Factors Encouraging Student Enrollment Following Dual Enrollment Participation

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Less than one-third of dual enrollment participants choose to matriculate with the host institution after high school, especially at a community college. Using Perna's college choice model, this qualitative study explored how dual enrollment participation shaped students' choice to attend the host institution the semester after high school graduation. The findings suggest that students particularly appreciated the supportive faculty. Additionally, the participants selected the host institution because of the environment, ability to save money, location, the gained momentum, and the available programs and transfer opportunities. The study's findings add to the dual enrollment literature and provide insight for community college administrators seeking to recruit former dual enrollment participants. Keywords: dual enrollment, community college, college choice factors

Dual Enrollment (DE) has proven to increase college entry the semester after high school and to reduce the time to completion (Grubb et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015). As a result, colleges now offer DE to a broader range of students, including those considered at-risk (Loveland, 2017; Zinth & Taylor, 2019). This is especially important because the United States Bureau of Labor Statics predicts an increased number of careers requiring an associate's or bachelor's degree (Watson, 2017).

States enacted various policies concerning the cost of DE. Whether students pay reduced or no tuition (Adams, 2014), they receive significant financial savings as well as a boost in academic benefits from DE programs (Mansell & Justice, 2014). Unfortunately, the low cost to students often places a burden on some institutions, and college administrators have indicated the cost as a barrier to maintaining or expanding DE programs (Kilgore & Wagner, 2017). States differ in funding models with some states allotting money specifically for DE programs and others providing none (Kinnick, 2012). In the situation with no designated state support, the cost falls to the student, the school district, or the host institution (Adams, 2014; Zinth, 2016). District superintendents claim funding DE

programs strain the budget (Romano & Palmer, 2016). Community colleges rely on state and local government funding, which is susceptible to economic changes (Romano & Palmer, 2016), and inconsistent local and state support leaves the community college having to depend on tuition. At the same time, college leaders do not want to put a financial burden on the student, creating a cycle of concern regarding monetary responsibility (Roach et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the potential to recruit new students serves as a reason that community colleges continue to offer DE programs despite the financial strain (Kinnick, 2012). The United States Census Bureau (2018) has reported a decline in the number of future 18-year-olds creating a smaller recruitment pool. Colleges could offset the loss of enrollment by encouraging high school graduates to enroll in the DE host institution. Research has shown that DE participants are more likely to enroll in college the semester following high school than nonparticipants (Wang et al., 2015). Naturally, community college administrators view DE as the ideal channel for recruitment (Kinnick, 2012).

The literature is inconclusive regarding community colleges using DE as a recruitment effort. In a Florida study, three-quarters of participants enrolled in a public Florida institution after high school graduation. The report, however, did not indicate the number of students who selected the host institution (Khazem & Khazem, 2014). According to Kinnick (2012), approximately one-third of DE participants returned to the host institution the semester following high school graduation, and students in the study indicated that participation in DE often led to a change in their post-high school plans. There has, however, been a lack of empirical literature regarding how participation in DE affects college choice following high school graduation and why more students do not return to the host institution.

Purpose Statement

Offering a DE program comes with a cost, but many community college administrators believe the recruitment potential outweighs the expense (Kinnick, 2012). Research data concerning how DE participation in both technical and transfer programs served as a contextual factor within college choice would allow administrators to make better-informed decisions regarding program options and processes. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how DE participation shaped students' choice to attend the host community college the semester after high school graduation.

Research Question

The following question guided the study: How does participation in a technical or transfer dual enrollment program serve as a context within students' choice to enroll as degree-seeking with the host institution?

Key Terms

The definition of DE differs slightly among states (Pretlow & Patteson, 2015). Also, the literature uses the terms dual enrollment, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment interchangeably to refer to programs offering both high school and college credit for the same class (Taylor et al., 2015). For this study, we used the term DE exclusively. DE is defined as high school students enrolled in college-level courses, earning credit toward both the college and high school transcript (Lile et al., 2018).

