likely to be correlated with other goals?

c) What themes emerge from the students when asked about their motivations for returning to college?
2. What factors lead to an adult learner planning to not continue at Madison College West Campus next semester?

3. How do adult learners and traditional learners differ in terms of motivation for those returning to Madison College West Campus?

The data was analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics, Pearson’s r correlation, and thematic statistics. The number of responses to each achievement goal orientation statement was evaluated by the frequency and percentage for those filtered for ages 24 and older to find the total, as well as the mean and standard deviation. In order to find the possible associations of one or more motivational goals to another, SPSS ran Pearson’s r correlation to find any relationships that were statistically relevant. Thematic statistics were employed to analyze the unique responses of the adult students to code for the motivations within the 2x2 achievement-goal framework. One hundred thirty students participated in the study from nine different classes taught by five different instructors over a span of three weeks.

**Discussion**

The first research question sought to find what types of motivation are associated with the adult learner who plans to continue at Madison College for another semester. The achievement goal questionnaire was modified for the purposes of this study to focus on adult students at West Campus who planned to return for the spring semester. The questionnaire evaluated the motivation of the subjects’ return and therefore subsequent participation in college its usefulness in the attainment of their goals after graduation. The perception of competence and the attitudes toward one’s own achievement while in college will translate to their successful postgraduate employment.
The minimal research on adult learners and motivation suggests varying conclusions. Some suggests they are more intrinsically motivated and seek knowledge for the sake of learning. This may be due to the fact that adults are choosing to return or go to college for the first time and have a drive to learn and succeed (Eppler & Harju, 1997; Hegarty, 2011). Other research findings suggest that adult students, specifically those in graduate-level coursework, may have more performance-based motivations, possibly due to their desire to be viewed as successful in the workplace (Hegarty, 2010).

Conclusions

The results of the current study show that adult students aged 24 and older placed high value on both mastery-approach goals and performance-approach goals. Almost 95% of the adult respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with the mastery-approach goal orientation statement that said, “I plan to go back to school next semester because my goal is to continue building my knowledge from one semester to the next in order to do my best when I am employed.” Thematic analysis of the open-ended question that was asked during the survey helped to give greater insight into the intrinsic mastery goals that students have when it comes to their education. One respondent’s goal was “self-improvement and growth,” while another said, “I want to expand my knowledge in the workplace and gain more responsibilities,” while others stated that they were returning because they enjoy learning at West, or to build a foundation for the future. Responses coded for mastery approach revealed that many students who have a strong will to learn also have a strong desire to complete what they start. The current findings support this as a positive and effective learning strategy used to achieve success in task completion, consistent with previous findings that adult students are mastery-approach oriented (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; McCollum & Kajs, 2007).
Adult students who indicated they planned on returning to Madison College for another semester also scored very high in the performance-approach goal orientation. Seventy-five percent of the respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement of, “I plan to go back to school next semester because it is important for me to have my accomplishments recognized, so continuing to go to school achieves that goal.” The goal-orientation trichotomy framework was conceptualized because subjects with performance-approach goal orientations perceive their levels of competence to be high when completing a task; therefore, the performance-approach goal is a productive goal orientation, more so than originally perceived. Furthermore, the current findings support previous data that showcases performance-approach as a positive and effective learning strategy used to demonstrate high levels of competence to successfully complete a task (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; McCollum & Kajs, 2007).

When prompted to respond with their own words about what motivated their return to college, many respondents gave family-focused reasons that were coded for performance-approach. Many of the adult students indicated they were returning to college not to demonstrate high levels of competence and earn favorable recognition from employers or peers, as the performance-approach seems to have assumed, but rather from their parents, spouses, and/or children. Adult students at West Campus indicated that they want to display competence and receive recognition from those they love, not peers or classmates. Previous research assumed that students most desired recognition from their peer group or employer. Not only are students driven by their desire to learn and gain knowledge for successful employment after college, they want their family to recognize and appreciate that they are dedicated. This could possibly be considered a new type of group of adult students, since one of their top priorities is usually the family unit, which can be defined as anyone they care for on a regular basis—parents, children,
or spouse. Adult students return to college with many more priorities and life experiences than a traditionally aged student; many have families, jobs, and social lives they hold in high regard and want their educational journey to be acknowledged and appreciated.

Barron and Harackiewicz (2001) advanced the hypothesis that mastery and performance goals can work together to better help a subject complete a task. They wanted to test if a subject could be both interested and invested in a task and care about how they performed in relation to others. This researcher confirms that several types of motivation are associated with one another in adult students. Students demonstrated a high degree of association with performance-approach and mastery-approach, performance-approach and performance-avoidance, and mastery-approach and performance-avoidance. Previous literature hypothesized that adult students might assign a high score to the mastery-avoidance goal due to the disadvantage of age and cognitive ability when it comes to learning and retaining new information (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

Adult students at the West Campus who choose to return to Madison College are dynamically motivated. They have a strong desire to learn due to their age and previous experience; they aspire to have their accomplishments recognized by their families; and, having some experience in the real world, they know how hard one has to work to succeed and are attending college because they want to avoid professional and personal failure. These students are dedicated to their future, so 86.5% of them are planning on returning to Madison College.

This successful retention rate may be due to several variables working together. First, the nature of the students who choose to attend West Campus: when prompted to respond with their own words about what is motivating them to return to college, many students indicated that they loved the smaller feel of the West Campus in comparison to the main Truax Campus. They cited
proximity to home, small class sizes, helpful and knowledgeable instructors, as well as its departure from the usual, mainstream campus schema. Adult students who learn better on a small campus, where many other adult students are taking classes and instructors know their students, may be more likely to return than those who perhaps get lost in the shuffle of a larger campus with bigger class sizes.

These factors combined with high levels of mastery- and performance-approach, with just enough fear of failure, may be the winning combination to successfully retaining adult students. It was helpful to discover that most of the adult students who were not able to return next semester gave positive or beneficial reasons, such as graduation or transfer to another institution to continue their education. The other factor students indicated for not being able to return was financial considerations; this finding is consistent with adult students making sacrifices to earn a degree as an adult, as students are not always able to fulfill all of their roles, such as parent, employee, student, spouse, etc.

Traditionally aged students displayed high levels of mastery-approach and performance-approach orientations, but differed from adult students on the span of results, showing that younger students are not as focused on their goals as adult students.

The major difference in results was first found in the high levels of performance-avoidance goals. Younger students were much more likely to agree with the statement, “I just want to avoid doing poorly in life.” Many younger students have not had the opportunity to work and live in a world outside of their enrollment in school, so it may be the fear of the unknown, as well as failure in the eyes of family, friends and coworkers, that is keeping students in school to avoid failure. Research suggests that those with performance-avoidance motivations
in the classroom carry these motivations over to the workforce and other areas of life, which may be a concern for future employers of these younger students (McCollum & Kajs, 2007).

Next, traditionally aged students were more afraid of the possibility of losing information previously learned, so they continued to go to classes to avoid failure. Since both performance-avoidance and mastery-avoidance are linked to low achievement, this may be cause for concern (McCollum & Kajs, 2007). In the long run, this self-defeating attitude may create a challenge for Madison College in retaining younger students through graduation.

Based on the findings and observations of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Adult students who are continuing their education for another semester at Madison College are both mastery-approach and performance-approach oriented, with current research suggesting this is a valuable combination of motivation in an educational setting.

2. Adult students are not as performance-avoidant as traditionally aged students. This suggests that younger students may have a fear of the unknown future and their ability to succeed, so they decide to stay in school.

3. Adult students are not as mastery-avoidant as traditionally aged students. This suggests that younger students fear losing the knowledge they have, so they stay in school. Traditionally aged students might be at greater risk of attrition due to the link between mastery-avoidant goals and low levels of competence and achievement.

4. In addition to their internal drive for knowledge and success, adult students indicate they plan to return to Madison College because they like the small environment of the West Campus.
5. Retention at the West Campus was high between fall 2013 and spring 2014, for all ages of students.

Consistent with previous findings, students of all ages are able to employ more than one motivational goal.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, observations, and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Further research is recommended to determine whether different subjects bring out different motivational goals.

2. Further research is recommended to ascertain what motivates those who choose not to attend.

3. Small-campus options within the Madison, Wisconsin metropolitan area need to be a high priority for the college’s administration. The West Campus’ high retention rate for students of all ages displays their commitment to the learning environment.

4. Preliminary research suggests that mastery-approach; goal-oriented students may display other goal orientations in different settings. Further research is needed to quantify the effect of goal orientations on adults in adjusted environments.