Other terms used throughout the study include:

- *College choice* refers to the selection of postsecondary school in which a student enrolls following high school graduation (Perna, 2006).
- *Degree-seeking* refers to applying to an institution with the purpose of declaring a major.
- The *host institution* is the college responsible for administering the DE program.
- *Technical DE programs* include curriculum intended to apply toward a two-year terminal degree.
- *Transfer DE programs* include curriculum intended to transfer into a four-year degree.

Conceptual Framework

Laura Perna's four-layer college choice model (2006) served as the conceptual framework for this case study. Perna (2006) recognized that college choice was multilayered and developed a conceptual model that combined economic and sociological models. Perna (2006) indicated the four layers of influence on college choice include: "(a) individual habitus; (b) school and community context; (c) the higher education context; and (d) the broader social, economic, and policy context" (p. 116).

The first layer, the individual habitus, involves the student's gender, race, socioeconomic status, cultural knowledge, the cultural value of education, available information regarding college, and support navigating the college processes. Bergerson (2009) further explained the first layer as an "unconscious lens through which individuals view their options

and make decisions based on what feels comfortable for them" (p. 37). Additionally, the individual habitus impacts the access to college options. For example, students from low-income families cannot afford selective, nonlocal colleges (Perna & Ruiz, 2016). The school and community context of the second layer include the availability and types of resources, as well as structural supports or barriers, which includes guidance counselors, teachers, and available college information (Bergerson, 2009; Perna, 2006). The third layer, higher education context, refers to institutional marketing, recruitment, location, and characteristics (Perna, 2006). Higher education institutions provide information through marketing and recruitment, highlighting characteristics to attract students (Perna, 2006). The fourth layer contains social, economic, and policy contexts (Perna, 2006). The model assumes that social demographics and the state of the economy play a role in college choice (Bergerson, 2009). Additionally, public policies that support or discourage college attendance, such as financial aid or free community college policies, influence the student's choice (Perna, 2006).

Perna's (2006) four-layer college choice conceptual model "assumes that college enrollment decisions reflect an individual's 'situated context'" (p. 114). Viewing the context of each layer is vital to understanding individual choices (Bergerson, 2009). The model follows earlier models in that students base the decision on the cost-benefit, but various influences impact the view of the benefits (Perna, 2006).

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research design with a constructivist research paradigm, which assumes reality is based on perception (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The current study was designed to determine how participants perceive their experience in DE shaped their college choice. The study was bounded to on-campus DE programs from the 2017–2019 academic years at Appalachia Community College (ACC) (Moore, 2021).

Study Context

The data collection occurred during the fall of 2020 at ACC. According to Perna's (2006) model, various direct and indirect factors influence college choice. Layer three is the higher education context, including location, and layer four of the model includes the social, economic, and policy context. We selected ACC because of the unique contextual factors of the Appalachia Region. The Appalachian Region spans from New York to Alabama and includes portions of 13 states (Appalachian Region Commission [ARC], n.d.). Jobs in the Appalachian Region have shifted

from extraction industries to manufacturing and the service industry (ARC, n.d.).

The Appalachian income and educational attainment rates consistently fall behind the rest of the United States (Greenberg, 2016). The job opportunities and the rural setting contribute to these rates (Greenberg, 2016). Community colleges provide higher education access to low-income and first-generation students (Bahr & Gross, 2016). In hopes to improve the poverty rate and educate more individuals, ACC's state recently enacted a free community college policy. ACC's multiple locations allows individuals from a large service area to access campus.

Layer one and two of the model include the individual culture and the available resources or supports within high school. At-risk students lack personal and cultural support regarding college attendance, college information, and knowledge of processes (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Unfortunately, the poverty rate within much of Appalachia puts students at risk of improper support (Greenberg, 2016). DE serves as an essential resource to encourage college attendance and provide knowledge of college opportunities and processes among underrepresented students (An, 2013; Taylor, 2015).

Participants

We recruited former DE participants from the 2017–2019 academic years who opted to re-enroll with the host institution the semester following high school. The students represented all the on-campus program options offered on ACC's campus. Six technical DE program students and eight transfer DE program students completed the interviews. After gathering the contact information of the DE alumni from ACC's high school coordinator, who retrieved the content from their student information system, we emailed the students. The email explained the study and the participant's role. Additionally, we ensured the message indicated that participation was voluntary and that we would maintain confidentiality. We followed up with interested students to provide further information, schedule a time to meet, and gather the participants' signatures on the consent form. To maintain confidentiality, we assigned pseudonyms to both the participants and the college to eliminate the use of real names.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering included semi-structured interviews, a document review, and field notes. During the interviews, behaviors, nonverbal cues, and additional content the protocol did not include were noted. These field notes added context lost in the interview transcriptions.

Semi-Structured Interviews and Field Notes

The semi-structured interviews occurred via a video conferencing program. The COVID pandemic created discomfort conducting live interviews. Also, students from the 2017 school year had mostly graduated. The video conferencing program provided convenience for nonlocal participants.

During the live interviews, we used the video conferencing recording option to document the responses to the questions noted in Table 1. We took field notes indicating behaviors, nonverbal cues, additional questions, and recurring themes (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). After each interview, we noted, within the field notes, the main ideas we drew from the discussion.

Table 1. *Interview Questions Mapped to Perna's College Choice Model*

Question	Layer 1	Layer 2	Layer 3	Layer 4
Talk about your hobbies or what you did with your free time during high school. Did you also work during high school?	X			
What type of classes did you take in high school? (Honors, AP, college-prep, etc.)	X	X		
Describe the college expectations and supports from your family unit during high school.	X			
Describe how and who provided college information within your high school. Explain what type of information these individuals provided and how often.		X		
How did you learn about the dual enrollment opportunity, and why did you decide to partake?		X	X	
Talk about your educational goals prior to enrolling in dual enrollment courses. a. Did you have a plan to attend a specific college? b. Did you know what degree you wanted to pursue? c. Did you have career goals?	X	X	X	X
Describe what stood out to you from your dual enrollment experience, such as the faculty and staff, course content, learning environment, student support, procedures, etc.		X	X	

	Layer 1	Layer 2	Layer 3	Layer 4
How did participating in dual enrollment support or change your perception of college?		X	X	
How did participating in dual enrollment support or change your future career goals?		X		
Why did you ultimately decide to enroll at [institution's name]?	X	X	X	X

Note. Layers 1–4 represent the four layers in Perna's (2006) College Choice Model. Layer 1 represents individual habitus; layer 2 represents the school and community context; layer 3 represents the higher education context; and layer 4 represents the social, economic, and political context.

Document Review

Yin (2018) explained that a researcher conducting a document review must look for the "important message between the lines" to support the findings (p. 84). Therefore, we analyzed the messages within ACC's DE marketing materials. The type of information portrayed could potentially impact the type of student the material attracts. For example, marketing materials that highlight the transferability of courses could interest a student with intentions of attending a different institution after high school. In contrast, materials highlighting the opportunity to jump-start a technical program may entice a student wishing to quickly enter the workforce.

In addition to the marketing materials, we reviewed other DE documents, including information sheets, an FAQ sheet, agreements, and DE transition to degree-seeking documents, such as procedures and the degree-seeking application; then we analyzed how these documents and policies encourage enrollment after high school graduation.

According to Perna's (2006) model, college marketing materials, college recruitment efforts, college policies and processes, and structural supports within high school all add to the college choice complexity. This contextual information was imperative to include, and the DE materials served as a secondary data source, providing a more in-depth insight into the phenomenon that interviews may miss (Hays & Singh, 2012). While analyzing the materials, we took note of the information provided, exact quotes, and any subliminal messages portrayed.

Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis included the transcription of the interview recordings and field notes. The typed document review was placed in a separate file before the coding process. The coding process began with descriptive coding, where the main idea is summarized into a single word or brief phrase (Saldana, 2010). Utilizing comment boxes, a code

was noted for each statement in the interviews, field notes, and document review.

Following the first-cycle coding, we completed a member check with participants via email to ensure accurate interpretation of their responses. Participants received a bulleted list of themes that emerged from the individual interview and they were permitted to add additional information or correct previous data. After participants provided further information, the new content was coded using descriptive coding.

Before the second-cycle coding process, the words and phrases from the first-cycle coding were listed on a chart and grouped by similar topics. Then, each group was assigned an overarching term to describe the subject. Language used in Perna's (2006) model guided the assigned theme's name. This second-cycle aligns with the pattern coding process of identifying meaningful themes (Saldana, 2010).

Analysis

Most of the conversations began with an emphasis on the faculty's importance and then slowly transitioned to other college choice considerations. As the conversations shifted, we perceived the participants' demeanors and responses shifted from lighthearted excitement to matter-of-fact replies. The additional factors came more as an afterthought for several participants and they generally needed probing to recall other reasons.

Common themes emerged among both the technical and transfer students, indicating that they desired similar characteristics no matter the degree path. These common themes included the faculty, the campus and classroom's learning environment, saving money, the location, the momentum toward a degree, and academic major and transfer options (Moore, 2021).

Faculty Care as a College Choice Factor

When asked to describe what stood out from the DE experience, participants commonly replied, "the faculty." Molly indicated, "All my teachers [both full-time and part-time], my first year there were super helpful." Molly's peers reiterated the same sentiments multiple times. Since the participants were quick to share their experience with the faculty, it became apparent that both the full-time and part-time faculty played a crucial role in encouraging them to enroll as degree-seeking with ACC. We noted in our field notes that many participants' demeanors changed when they described the faculty. They relaxed, smiled, and spoke freely and excitedly.

The participants attributed the faculty care, understanding, and desire for students to succeed as nature of the community college. Isiah expressed, "I don't know if it's just because it's a community college, I feel [the teachers] put a whole lot more into actually teaching the students." Kelly added, "They want to help. They want you to succeed, just as much as you want to succeed. And I feel like you wouldn't get that in a big college."

The Learning Environment in the Campus and Classroom as a College Choice Factor

According to Perna's (2006) model, students desire colleges in which they are comfortable. Most of the participants expressed comfort with the learning environment as another significant factor. The DE opportunity allowed the participants to experience the community college learning environment, and the students quickly realized the community college offered characteristics that met their needs.

The participants appreciated the familiarity with the campus, the well-maintained facility, and the smaller classes. Shelly stated, "I already knew where things were. And it was just easier." Some students found comfort in the clean and maintained physical building. Isiah explained, "The school is, it was, well kept. It was very, you know, it was a nice school to be in."

While the physical comfort appealed to some, the psychological comfort of smaller classes provided a sense of safety. Keisha stated, "My first classes in [DE] were really small. And honestly, they still are. They're probably like 10 to 20 people in that first class. So, it was really easy to like make friends and talk to people." Bruce agreed, "I liked it being smaller classes, less people in them, and having a much more focused and like serious [learning environment]."

The DE documents reflected Bruce's feelings regarding the focused and serious environment. The DE student agreement emphasized the high school students' requirement to meet the same standards as traditional students. The agreement stated, "I understand I am a college student and will be treated as such. I will demonstrate mature behavior at all times." The agreement also encouraged parents to limit their involvement to promote student learning and independence, which prepares students to transition into degree-seeking programs. The expectations of mature behavior set the tone for a comfortable and focused learning environment, which Bruce appreciated.

Saving Money as a College Choice Factor

When asked why he chose AAC, Jeff replied, "Probably the number one thing would be to save money." The combination of low tuition and available grants and scholarships made ACC attractive to the former DE students. Kelly explained, "I really kind of waited last minute to make my decision of where I was going to go because I wanted to go away for college. But then again...it was more about the cost and saving money."

Some participants reported changing their original plans to attend other institutions to save money. ACC's state government funds an in-state scholarship for high-achieving students and a free community college grant. Colin earned the free community college grant. Colin stated, "Well, I mean the [free community college] grant helped. I think if the opportunity had not presented itself, could there have been a higher likelihood of me maybe going...somewhere else? Possibly." Jenna was in an analogous situation. Jenna planned to attend an out-of-state university where she earned bowling scholarships, but the bowling scholarship was not enough. Jenna struggled to deny the cost-saving option of staying in-state after she earned the state scholarship for high-achieving students.

Location as a College Choice Factor

The college location became an important factor for 10 participants. The campus proximity allowed the students to stay home, but the reasons differed. Some students wanted to save money, others needed time to mature, and life events encouraged a few others to remain local.

"Do I want to move?" is the question Alex asked himself when considering attending a nonlocal university. Alex realized he was not ready to move away. Others agreed they needed a chance to gain independence before leaving the area. The combination of saving money and parental support encouraged Kelly to remain at home.

For others, various life events or responsibilities encouraged participants to stay local. Bruce has medical issues that require multiple doctor appointments, so ACC's location was "convenient" for his current situation. During high school, Colin started a job and has remained in that position. Colin stated that "The fact that I have a stable job here" aided in his decision to stay close to home. Lastly, Molly is a caretaker for her sick grandmother. Molly eventually came to terms that her commitment to her grandmother outweighed her desire to attend a nonlocal university.

Momentum Toward a Degree as a College Choice Factor

The participants indicated they completed DE because they wanted an early start earning college credit. Multiple DE marketing materials used the language "jump-start your degree," and the *High School Viewbook* accentuated saving time and shortening the time to degree completion. About half of the participants described a desire to finish the program they started.

Layne described her decision to continue with the program. "A year before, I was struggling and really worrying I'm running out of time, I didn't know what I want to do, where I even want to go," explained Layne. Her excitement increased and her worries decreased when she realized she could finish the program in one more year. Jenna and Isiah held similar sentiments. Jenna stated, "I think it was because I already had the one year from [DE] that it just made it easier to not [attend the originally planned university]," and Isiah said, "I felt it would be a waste to not do it."

The document review revealed a smooth transition to motivate students to finish their program at ACC. The dual-enrollment to degree-seeking application was one page and shorter than the regular application. Also, the dual-enrollment to degree-seeking application waived the $25 application fee and the orientation requirement. Lastly, the DE to degree-seeking application encouraged immediate enrollment, as the summer and fall semesters are the only options for the "beginning semester."

Available Majors and Transfer Opportunities as a College Choice Factor

While the momentum attracted students, interest in ACC's opportunities served as another factor. Sixty-five percent of participants indicated available major and transfer options as another reason for choosing ACC. The DE experience allowed the participants to learn about the specific career options and articulation agreements with partnering four-year schools.

Willow had plans to attend the local university and pursue something in the health field. She was uncertain before DE of the specific healthcare path. While Willow was a dual enrolled student, she learned of the health information technology field, and she realized ACC offered a degree to pursue health information management. She decided to enroll, and her passion for the subject flourished.

ACC's *High School Viewbook* and marketing materials emphasized the *State-Wide Transfer Program* for general education courses. The transfer program is an agreement outlining general education courses that

transfer to any in-state college. The DE FAQ sheet defined program articulation agreements and provided a link to ACC's current articulation agreements list, notifying DE participants of future transfer options. The agreements encouraged Shelly, Jenna, Colin, Bobby, Kelly, and Isiah to pursue ACC's transfer programs. Colin reasoned, "I also heard about the two-plus-two program for the education.... So, you know, why not just stick with it and then transfer?"

Results

Academic major is often considered a significant enrollment factor for former DE participants (Damrow, 2017). In fact, many of ACC's on-campus DE programs provide students momentum toward a specific major, encouraging participants to complete the degree after high school, but the current study found several other significant factors. As Perna's (2006) model indicates, college choice is not as straightforward. College choice evolves from the interconnection of multilayered factors such as "individual habitus, school and community context, the higher education context, and the broader social, economic, and policy context" (p. 116). Without speaking to the students, the complexity of the participants' college choice process is lost. The current study provides insight into how DE participation served as a college choice context. The DE experience exposed students to ACC, and the exposure allowed students to explore desired characteristics influenced by multifaceted needs (Moore, 2021).

Faculty and Learning Environment

The findings of the current study revealed students found the caring faculty the most significant factor when choosing ACC. Throughout the interviews, participants reiterated positive interactions with both full-time and part-time faculty and emphasized how faculty inspired them to enroll with the host institution. The faculty displayed care through their support, responsiveness, and attention to student learning.

Often the conversations transitioned naturally from the topic of faculty to descriptions of the environment. Again, the participants continually described a comfortable physical and psychological learning environment both in the classroom and across campus. Students' familiarity with campus, the intimate setting, and the well-kept facility added to the comfortable environment participants described.

At first, these findings appear to contradict the findings of previous studies which had indicated students considered tangible factors, such as their major (Damrow, 2017). However, when viewing the results through

the lens of Perna's (2006) college choice model, the findings make sense. Bergerson (2009) indicated that the individual habitus serves as an "unconscious lens" that guides individuals to comfortable choices (p. 37).

The faculty and the learning environment's importance is also less surprising when considering other college choice literature. In a study regarding why students choose a community college over a university, participants described the community college "as more learner-friendly and 'just as good academically' as four-year colleges" (Somers et al., 2006 p. 66). The students referred to the faculty characteristics, the faculty care in student learning, and the small classes when describing the "learner-friendly" college.

In a more recent study of gifted African American students, the findings suggested students desired a safe environment, one in which they feel accepted (Goings & Sewell, 2019). In this same study, the participants described supportive parents that lacked college knowledge to help navigate the college processes. The study's participants appreciated outside resources that aided in the college navigation (Goings & Sewell, 2019).

More than half of the current study's participants were first-generation students who described having supportive parents but reported navigating the college processes independently. We suspect ACC's caring faculty served as the "outside" resource that aided with the navigation processes. Molly and Bruce detailed specific examples of faculty assisting in the college processes, while other participants stated appreciating faculty responsiveness for all general questions. Although Somers et al. (2006) and Goings and Sewell's (2019) studies did not include DE participants, many of the participants in the current study were at-risk like the students in described studies.

Money and Location

When the students spoke of saving money and the location, the conversations transitioned from lighthearted excitement about the faculty to more matter-of-fact responses. Location and cost are common higher education characteristics noted in the college choice literature (Damrow, 2017; Perna, 2006; Stephenson et al., 2016). However, the narrative behind these desired characteristics provided a different perspective. The economic models presume students use rational decision-making when choosing a college (Somers et al., 2006). The participants did offer rational arguments for choosing ACC based on the location and ability to save money.

The lives of many students in the study, like students across the country, dictate that they choose a low cost and nearby option, the community

college, to meet their higher education needs. While students had access to other college choices in the area, ACC has multiple locations within the students' communities, making ACC the closest and cheapest. Many participants contemplated the local university, but when they considered the cost and the campus environment, they decided ACC was the better option.

Several students discussed the available scholarships and grants and how they could not pass on the opportunity. The income levels of the 13-state Appalachian region's population are generally lower than in other regions of the United States (Greenberg, 2016). Students from low socio-economic status lack proper support (Perna & Ruiz, 2016), so rationally, they valued the scholarship opportunities and ability to stay home. Saving money motivated many participants to forgo their top college choice, which aligns with previous literature (Stephenson et al., 2016).

Momentum and Major Options

Students' desire to finish the program served as the next factor. Many of the on-campus DE programs allowed students to gain momentum toward a specific degree, and some of the participants did not want to waste their progress. The desire to finish the program was a rational decision (Somers et al., 2006). The shortened time to completion allowed students to save money and enter the workforce sooner.

This desire to continue with the program aligns with the final factor of the major and transfer opportunities. Their DE experience allowed the participants to explore ACC's programs and learn about articulation agreements, which attracted several students. Some students switched majors after examining the options, while others remained on the original path.

In both situations, the students felt confident in their decision. Additionally, students wishing to transfer found comfort knowing their credits transferred because of articulation agreements.

The final themes, desire to finish the program and major options, aligns with the previous literature listing major as a significant college choice factor (Damrow, 2017; Stephenson et al., 2016). Additionally, as Lile et al. (2018) implied, the DE experience allows students to explore careers. The findings also make sense when acknowledging the societal and economic contexts (Perna, 2006). Job opportunities in the community are growing. ACC continually develops programs informed by the area's career potentials. Most of ACC's DE programs allowed students

to gain momentum toward specific majors to fill the community's needs (e.g., cybersecurity, nursing, and education).

The interest in transfer opportunities is consistent with the previous literature. Generally, DE participants hold intentions of attending a four-year college after high school (Ozmun, 2013). Of the students who choose to enroll with the host community college, most complete transfer programs (Lawrence & King, 2019). The transferability of general education credits and specific articulation agreements were of interest to several participants. Often participants spoke of the transfer options in conjunction with money savings. The students found comfort knowing they could save money first and then transfer smoothly to complete a bachelor's degree.

Limitations

We only interviewed students from one community college, creating a limitation. The participants had similar DE experiences. However, we utilized a mix of participants from three consecutive years and from different programs within ACC. The program options grew during the three years, as well as the need for more faculty. The responses, though, remained consistent throughout the two groups and various academic years.

Recommendations for Practitioners

With the decline in enrollment due to lower populations of 18-year-olds and COVID-19 impacts, administrators will continue to seek recruitment opportunities (Census Bureau, 2018). DE programs provide institutions with an audience to recruit for post-secondary enrollment (Kinnick, 2012). This study's findings offer community college administrators insight regarding areas to focus future efforts and attention. The focus areas include considerations regarding modality and program structure, attention to faculty professional development needs, an emphasis in marketing materials, and continued efforts to maintain proper financial assistance for both the students and the institution.

First, the findings indicate that the participants valued faculty interaction. Consideration of modality is crucial. On-campus DE programs will allow students to interact with faculty and experience the college characteristics that marketing materials cannot capture. As colleges seek to find a "new normal" after COVID-19, it is imperative to consider maintaining on-campus, live DE programs. Online modalities lack the environment for faculty to build strong relationships with students and for students to experience the campus "vibe," as a few participants described.

Second, equipping faculty to serve students is crucial. Providing professional development in pedagogy and teaching high school students will prepare faculty to meet student needs. Additionally, faculty need time to provide the necessary support. Ensuring faculty maintain manageable workloads will permit for that time.

Third, a crucial consideration is how colleges market DE programs. The document review revealed a lack of detail regarding the caring faculty and small class sizes. The faculty and learning environment were the most cited factors for choosing to enroll with ACC after high school graduation. Highlighting these desirable characteristics in the DE marketing materials would attract students.

Fourth, the low tuition, coupled with available grants and scholarships, attracted students to ACC. Maintaining low costs for both DE and degree-seeking students is imperative for motivating students to choose ACC. Comparing competitor prices and using this comparison to set the tuition and fees is essential. Preserving a strong scholarship foundation will also permit continual student financial assistance, allowing students to save money if awarded a scholarship.

Additionally, administrators serve as advocates for policies and funding for education access. Encouraging lawmakers to develop and maintain state-funded scholarships and grants, such as a free community college grant, will positively impact potential students. Building strong relationships with state lawmakers will also aid in securing sufficient funding to maintain low tuition costs. A compelling argument regarding the value of state-funded grants will especially serve as crucial during economic hard times.

Lastly, many participants appreciate the degree momentum. Maximizing the early start is critical. DE programs designed to allow students to build momentum toward a specific major are a proper use of students' time. The specific majors should include technical and transfer options with articulation agreements that outline clear paths toward a bachelor's degree. When marketing the major-specific DE programs, we encourage recruiters to target students based on future career goals (Moore, 2021).

Conclusion

Two-thirds of DE students choose to matriculate in institutions other than the host community college. The literature suggests that DE allows students to explore various majors, and one study of DE participants found that academic major was the top factor in their college choice. The previous literature lacked the student's voice, as well as the choice's con-

text. This study provided the student voice by answering the question, "How does participation in a technical or transfer DE program serve as a context within students' choice to enroll as degree-seeking with the host institution?" The findings indicate caring faculty, the learning environment, money savings, location, momentum, and academic major and transfer options encouraged students to choose ACC. The DE program exposed students to these characteristics, providing a firsthand experience that they could not get from marketing materials alone.

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