5. Additional research on adult students’ motivations is needed in order to confirm and generalize findings.

This study highlights adult students in technical education and their motivations for returning to Madison College for another semester. By using the achievement-goal questionnaire, motivation can be quantifiable and measurable using a reliable tool. This data is useful to the CORE college committee tasked with improving retention for all students at
Madison College. Adult students make up a large percentage of the technical college’s student population, and their motivations for staying at Madison College provide the committee with useful information on successful retention characteristics. The findings offer insight for Madison College, West Campus, but further research is needed in order to postulate whether findings are relevant for a larger population or can be replicated at other educational institutions.
References


Appendix: Survey

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: The impact of motivation on retention rates of adult learners at Madison Area Technical College, West Campus.
Researcher: Ashley Bauer (bauera3315@my.uwstout.edu)

Description: This survey is looking at your motivations for why you may or may not be planning on going back to school next semester at Madison Area Technical College.

Confidentiality: Responses to all of the questions in this survey will remain confidential and anonymous. Responses will not be traced back to you. Please give honest responses; this will provide the study with accurate data. This survey will not be timed.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. You have the right to stop the survey at any time. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator. If you are participating in an anonymous online survey, once you submit your response, the data cannot be linked to you and cannot be withdrawn.”

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the researcher. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

IRB Administrator
Sue Foxwell, Research Services
152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.
UW-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
715.232.2477
foxwells@uwstout.edu

Statement of Consent:
By completing the following survey, you agree to participate in the project entitled, “The impact of motivation on retention rates of adult learners at Madison Area Technical College, West Campus.”

Please begin the survey on the next page.
Please circle Yes or No

1. Do you plan to continue at this technical college next semester?  
   Yes  No

*If yes, please proceed to Section 1.*  
*If no, please skip Section 1 and proceed to Section 2.*

**Section 1**

Directions for items 2 through 6: When it comes to making the decision to return to school next semester, different students have different motivations. Please read the following statements carefully. Reflect how they make you feel or think and whether you personally agree or disagree with each. Use the following scale to rate each sentence.

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I plan to go back to school next semester because...

2. ...it is important for me to have my accomplishments recognized, so continuing to go to school achieves that goal.  
   1  2  3  4  5

3. ...my goal is to continue building my knowledge from one semester to the next in order to do my best when I am employed.  
   1  2  3  4  5

4. ...I just want to avoid doing poorly in life.  
   1  2  3  4  5

5. ...I’m often afraid that I haven’t understood the content of my classes as thoroughly as I’d like. If I don’t understand then I won’t accomplish my goal of getting employed after I’ve graduated.  
   1  2  3  4  5

6. In your own words, what motivated you to continue at this technical college?

---

*Please skip over Section 2 and proceed to Section 3.*
Section 2

Please circle Yes or No

7. Are you graduating at the end of the semester?
   Yes    No

If yes, please skip the rest of Section 2 and proceed to Section 3.

8. If no, circle one or more reasons why you do not plan on attending this school next semester:
   - Family obligations
   - Personal reasons
   - I got a job in my field already
   - Financial reasons
   - Health reasons
   - Dissatisfaction with college
   - Transferring to another school
   - Joining the armed forces
   - Other (please explain):

Section 3

Directions for items 9 through 12: Lastly, I need to know a few things about you as a respondent to this study. Please read the following questions and circle the most appropriate answer.

9. As of today, are you enrolled in a certificate, technical diploma, associate degree, or transfer program at this technical college?
   Yes    No

   By answering Yes, it means that you have completed the application requirements, have been admitted to the program and are completing the required courses in the curriculum.
   By answering No, it means that you are not admitted into a program but are taking courses at the college.

10. What is your age?
    18-19  20-23  24-29  30-34  35-39  40-49  50+

11. What is your gender?
12. As of today, what is your enrollment status?

Full-time status is defined as taking 12 credits or more this semester.
Less than full-time status is defined as taking 11 credits or less this semester.

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<tr>
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<td>Less than full-time</td>
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YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE SURVEY.

TURN THIS SURVEY OVER ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF YOU WHEN COMPLETE.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY, PLEASE EMAIL THE RESEARCHER AT BAUERA3315@MY.UWSTOUT.EDU

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING.