Technical College Graduates Career Decisions at Four Southern Technical Colleges: What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School of
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

in the Department of Political Science
of the College of Arts and Sciences

December 2016

Alvin Payton, Jr.

MPA, Valdosta State University, 1994
BS, Northeastern State University, 1976

This dissertation, "Technical College Graduates Career Decisions at Four Southern Technical Colleges: What Do You Want to be When You Grow Up?" by Alvin Payton, Jr., is approved by:

Dissertation Committee Co-Chair

James W. Peterson, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

Dissertation Committee Co-Chair

Napoleon A. Bamfo, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

Committee Member

Lee M. Allen, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

Dean of the Graduate School

James LaPlant, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

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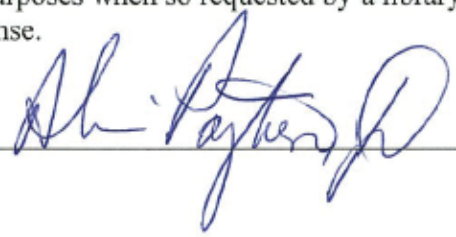
Signature 

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ABSTRACT

The following research was a mixed-method study exploring the relationship between career counseling and career choices of graduates at four southern technical colleges. Selection of an appropriate career is important for the graduates of technical colleges to obtain satisfactory and fulfilling employment. As the cost of post-secondary education increases, a graduate's career selection must be a wise decision. Whether it be a 4-year liberal arts university or a 2-year technical college, many changes in career choices become cost prohibitive halfway into a program that do not match a student's goals. More tragic for a graduate would be to complete the program and obtain employment in a chosen career, only to learn that it fails to match the graduate's mental, physical, or academic make-up.

The researcher employed qualitative research methods to determine ways to improve knowledge and use of career service opportunities by technical college graduates. Roles of social pressure and state governmental policies influencing career selection were analyzed in graduates of four medium sized, 2-year technical colleges in South Georgia. The mixed-methods study involved use of surveys to assess levels of satisfaction with career counseling services provided by the institution, the graduates' happiness with their career selections, as well as how the graduates made their career selections. This research also involved interviews with five administrators in Academic Support and Career Counseling at four southern technical colleges.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my co-committee chairs, Dr. James W. Peterson and Dr. Napoleon Bamfo, for their guidance, support, encouragement, and positive feedback, all of which were instrumental for the success of this project. The committee members' encouraging remarks were pivotal in helping me overcome the motivational challenges this process presents. I am also grateful for my family, especially my brother, Emanuel Payton, who showed me the light when I could only see darkness and provided guidance when I was going astray. My gratitude goes out to my colleagues, who provided words of encouragement as they sensed the challenges that came with this journey. Many thanks to all the technical college graduates who participated in the surveys, and the employees of the four southern technical colleges for their participation in various interviews, who also assisted with obtaining the graduate surveys. This project would have been extremely difficult without their cooperation. Finally, thanks to the many individuals for their assistance and encouragement toward my continued success during this very long, tedious, and often-crooked journey.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Finding the right career after graduation entails being able to pursue life-goals, personal interests, and, at the same time, pay the bills. Collaboration between career counselors and students becomes paramount to the efficacy of a technical college education and the right career path. According to Pope (2009), Jessie Davis, a pioneer in guidance counseling, described vocational guidance as the gradual unfolding of an individual's better understanding of aptitude and abilities, an awakening of moral consciousness. This guidance involves (a) gaining perspective to the broad fields of opportunity in the world, (b) a selection of and preparation for the best field of service, (c) a positive self-concept as a social being in some future occupation, and (d) from this viewpoint, an appreciation of obligations and duty toward neighbors, business associates, and the law (Pope 2009).

Career selections have many variables that influence a student's decision. The definition of a career is the sequence and combination of work and non-work roles held by an individual over time (Mihal, Sorce, & Comte, 1984). The concept of career choice, in which a student perceives career options, may be attenuated by demands of family or social life, lack of adequate skill or experience, a lack of the opportunity to succeed, or a variety of other motivational factors. In this study, the researcher sought to determine the variables that influenced career selection for graduates of four southern technical

colleges, as well as the ability to select a career that allows an individual to grow and stay with his or her selected career.

Having a career that lasts 15, 20, 30, or even 40 years is no longer common, especially within one organization, company, or institution. Occupations that were in high demand 10 or 20 years ago are no longer available because of the rapidly changing economic landscape and technologically driven times. Once thought of as stable and safe, the public school teachers' career faces instability through economic constraints and legislation. With the economy and technology in flux, businesses downsizing, and jobs relocating overseas because of the influence of the North American Free Trade Agreement, having multiple careers is increasingly becoming a way of life for many graduates of technical colleges. Career development has coincided with political and social pushes to advance educational and counseling opportunities for students. Whether it is their first professional job after technical college graduation or a fourth career change, researchers need to determine how technical college graduates are choosing their careers. During a time of societal change involving a shifting and aging workforce, as well as economic constraints, it is appropriate to continue to research the factors that influence the career development of technical college graduates in the 21st century.

After a thorough investigation of peer-reviewed articles found within Chapter 2, and other sources concerning the issues stated above, the researcher concluded that no single factor influences career decisions. Instead, many perceived and real hurdles exist to choosing the right career path, some of which are at the legislative level, while others are more personal. Aptitude and personality testing has evolved to provide students and administrators insight into career choices. After analyzing in-depth one of the aspects of

career choice, the researcher suggested that the technical college graduate, in conjunction with the Georgia Legislature, benefits potentially because of the focused efforts for enhanced career selection. Many efforts by the Georgia Legislature support technical college graduates' career selection, as evidenced by the Georgia Work Ready program, Go Build Georgia program, and Complete College Georgia program. Researchers have investigated the career paths and tribulations of students without career guidance. Perceptions of career paths, regardless of aptitude and personality, have an influence on student choices. Guidance counselors enable their clients to understand themselves better through tests, such as the Life-Skills Development Inventory College Form Dimensions, which establishes corresponding programs that will nurture their clients' development. In some cases, personal standards are set unrealistically high and cannot be met. The need for self-actualization through continual guidance is necessary to overcome such obstacles.

Overall, researchers continuously point to the success of vocational guidance within postsecondary education. Development of life skills, especially building a student's self-awareness, helps to create further choices and eliminates confusion when choosing the right career path. No one solution for student frustration exists. Many aspects, such as aptitude, interests, and environmental pressures, affect and direct a student's path toward a positive career choice.

The researcher's methodology included getting permission from the Vice President for Student Affairs at the technical college to conduct surveys of technical college graduates. The conducted surveys occurred during the spring graduation (Graduation 1) in 2011, summer graduation (Graduation 2) in 2011, as well as the winter

graduation (Graduation 3). The designed surveys provided quick and simple replies. The researcher's anticipated return was 10–15%. The responses exceeded expectations with a combined 55.7% surveys returned. In addition, the researcher noted observations and interviews with administrators and students from which no data was accumulated as part of the research on this topic.

The Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness provided Student Satisfaction Survey results. This survey tool measured students' satisfaction with the Student Services Department. Surveys concentrated on job placement and Career Services. The survey students participated in was titled, What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up? Questions were limited to demographics and career choices. Each graduation had the same questionnaire presented. A majority of graduates chose their careers because they were proficient in them, and a low percentage of students chose their careers because of job availability, which goes against legislation directing career advocacy. Career happiness, as indicated on the surveys, was almost unanimous.

The research objective was to make meaningful inferences regarding the technical college graduate's behavior. Though conducted at four southern technical colleges, the researcher believes that the results are applicable to technical colleges in other regions of the state of Georgia and possibly throughout the country. The results may also be applicable to 4-year universities, which warrants additional research.

Background on Career Counseling

Brun (1978) stated that early philosophical evidence links career counseling to public administration. Socrates, considered the father of both political philosophy and ethics, laid the foundations for early Western philosophical thought and the scientific

method. Socrates also provided many theories currently practiced in public administration and provided career counseling, as demonstrated with Alcibiades. Their relationship as mentor and mentee may be one of the earliest examples of career counseling. Nichols (2007) shared that Socrates was accused in 399 BC of corrupting the young, and the harm that his one-time associate Alcibiades did to Athens provided fuel for the charge against him. Alcibiades led Athens on a disastrous Sicilian expedition. Plato questioned whether Socrates' freedom from the accepted opinions of his city and the universalism of the truth he pursued influenced political expression in imperialistic ambitions, such as Alcibiades. Plato argued that Socratic philosophy was properly understood is a middle state. As such, cannot represent an escape from one's particular political community into imperialist politics. Moreover, a middle state being characterized by reciprocity offers a model for political life different from Alcibiades' imperialism.

Fletcher (1949) indicated the period since World War I has seen increased strides in the promotion and spread of formalized counseling. Counseling performed under varying conditions is an integral part of many occupations. Fletcher further stated, "Although some descriptions of certain counseling occupations have been published, no systematic endeavor to cover the total field of counseling has previously been undertaken" (pp. 93–100).

Guidance counselors are available in the K–12 educational system, career counselors in post-secondary education, as well as professional career counselors for individuals seeking to change careers. The researcher examined the influence or lack of influence that social pressures and career counselors in four southern technical colleges

have on technical college graduates' career selection. The researcher also reviewed what political influence, if any, the Office of the Governor of Georgia (2011) and the Georgia Legislature have on technical college graduates.

According to Patterson (1938), largely the Army personnel program of World War I developed the foundation of the modern counseling program in schools and colleges. Patterson also suggested that the use of tests can reveal a wide range of individual differences and the relations of those differences to educational experience with respect to the amount and quality of education. Mental tests determined potentialities before experience, for selection, and for classification of individuals in industry and education. The views of Patterson support Williamson's (1944) research with the U.S. Army, where tests established a mental ability rating of the average adult male. This point of reference is widely used to show the extent to which a given population of college students selected from the higher levels of intelligence differs from the population at large. As the mental tests have transitioned to the aptitude tests of the 21st century, these designed tests provide and assist the technical college students in making career decisions best suited for the technical college graduate. The career decisions provide guidance and assistance to the technical college graduate based on the results of the various aptitude tests.

Brief History of the Technical College System of Georgia

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson appointed a commission to study national aid to vocational education. The origins of Georgia's technical college system date back to 1917 when federal legislation provided funds to support vocational education in agriculture, home economics, trades, and industry. The Smith-Hughes Act, also known

as the Vocational Act of 1917, co-sponsored by Hoke Smith, U.S. Senator and former Georgia governor, and Dudley Hughes, a Congressman from Georgia (Smith & Hughes, 1914). The act required each state to create a state board for vocational education and specified use of federal money for vocational programs below baccalaureate level (Smith & Hughes, 1914). Education was required for individuals who desired training in a chosen vocational area. The act also supported those employed who sought additional training for improvement or advancement (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 1996).

The Smith-Hughes Act also gave vocational education a place in the public school. Before the implementation of the act, the U.S. had 200,000 vocational students and less than three million dollars were devoted to their education (Prentice, 2001). By the end of the 1950s, the number of vocational students had grown to 3.4 million with 176 million dollars spent annually on their education (Prentice, 2001).

In the early 20th century, the primary purpose of vocational education was to prepare students to enter the workforce. The technical college mission is the same in the 21st century. The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), February 27, 2010, mission regarding technical education is to boost the economic development of the state by providing quality technical training through its network of technical colleges. To carry out its mission, the TCSG assigns each college a service delivery area, which covers certain counties and focuses programs considered desirable by employers who would potentially hire technical college graduates. Therefore, certain career choices may not be readily available at a technical college because of limited employer interest.

Increasing the Relevance of Technical Education

While on average, all workers with associate's degrees earn less money than those with a bachelor's degree, the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce found that 27% of people with post-secondary licenses or certificates—a credential short of an associate's degree—earn more money than the average bachelor's degree recipient do (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl 2010).

When considering recent graduates, the value of an associate's degree is more pronounced. In a recent study in Virginia by College Measures (2012), researchers studied first-year earnings of college graduates between 2006 and 2010 (Schneider, Massa, & Vivari, 2012). The researchers found that graduates of occupational or technical associate's degree programs, with an average salary of just less than $40,000, out-earned not only non-occupational associate's degree graduates by about $6,000 but also bachelor's degree graduates by almost $2,500 state wide (Schneider et al., 2012).

In a recent study, McKinsey and Company (2013) found that about one in three graduates do not feel college prepared them well for the world of work. One example was the value of work experience during school. Graduates who gain real work experience (for instance, completing an internship, working part time, or participating in employer mentorship programs) feel better prepared for the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2013). Of those with such work experience, 77% stated that college prepared them well for employment, compared with 59% of students who lacked similar experience (McKinsey & Company, 2013).

Introduction to the Problem

The career of a technical college graduate may be that of a drafter, electrician, or licensed practical nurse, unlike those of liberal arts or other 4-year colleges offering careers in architecture, engineering, or registered nursing. Although a person need not graduate from a university or technical college to have a successful career, success may be obtained more easily with a post-secondary education.

The need for career counseling may occur based on constant educational and technological advancements and new demands by employers. For example, an employer may require certification for consideration for promotion or transfer. Employees are finding that in order to be competitive, they need either new or updated skills. Often, the cost-prohibitive aspect of obtaining new skills in the appropriate career is the biggest challenge.

During the last 40 years, career selection has evolved from graduating from high school or college and finding a job for life or at least until eligible for retirement, to several divergent career paths. The past 10 to 20 years had the most significant influence on post-secondary education graduates, including out-sourcing of jobs (an economic occurrence where many manufacturing and customer service jobs moved to countries that incur less costs to corporations) and increases in productivity because of technological advances, such as robotics and automation of tasks.

Another factor, according to Wonacott (2000), is the negative image associated with technical college education and technical college graduates. Wonacott listed those perceptions as the following: (a) vocational education is only for the non-college bound, potential dropouts, or other students with special needs; (b) vocational education does not

pay off because technical training is inferior to academic training; and (c) not every child has the aptitude and interest to succeed in an academic 4-year college. Though Wonacott provided data to refute these myths, the researcher stated the negative overall image of vocational education is likely based at least in part on mistaken assumptions regarding how the labor market works. The researcher herein attempted to determine how technical college graduates select their careers and what the primary influences were on such decisions.

Sound advising should not be dependent on the southern technical college one attends. Students should receive support up to and through college from an advisor who checks in with them periodically using social media and in-person meetings. The advisors would also establish and support networks for students attending the same college and develop relationships with the college's student support and advising staff. College advisors' cooperation is essential to the sharing of needed information so that advisors can adequately support their students.

Vocational Background of the Study

The impetus of this study came from primarily two factors. The first was that my children attended college, and the other revolved around my observations of individuals in the technical college and university system changing programs or majors. Upon graduation, my son, a marketing major, and my daughter, an architecture major, pursued careers not relevant to their degrees. Currently, my son teaches sixth grade math and my daughter is pursuing a career in interior design. In addition, after having conversations with servers while having lunch or dinner at various restaurants, I learned that many were working their way through college. Many servers were uncertain about their majors.

The initial interest of the research was to search for a correlation between university graduates' and technical college graduates' career selections. The researcher determined that the most practical method was to focus on technical college graduates. The researcher developed surveys to ask technical college graduates a series of questions to determine how they chose their career fields. In addition, the researcher decided to interview individuals at four southern technical colleges in positions to assist students in making their career selections as well as in positions to assist the technical college graduates with finding employment in their chosen professions.

Statement of the Problem

Technical college graduates at southern technical colleges are graduating in career areas that may not be appropriate for their interests or aptitudes. Basic career questions technical college graduates need to address before determining their career directions are:

- Have you explored your strengths and personal attributes?
- Do you know your unique talents and abilities?
- Do you know what occupations are out there?
- Do you know your true interests, not interests of your family, friends, or the media?
- Have you chosen the career that is right for you?
- Have you made an informed decision?
- Have you made a decision based on chance or fate?
- Have you made a plan?
- Have you really thought about it?
- Do you have a clear plan, or are you wandering aimlessly?

Purpose of the Study

Technical college graduates face multiple opportunities to make career-related decisions. Technical college students based their current career selections on personal interests or aptitudes or on social pressures exerted from family, friends, economy, state government, job availability, and other external influences. In addition, the researcher explored to what extent social pressure influences a technical college graduate's career selection.

Significance of the Study

Because of high unemployment rates and the continual loss of entire job sectors, the significance of this study was a need for technical college graduates and career counselors to collaborate more successfully. In addition, this study is significant because these issues affect technical college graduates as well as 4-year university and high school students. Understanding what those variables are and how they influence decision-making is a necessary step toward more self-awareness, a life skill important in the development and growth of any student.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the technical college graduate's social pressures and career choices? Family, friends, economy, state governmental support, job availability, and other items external to the graduate's control describes social pressures.
2. What is the relationship between the career choices of technical college students and career satisfaction post-graduation?

Summary

The researcher explored and expanded on many aspects of the research questions in Chapter 2. Career decisions are complex situations where external and internal influences come together to confuse and sometimes disorient a college student. Many personal and environmental factors inhibit technical college students, such as their home life, occupation, parents and friends, and economic conditions. According to much of the research, self-awareness is paramount in overcoming the hurdles and pitfalls of career decisions. The literature review also includes a thorough discussion on state legislation that offers support to post-secondary students.

Chapter 4 presents the results from the data collected from the technical college graduates at Graduations 1, 2 and 3 through a survey titled, What do you want to be when you Grow Up? The surveys, more in-depth and analytical than the satisfaction surveys, had a response rate that exceeded expectations. The researcher explored a wide range of information, including the demographics, general attitude about career decisions, and the attitude with the technical college's career counseling. Easy-to-follow charts display the results of the surveys. In addition, the researcher also asked an Academic Support Coordinator (ASC), a Director of Career Services (CSD), a Director of Career Placement and Development or Career Services and Counseling (DCS), a Student Life Coordinator (SLC), and an Associate Vice President of Career Services (VPC) a series of 11 questions. The researcher summarized and assessed interview responses for commonalities.

In Chapter 5, the researcher explores the relationship between the conclusions and the research questions and between the complexity of career decisions and career support

within four southern technical colleges located in Georgia. The efficacy of career counseling within a technical college can extrapolate to 4-year colleges and universities. A larger sample reaching different regions within the United States and differing age ranges may be an area for further research into the subject of career counseling and selection.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes an examination of the influences and possible effects career counseling has for postsecondary students. Though many researchers have researched this topic, much more exploration is required. In examining and analyzing a variety of peer-reviewed publications on this topic, the intention was to unveil opportunities for further research. Consideration of a range of articles, interviews, and case studies in career counseling and decision-making produced a more comprehensive picture of the research to date.

After an investigation of the peer-reviewed articles and other sources concerning the issues stated in the problem, no single factor influences career decisions. This review is organized in four major sections covering the major topics of vocation decision-making, which are comprehensive insights into the body of current research concerning these topics and correspond with the surveys and interviews performed by this researcher.

In the opening section of this literature review, Social Factors Affecting Vocational Guidance, previous researchers pointed to the areas of success and pitfalls within postsecondary career counselors (DeWitt, 2007; Holland, 1973; Nichols, 1964; Willis, 2004). Holland (1973) believed each student needed to overcome four vocational problems prior to making a positive and healthy career decision. Much of a student's home environment plays a major role in their decision-making, and knowing whether these pressures are positive or negative can alleviate stress and indecision when going

through career options. Aptitude and personality testing represent tools students and administrators use to gain insight into career choices.

The General Assembly through amended HB 75 and HB 76 for fiscal year 2015 and 2016 supports Governor Deal's education Budget for AFY15-6. This support suggested that the Georgia Legislature benefits technical college graduates potentially because of the focused efforts toward enhanced career selection. The Georgia Work Ready program, the Go Build Georgia program, and the Complete College Georgia program are evidence showing how Georgia's Legislature supports technical college career selection. Researchers investigated the career paths and tribulations of students without career guidance as supported within these programs. Perceptions of career paths, regardless of aptitude and personality, have an influence on student choices (Holland 1974).

In the section Vocational Theory and Guidance, much of the research points toward students' needs for self-actualization, and discovery of their areas of proficiency appears to be the main factor in career success and happiness (Holland, 1973; Shepard, 2006; Stochel, 2008). An overlap exists between this section and the Life Skills section, which pertains to research on a student's self-awareness and the different occupations and majors that lead to better career choices. Guidance counselors enable their clients to understand themselves better through tests, such as the Life-Skills Development Inventory College Form Dimensions test, which seeks to establish corresponding programs that will nurture their clients' development. Teaching and guiding children at a young age, as research shows, ameliorates the problems and hurdles described in Social Factors Effecting Vocational Guidance. These two sections differ in that the Vocational

Theory and Guidance exhibits research directions that may or may not affect a student's career decisions, and Life Skill refers to finding a positive and healthy outcome when making the decision.

In the Perfectionists section, the researcher explored theories (Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004) regarding student career choices within fields where ability and interest are lacking, and their choices are based on external pressures, such as family and friends or the attainment of material possessions. Perfectionism correlates career decision-making with the pursuit of high standards. In some cases, personal standards are set so unrealistically high that perfectionists cannot possibly succeed. Again, the need for self-actualization through continual guidance is necessary to overcome such hurdles.

The development of life skills, especially building a student's self-awareness, helps a student to further understand the choices and eliminate any confusion toward the right career path. No one-size-fits-all solution or single test can describe a student's best-case scenario. Many aspects, such as aptitude, interests, and environmental pressures, affect and direct a student's path toward a positive career choice.

Social Factors Affecting Vocational Guidance

DeWitt (2007) suggested that student advising (academic and life) supports must be improved. The researcher pointed out that technical education can leverage postsecondary reform with seven sound recommendations:

- Establish postsecondary preparation and expectation for all students.
- Develop education systems that integrate all levels by coordinating education and training between federal agencies.

- Develop curriculum and instructional offerings that link to careers, foster lifelong learning, and encourage completion.
- Ensure portability and transferability of credits and skills attained.
- Enhance student advising, academic, and life supports.
- Increase financial support for low-income students.
- Pilot innovative funding solutions. (DeWitt, 2007, pp. 14–15)

Holland suggested (1974) current vocational guidance services are generally expensive, theoretical, and ineffective. These services fail to reach most people who want and need guidance and often fail to help those reached. Holland believed numerous misunderstandings, meaningless questions, and misguided forms of humanisms weaken vocational guidance, practice, and research. The views expressed by Holland should not be ignored but taken into consideration as technical college graduates face career changes that may be influenced by circumstances outside the limits of the graduate's control.

Osipow (1973), Bartlett (1971), and Westbrook and Mastie (1973) analyzed the most useful vocational assessment devices, classifications, and simulations that rely on well-established matching models. Vocational development investigators have produced only a few additional tools, such as occupational knowledge tests and vocational or career development measures, with practical values that remain in doubt. The assessments are often not the driving force for the technical college graduate in deciding a career path. Interviews with administration in career services and academic support reinforces data in which few technical college graduates utilize academic support in determining what

careers best fulfill their aptitude and interests. Therefore, the career decision influences may not be assessment related.

In the 1940s, society believed that undecided students were either troubled or in trouble. This belief went unchallenged for several years as counselors searched for undecided students and attempted to convert them. Based on several large scale studies, Holland and Nichols (1964) suggested that undecided students are like most students because they make subsequent decisions and their decisions are as sensible and should not be disregarded. Only for a small minority does indecision seem to represent severe conflict and instability. As research will show in the sections that follow, self-actualization for students needs to occur in order to understand a positive career path. These undecided students may be behind their fellow students with their choices because they are trying to figure out who they are and in what vocational areas they are proficient.

With time, a change occurred in the assumption that technical college graduates do not need formal career selection support. Holland (1973) supported the growth of vocational guidance services and career development programs assuming that many people, young and old, require special assistance if they are to cope effectively with choosing an occupation and making a career. Holland believed successful vocational remedies are tailored to vocational problems if they are to be both effective and inexpensive. Vocational problems that resolve themselves in the normal course of living may not require treatment. The distribution of services and programs may depend more on government agencies and professional mental health services involvement than upon actual need. Holland believed that most people must cope with four kinds of vocational problems in their lifetime:

1. They must decide what occupation to follow or enter an occupation by default due to poverty, prejudice, or ignorance.
2. They must secure the training required to enter their chosen occupation or by default enter whatever occupation is available.
3. They must learn to cope with a lifetime of job changes: when they should move laterally or upward within a company, how to cope with involuntary job changes, and when, where and how to reduce hours at work or retire.
4. For each job held, a person must learn to cope successfully with the work itself, fellow workers, supervisors, and subordinates (Holland, 1974, pp. 14–15).

Every career presents occupational, interpersonal, and emotional problems that can lead to achievement, support, and happiness or to failure, alienation, and unhappiness for the technical college graduate. The issues that existed previously as vocational problems are now technical college problems in the 21st century. Technical college graduates still must address each of the four challenges, whether or not they seek the career counseling provided by the institution

Holland's (1973) views are supported by Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. People must satisfy their physiological needs with nourishment being a primary example. Next is security, like the shelter of a home. Esteem from others builds upon the need for acceptance within social structures, the need to be loved, and then the need for self-esteem from a sense of competence. Finally, a need for self-actualization builds upon each of these human needs making people more self-aware (Willis, 2004). Maslow's self-actualized, self-transcendent state was also a product of the phenomenological

perspective (Kirkhart, 1971), with individuals responding to more than their basic needs, identifying with their jobs, and being comfortable with themselves. These needs generally are a different level of development and therefore would be of benefit in the process of deciding a career for a technical college student.

Maslow based his theories on the notion that people desire to grow as individuals and organizations can facilitate that growth by encouraging autonomy and individual capacity building (Lynch & Cruise, 2006). Based on Holland and Maslow, the technical college graduates' career decisions have a major psychological component that must be addressed whether consciously or subconsciously. Based on this input, the purported needs identified by Maslow can be better addressed for the technical college graduate.

In their study of 14 community colleges, Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003) found the need for community colleges to require certain kinds of social know-how. Students lacking such social know-how skills would face seven obstacles (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003). A student's career choice is significantly influenced by the seven listed obstacles:

1. Bureaucratic hurdles, such as complicated class schedules and college catalogs, were difficult to understand and time consuming.
2. Confusing choices because of the wide variety of programs, each having different requirements for their various degrees and certificates.
3. Student-initiated guidance through which colleges require students to initiate the process of seeking out guidance.

4. Student counselors are typically overburdened because they are responsible for advising the student transfer processes, career exploration, part-time job placement, and personal issues.
5. Poor advice from counselors fails to get sufficient information regarding program offerings and requirements from departments into the hands of students.
6. Delayed detection of costly mistakes, i.e., students not knowing the type of degree, whether it is terminal or not, and the need for remediation classes.
7. Poor handling of conflicting demands, e.g., parent illness, financial needs, child care emergencies, unanticipated health problems, automobile breakdowns, and work obligations. (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003)

The first three of these obstacles are institutionally driven, whereas the remainder are dependent upon the student. Because of the seven obstacles, a student's career choice is often not met (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003).

Georgia's Role: Influencing Career Decisions

The four vocational issues laid out in Holland's research are addressed in Georgia's 2011 House Bill (HB) 186, as passed by the House and the Senate, which seeks to support the mission of the TCSG. The main goal is to prepare technical college graduates to enter Georgia's workforce with a certification in soft skills. The HB 186, Section 10 Chapter 14 of Title 34 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Georgia Workforce Investment Board, is amended in Code Section 34-14-3 and allows the following:

1. The Governor's Office of Workforce Development is hereby established to implement state workforce development policy as directed by the Governor and to serve as staff to the board.
2. In addition, the office is authorized to establish certification in soft skills, which may include, but not be limited to, skills relating to punctuality, ability to learn, and ability to work in a team, as a discrete and complementary component to the current assessment system utilized in Georgia to measure an individual worker's skill and knowledge in the areas of applied mathematics, reading for information, and locating information to determine and indicate to potential employers such worker's level of work readiness. Such certification is intended to assist both the existing workforce as well as the state's emerging workforce. The office is authorized to explore local, national, and international soft skills programs for the purpose of developing a soft skills certification system.
3. The office is authorized and encouraged to work with the state's emerging workforce, including rising and graduating high school students, with the goal that, upon graduation, high school students have both a diploma and certification in soft skills and work readiness to enable them to be successful in postsecondary education, a career pathway, or both. The office may collaborate with the Department of Education and the Board of Technical and Adult Education to facilitate coordination with high schools, so that high school students can attain certification in soft skills and work readiness.

HB 186 (2011) Certification of Soft Skills supports the technical college graduate and the potential employer of the graduate by certifying the graduate's soft skills, which categorizes the graduate's work ethic.

The Georgia Legislature legislatively supports technical college graduates' career selection. The technical college student, in conjunction with the Georgia Legislature, benefits potentially because of the focused efforts for enhanced career selection. The Georgia Work Ready program implemented by Governor Purdue, the Go Build Georgia (2014) program, and the Complete College Georgia program implemented by Governor Deal are examples of their efforts.

Governor Purdue and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce launched the Georgia Work Ready program in August 2006 to improve the job training and marketability of Georgia's workforce and to drive future economic growth for the state. This program is the only initiative of its kind between the state government and the State Chamber of Commerce working to ensure companies can more reliably match the right people with the right jobs. Based on skill assessment and certification for job seekers and a job profiling system for businesses, technical college students can utilize this free assessment tool to assist in their career selection and success. Graduates, after the work ready assessment, receive a certificate that ranks from low-to-high order as follows: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. A technical college graduate's career choice supported by a highly ranked Work Ready Certificate has been received well by the potential employers and the graduates. Technical college graduates benefit significantly from the Georgia Work Ready program in a competitive employment environment by obtaining a designation. This designation allows the employer to get the best possible candidate

based on education and preparation. In addition, technical college graduates introduced to the soft skill enhancement through HB 186 (2011) and Georgia Work Ready substantially improve their consideration by potential employers.

The state created the Governor's Office of Workforce Development to improve the job training and marketability of Georgia's workforce and drive future economic growth for the state (Office of the Governor, 2011). The office implemented Georgia's workforce development policy, as directed by the Governor, and serves as staff to the Georgia Workforce Investment Board. The Governor's Office of Workforce Development believes in the importance of soft-skill education for career success.

Governor Nathan Deal

Governor Deal supported the effort to expand access to technical schools. Governor Deal, Lieutenant Governor Cagle, House Speaker Ralston, and State Representative Evan (D. Smyrna) proposed lowering the original level of the GPA requirements for the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) grant, which goes to students in the technical college system. By expanding access to the HOPE Grant, the governor and legislators strengthened the state's workforce development efforts. The GPA required for the HOPE Grant was lowered back to 2.0 after being raised to 3.0 for budgetary reasons in 2011.

At a leadership summit in April 2015, Governor Deal stated, "Education should lead to employability." At this leadership summit, he discussed "Move on When Ready," regarding dual enrollment of high school students in technical college to give students the relevance of technical education. Deal wanted his administration to be a "Whenever Administration, whenever you are ready!" Of all state dollars in the fiscal year 2016

budget, 55% will be spent on education, and more than half of all state funds have been dedicated to education every year since the Governor's inauguration in January 2011. One of Governor Deal's education goals for Georgia is to increase the percentage of Georgians who hold a post-secondary credential. According to Governor Deal at the 2015 Leadership Summit, by 2020, more than 60% of job openings in Georgia will require some form of postsecondary degree (Office of the Governor, 2011). With this in mind, Governor Deal's Complete College Georgia Initiative and other efforts are dedicated to increasing the number of students who earn meaningful degrees from a Georgia higher education institution (Office of the Governor, 2011).

Two additional initiatives to foster career decisions established by Governor Deal were the Complete College Georgia Initiative and the Go Build Campaign (Office of the Governor, 2011). In August 2011, Governor Deal announced the Complete College Georgia Initiative, which provides concrete steps to address college access and completion. The Complete College Georgia Initiative, based in part on a $1 million grant receive from the Complete College America Foundation, was a set of policy priorities and supporting action plans that served as a direct response to the higher education issues and future employment needs that affect the state of Georgia (Office of the Governor, 2011). The Go Build Georgia Foundation is the private area of the public and private partnership of the Go Build Georgia program undertaken by the Georgia Department of Economic Development's Workforce division (Go Build Georgia, 2014). The foundation was established to support the Go Build Georgia program by rolling out an educational campaign using television, print, online, social media outlets, and promotional events. The end goal was to educate students and the workforce at-large about the program and

drive them to the Go Build Georgia website where they can learn about opportunities in the skilled trades (Go Build Georgia, 2014).

According to Governor Deal's office, by 2020 more than 60% of job openings in Georgia will require some form of postsecondary education. The governor's plan prescribes the following strategies:

- Development of comprehensive system-wide and campus-level completion plans
- Restructuring of select TCSG programs
- Development of a Seamless Education System
- Improvement in remediation as part of the $1 million Complete College America grant
- Creation of a needs-based scholarship program
- Formation of the Higher Education Finance Commission. (Office of the Governor, 2011)

The Go Build Georgia campaign is a public relations and social media campaign to educate young people regarding the value of learning a trade, to dispel their misconceptions about the skilled trade industry, and to inspire them to consider building a career as a skilled tradesman (Go Build Georgia, 2014). Go Build Georgia aims to provide better opportunities for tradesmen, a more highly skilled labor force for businesses, and an enhanced development for Georgia and the nation (Go Build Georgia, 2014).

Vocational Theory and Guidance

Holland (1973) summarized the vocational theory with several key ideas, regarding the selection and maintenance of a career, that are helpful for understanding careers, organizing vocational data, and creating effective interventions. Holland suggested the first job and all subsequent jobs constitute a career. Whether a person is selecting an occupation, field training, working a new job, or retiring, an individual searches for a situation where personal capabilities, talents, interests, values, and personality traits can be both expressed and rewarded (Holland, 1973). The items, as Holland pointed out, are supported in the research of technical college graduates. The overwhelming majority, 76.1%, of those participating in the survey selected their career because they believed it was something they did well (Holland, 1973). This was supported in the survey, as 99.2% of the survey participants were happy with their career choice. Self-awareness becomes a major factor in career decision-making.

Shepard (2006) studied the career and academic development of students who were on normal academic status versus students on probation or dismissal status in a college of agricultural and environmental sciences. Results indicated the perception of career and academic barriers increased for students on probation or dismissal and students reported career decision self-efficacy lower (Shepard, 2006). As students perceived fewer barriers and the ability to cope with barriers to career and academic goals, career decision self-efficacy was higher (Shepard, 2006). Therefore, as students enrolled in a technical college with a career path that may have the perception of not being as prestigious as another field, those students may have lower levels of self-efficacy. An example would be students enrolled in automotive or welding programs

compared with students enrolled in the paramedic or computer-networking program. The perception of taking an academic route versus one that is not as challenging is a hurdle for institutions to overcome through counseling and aptitude testing.

Stochel (2008) studied the effectiveness of combined career interventions. The researcher designed the study to examine the combined effects of a career course and a career consultation session (Stochel, 2008). The results indicated students who participated in both the career course and a career consultation session reported higher levels of self-efficacy and career decision-making than students solely participating in the career course (Stochel, 2008). Stochel found no other significant differences between these two actions.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reported that the largest percentage of the total unemployed, 58.7%, were persons 25 to 54 years of age with an additional 13.7% in the 55 and older category. In the current job market, many of the unemployed are looking at education and training to help become more marketable. Wilensky (1967) believed that the average person would hold a dozen jobs in a 46-year work life, many such jobs not now in existence. Since the school cannot train for specific careers, it should instead concentrate on its educational tasks (Wilensky, 1967). The best vocational education is a good general education accentuating basic literacy, disciplined work habits, and adaptability—this constitutes an optimal base for lifetime learning. Wilensky's view supports Georgia's soft-skills legislation within HB 186 (2011). Wilensky understood that technical college graduates require occupational information to assist the graduates through the various training programs and school curricula.

Castellano, Stringfield, and Stone (2003) identified the potential benefit for research and practice in re-examining career and technical education as a means of preparing the nation's youth for the future. Career and technical education authorizes funding for secondary vocational education. Castellano et al. believed federal legislation, which mandates accountability requirements, such as improved academic achievement, will support technical college graduates. These requirements necessitate the search for ways to integrate career and technical education into broader school reforms with the goal to improve technical college graduates.

In a 2011 interview, the CSD and Work Keys shared that the technical college offers a program called Career Scope. This program is a tool that provides the students with an assessment that determines a career path based on their interests. The assessment is no cost to the student. Technical college graduates who use such tools at the beginning of matriculation at a technical college will improve their chances of finding a career selection that fits their interests and aptitude. Researchers have confirmed the assessment of the technical college students' positive outcomes toward career decisions.

Substantial evidence shows that large proportions of the population, with little or no help from counselors or vocational agencies of any kind, select jobs, get the proper training, and manage their careers. Flanagan, Shaycoft, Richards, and Claudy (1971) found that only 2% of the college students in the Project Talent sample were sorry about the kind of work they had chosen, and only 5% were unhappy about their choice of major or field. Graduates are making their career choices based on areas they believe they are skilled in and report they are satisfied with their career choices (Flanagan, Shaycoft, Richards, & Claudy, 1971).

During the interview process by the researcher, the CSD and the Coordinator of Academic Support revealed just how few technical college students utilize their services even though many forms of available media are currently used. The ASC believed the career scope and career assessment tools need to be a required component for all technical college students. However, the technical college offers certificates, diplomas, and degrees all of which require various levels of academic completions.

Life Skills

Picklesimer and Miller (1998) stated the four life-skill descriptors are learning, working and playing, relating, and self. These descriptors form the basis for effective development in the four domains of life, which are home, school, work, and community. Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, and Reardon (1992) provided an effective approach to deciding on careers and college majors by empowering adolescents with the opportunity to learn about themselves, their options, and decision-making strategies. This reflects the Career Scope program provided by the technical college. The technical college student, now able to determine a career choice that best suits his or her particular psychological profile, is more likely to be successful (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, & Reardon, 1992). Such success may not necessarily be measured by income earned, but rather by the desire to look forward to coming to work, contributing to the organization's well-being, and having successful working relationships with colleagues.

Billups and Peterson (1994) indicated that what one knows about one's self and about different occupations and majors leads to better career choices. Picklesimer and Miller (1998) believed students feel successful by developing an interest in going to college, making the final college choice, and choosing a major. The Life-Skills

Development Inventory College Form Dimensions enables career counselors to establish corresponding programs to nurture their clients' development. Some scholars and practitioners, according to Blustein (1997), Niles, Anderson, and Goodnough (1998) have started to embrace the idea of career explorations as a lifelong pursuit and as a means to cope with a variety of career transitions. A technical college graduate's self-actualization, as mentioned earlier by Maslow, is more achievable with the utilization of the abovementioned vehicles. Technical college graduates utilizing the vehicles provided by the institution will enhance their opportunities to have positive career choices.

Their environment, their parents, and their social context affect technical college students' career choices, which include character aspects, such as age, gender, specific talents, interest, and values. Adding to the wide array of influences for the technical graduates are geography, legislative or political issues, and the economic climate. Blustein (2006) and Savickas (1993) discussed individuals seeking career guidance in the chaotic environment of social and economic pressures. Their conclusion was that it is necessary for counselors to obtain a holistic view of the individual navigating in this environment (Blustein, 2006; Savickas, 1993). Career exploration involves taking on different target populations, the total life context in which individuals live, and the multiple aspects of personal lives (Bluestein, 2006). Similar to different pieces of a puzzle, this is part of people's lives and careers.

Zikic and Hall (2009) stated that career practitioners are to act as career detectives in assessing the type of career exploration problems that a client may be considering. The counselor must first try to define whether an individual has the basic willingness to explore career options and if the exploratory attitude is desired and supported in the

broader context of his or her life (Zikic & Hall, 2009). The most encompassing guidance and support relies on self-exploration and environmental exploration processes. By taking into account more complete patterns of influence, an individual can obtain a unique understanding of his or her career and engage in a tailor-made approach to career decision-making (Zikic & Hall, 2009). Career practitioners should be aware that career exploration and careful career planning may not be the panacea for every client. Equally important is the preparation of one's client to deal with unexpected influences.

Therefore, the technical college graduate must engage the counselor in such a way as to benefit from the counseling services that are available. The self-exploration and environmental exploration process, when utilized by the technical college graduate, will provide the most encompassing guidance and support in determining the most suitable career for them. Technical college graduates want to avoid unexpected influences by utilizing good career planning.

Perfectionists

Emmett and Minor (1993) and Leong and Chervinko (1996) suggested that perfectionism is typically understood to include the pursuit of high standards and a correlation with career decision-making. Chang, Watkins, and Banks (2004) have studied a new era of research labeled *construction perfectionism,* defined as the relationship between career perfectionism and career development. In their theory, the perfectionist minimizes outcome efficacy by setting over-ambitious and nearly inaccessible career goals (Chang et al., 2004). This may be observed in the technical college graduates' selection of careers that are not supported by their aptitude or natural

interest. Social influence, such as family, friends, governmental support, and length of time required to enter the profession, drive these selections.

In another study, Pacht (1984) noted personal standards are set unrealistically high and perfectionists cannot possibly succeed these standards. Horney (1950) stated that perfectionists suffer under the tyranny of self-critical evaluations, which lead to lower levels of judgment about how he or she can use personal knowledge or skills toward goal attainment, also known as perceived self-efficacy.

Bandura's (1982, 1989) theory supports the survey results that technical college graduates' self-efficacy career decisions support their personal knowledge and skills to attain their career goal. Bandura (1986, p. 1391) defined a person's perceived self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances." Self-efficacy centrally relates to one's sense of personal agency or ability to behave in such a manner as to exert influence on one's life.

Striving for perfectionism has hidden dangers. Hamachek (1978) identified two groups of perfectionists: normal and neurotic. Normal perfectionists have high personal standards, judge themselves more flexibly, and accept their inconsistency (Hamachek, 1978). The normal perfectionists generally feel pleased with their attempts and are motivated to maximize their capabilities. Hamachek identified those who were neurotic as setting high personal standards, judging their performance harshly, and finding it difficult to accept poor performance. The neurotic high personal standards could limit and may appear to impede the selection of a career that is better suited for their interests and aptitudes (Hamachek, 1978).

Leong and Chervinko (1996), in a study of negative personality traits associated with career indecision, found that self-oriented perfectionism correlates with decreased career indecision. The researchers also found that socially prescribed perfectionism—the individual's belief that others expect him or her to be perfect—had a positive correlation with career indecision (Leong & Chervinko, 1996). Emmett and Minor (1993) found that individuals listed perfectionism and sensitivity to others' expectations as the two personality factors most related to their career decisions. Results from their study indicated that perfectionist, gifted children find it difficult to make decisions out of fear of making the wrong choice because of feelings of inadequacy (Emmett & Minor, 1993). The existing literature suggests a connection between perfectionism, career decision-making, self-efficacy, and the lack of technical college graduates utilizing career services.

Research Design and Rationale

This study involved a mixed-methods design. Specifically, the researcher followed the convergence model described by Creswell (1999) in which the researcher collected quantitative data and qualitative data separately with the goal of providing a comprehensive view of the phenomenon of interest.

Mixed-methods research denotes research that encompasses both the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data for the purposes of examining the same topic within one study or a succession of studies (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). A mixed-method design can take many different formats varying in the degree to which quantitative and qualitative methods are integrated, the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative inquiries, and the relative importance or significance of the quantitative versus qualitative data (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

The researcher chose a mixed-methods design for several reasons. Sale, Lohfeld, and Brazel (2002) stated that the primary strengths of a mixed-methods design were two-fold. First, mixed-methods designs are valuable for validation purposes (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazel, 2002). Use of different types of data collection and analysis lends validity to the findings of a study through the process of triangulation and can enhance the process of data interpretation (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Sale et al., 2002). Second, mixed-methods designs are also successful in combining the relative strengths of quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2007; Sale et al., 2002).

Mixed-methods designs also enable the researcher to examine a particular phenomenon from different perspectives (Sale et al., 2002). In this study, the quantitative data collected through surveys did not allow for in-depth exploration and explanation of the phenomenon of interest. The quantitative data may offer insight regarding the *what* of participants' experiences but not the *how* or *why*. Through qualitative data analysis, the researcher was able to address these deficits. The qualitative data gathered in this study assisted with the process of enhancing the interpretation of the quantitative results (Feilzer, 2010).

Additionally, by using a mixed-methods design, the researcher collected data from a much larger sample than would be feasible in a purely qualitative study (Sale et al., 2002). Larger sample sizes improve validity as a higher proportion of the intended population is sampled, which is assumed to improve the representativeness of the sample (Sale et al., 2002).

Teddlie and Yu (2007) maintained that in some mixed-methods studies, because of practical limitations and the aims of the study, the use of purposive sampling to the

exclusion of probability sampling is appropriate. Purposive sampling is a common strategy in qualitative research (Suri, 2011). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select individuals who have information pertinent to the topic of interest (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). As the researcher aimed to obtain information about the career choices of individuals who graduated from a technical college, purposive sampling ensured that the participants chosen had experience with the phenomenon of interest.

Convenience sampling is another common sampling strategy in qualitative research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The use of convenience sampling was justified in this study, as the researcher did not have access to contact information for the graduating students. Therefore, random sampling of the entire graduating class was not possible. Convenience sampling of those graduates in attendance at their graduating ceremony offered the highest likelihood of success in making contact with a large number of graduates.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) established a criterion for determining the quality or trustworthiness of qualitative research. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) specified six techniques for improving the trustworthiness of qualitative research. The researcher used two of these strategies in the study: triangulation and thick description.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methodologies, data collection strategies, and data sources to achieve a comprehensive and representative convergence of data (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). In this study, the researcher followed the convergence model, which is a variant of the triangulation design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). In addition to triangulation, complementarity is another important concept to consider.

Complementarity denotes the use of quantitative and qualitative methods to explore and elucidate different aspects of a particular phenomenon (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). The mixed-methods design employed in this study allowed for complementarity between the quantitative and qualitative data, which will increase the descriptive value of the findings of the study.

The second strategy employed to improve the trustworthiness of this study was thick description. Thick description refers to the provision of detailed representations of the data (Shenton, 2004). This strategy lends credibility to the study by enabling the reader to determine the degree to which the data seems to be accurate, thereby contributing to the trustworthiness of the research (Shenton, 2004).

Summary

How a technical college student makes his or her career decision is a complex psychological process as well as a situational maze. According to much of the research, self-awareness is paramount in overcoming the hurdles and pitfalls of career decisions. Many personal and environmental factors inhibit a technical college student, such as their home and work life, their parents and friends, as well as economic conditions. Each of these aspects can bear as much weight and importance as the next and much of it depends on the individual and their current mental state.

For the uninitiated, college institutions are large bureaucracies that only confuse the students they serve. Course offerings and programs have differing requirements and certifications. Because of the costs to house counseling services, students must initiate their own search of career service counselors and may find them overburdened. As a

result, if that counselor fails to provide sufficient information, a delay in graduation may occur as well as an increased amount of debt amassed.

The State of Georgia, through HB 186 (2011), has implemented several programs and accentuated soft skills that employers want to have in their new hires. Working with the Chamber of Commerce provided insight into the needs of the businesses hiring potential technical college graduates. Communication and collaboration between government and businesses may not be perfect, but it does offer insight into how the government-run institutions can better serve the public. Even simple public relations campaigns may not entirely dispel the stigma of vocational work, but it may influence some students and that becomes a successful campaign. In addition, the national and state level dollars allocated toward education help keep the doors open and encouraged students to follow their own career decisions.

Though not supported by the surveys but shared during interviews with administration, students must consider the influence of job availability or how long it takes to complete a particular program. The interviews by the researcher of the CSD and the Director of Work Keys, in 2011, also revealed that gender and age are factors that have some degree of influence on the technical college graduate. The many barriers technical college students face, as outlined in the literature review, reflect the challenges they have to overcome when making a career choice.

Technical college graduates' self-actualization, as mentioned earlier by Maslow, is more achievable with the utilization of the abovementioned vehicles. Picklesimer and Miller (1998) showed that students felt successful after developing an interest in going to college, making the final college choice, and choosing a major. Some scholars and

practitioners, according to Blustein (1997) and Niles et al. (1998), have started to embrace the idea of career explorations as a lifelong pursuit and as a means to cope with a variety of career transitions. The information these researchers provided and the aspects of career navigation helped form the first research question of this study.

Earlier in the review of literature, DeWitt (2007) suggested that student-advising support needed to improve in order to meet the changing economic environments and needs of the modern technical college student. This lends background information for the second research question pertaining to career satisfaction. Student satisfaction may be dependent on the guidance practices that could reflect a need for change.

In the next chapter on methodology, the researcher details the mixed-methods research approach used for this study because it involves a framework applicable to the experiences of an individual or a group. In addition, mixed-methods research enabled the development of more appropriate student support services and the increase in student graduation rates. With the permission of the technical college administration, the researcher conducted a survey among technical college graduates regarding their campus experiences with the guidance counseling offices. In addition, this researcher interviewed five career development administrators to investigate the major themes pertaining to students' use of career services.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which social pressures influence the career choices of technical college graduates. With the permission of the technical college administration, the researcher conducted a survey among technical college graduates regarding their career choices. The researcher also interviewed five senior members of the administrative staff at four southern technical colleges to investigate career-related decision-making among technical college graduates. The survey did not identify technical college graduates' program of study, as the emphasis pertained to how the program of study was determine.

For the intent of the study, social pressures included pressure from family members, friends, the economy, state government support, and job availability. Managing these potential conflicting demands is paramount to a student's success in technical education and overall career happiness (Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). All concepts and variables examined in the study were operationalized. The chapter proceeds with a description of the methodology utilized in this study, including the procedures for participant recruitment and data collection. The chapter then presents the data analysis plan followed by a discussion of the study's trustworthiness and important ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of the chapter and transitions to Chapter 4.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the technical college graduate's social pressures and career choices? Social pressures are family, friends, economy, government support, job availability, and other items external to the graduate's control.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the career choices of technical college students and career satisfaction post-graduation?

Central Concept of the Study

The central concept that the researcher explored was career choice among technical college graduates and the effect of external pressures on career decisions. The researcher was ultimately interested in developing a better understanding of the ways in which graduates mitigate social pressures to arrive at satisfying career-related decisions. The argument of this researcher is that basic, practical career considerations exist that technical college graduates need to address before determining career directions (Thompson & Subich, 2006). Many of these questions require personal introspection, which might be quite difficult when external or internal factors place pressure on a student.

Conceptualization of Variables

- Social pressures were conceptualized as the factors, such as "family, school counselors, teachers, friends, and state government," that play a role in career development behavior (Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005, p. 46).

- Career choice conceptualized as the process by which career-related decisions are made and the directed actions that proceed from this process (Koivisto, Vinokur, & Vuori, 2011).
- Career satisfaction conceptualized as contentment with "the income, advancement, goals, acquisition of new skills, and success achieved during the span of their [chosen] career" (Riaz & Haider, 2010, p. 32).
- Though not considered a social pressure, aptitude conceptualization is the competency to do a certain kind of work at a certain level and may be physical or mental. Aptitude is inborn potential to do certain kinds of work whether developed or undeveloped. Aptitude determines if one is smart enough to get the desired job.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The researcher collected quantitative data through use of a researcher-created survey. Specifically, Survey Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 examined the research questions. Research Question 1 examined the relationship between social pressures and career choice. Survey Question 3 examined whether or not this graduation is the beginning of the student's first career. Survey Question 4 examined whether or not the students decided on their career program on their own. Survey Question 5 examined how their career choice was determined. Responses to Survey Question 5 included *something that I do well*, *suggested by my family or friends*, *job availability based on labor market information*, *an aptitude test given by a Career or Guidance Counselor*, and *recommendation by a Career or Guidance Counselor*. Survey Question 6 examined the degree to which their program selection was determined by social pressures, ranging in

potential responses from *no social pressure* to *completely due to social pressure.* The researcher conducted descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to address Research Question 1.

Survey Question 7 addressed Research Question 2, which asked students if they were happy with their career choice. Possible responses to the question were *yes* and *no*. The researcher conducted chi square tests of independence to assess the relationship between Survey Questions 4, 5, and 6 with Survey Question 7. The chi square test is the appropriate analysis to conduct when the goal is to assess the relationship between two nominal variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). The chi-square tests assessed whether or not a statistically significant relationship exists between social pressure and satisfaction with career selection. Table 1 presents the survey questions.

Table 1

December 2014 Student Survey Questions

Question Number	Question	Responses
1	Gender	Male, Female
2	Age	18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46 and older
3	Is this graduation the beginning of your first career?	No, Yes
4	Did you decide on your career program by yourself?	No, Yes
5	Your selection of this career or program was primarily determined by?	Something I do well, Suggested by family or friends, Job availability, Aptitude test, Recommendation of career or guidance counselor

Question Number	Question	Responses
6	To what extent was this career selection determined by social pressure? (Social pressures are described as family, friends, economy, governmental support, job availability and other items outside of your control)	No social pressure, Slight social pressure, Equal parts social pressure and my own decision, Mostly social pressure, Completely due to social pressure
7	Are you happy with your career choice?	No, Yes

The researcher collected qualitative data through use of face-to-face, phone or mailed survey interviews with participants. The researcher also developed an interview protocol to standardize the collection of qualitative data between the five participants. Responses to Interview Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 allowed the researcher to assess Research Question 1, which related to the influences on student career choice. Responses to Interview Questions 7, 8, and 9 allowed the researcher to assess Research Question 2, which related to career satisfaction among graduates. Interview Question 2 served to obtain additional information concerning the ways in which students make career decisions. Table 2 presents a list of the interview questions asked.

Table 2

December 2014 Administrator Interview Questions

Question Number	Question
1	Please tell me a little about your position at this institution.
2	What is your role in assisting students in their career selection?
3	What possible factors influence students to select a particular technical program?
4	In your opinion, what influence (if any) do the following factors have on student career selection? a. family b. friend c. economy d. governmental support e. job availability
5	Please name the three factors that you believe have the most influence on technical college graduates' career selections.
6	In what ways do the career selection methods, tools, and instruments offered by this institution assist students in managing and addressing these influences?
7	How does this institution evaluate the students' success or satisfaction in their career selection process?
8	Based upon your experiences, how satisfied do students appear to be with their career at graduation? Is there an instrument in place to measure such satisfaction?
9	What commonalities, if any, have you observed among students who report high career satisfaction?
10	In your opinion, how do student career choices affect post-graduate career satisfaction?
11	Based on your knowledge and experience, what factor(s) play the largest role in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation?

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher varied between the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. In the process of quantitative data collection, the role of the researcher was limited to disseminating and collecting surveys at graduations. The researcher then utilized statistical analyses to examine the quantitative data.

The qualitative data collection required participation of the interviewer as an instrument of data collection. In addition to asking questions contained in the interview guide, the researcher practiced active listening to obtain a full appreciation of what the participant communicated. Further, the researcher was active in encouraging the elaboration of significant statements and probing through questions. The researcher was also attentive to nonverbal cues that help inform the discovery of latent feelings and opinions.

The researcher did not have any known professional or personal relationships with any of the prospective participants in the study. The researcher had a prior relationship with one of the four technical colleges. However, no power differentials or conflicts of interest affected the study. In the collection and analysis of data, the researcher's bias posed no threat to the study's validity. In acknowledging the inherent biases possessed by every individual, the researcher recognized the need to examine and address his own biases. To accomplish this aim, the researcher practiced epoché, as described by Husserl (1970). In epoché, the researcher makes a conscious examination of his or her own biases and then brackets, or sets aside, these biases to inspect the data from a fresh and objective perspective. By practicing epoché, the researcher aimed to minimize the influence of researcher bias as a threat to the validity of the study.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The population of this study consisted of technical college graduates. The sampling frame of the quantitative portion of this study was limited to students graduating during the spring, summer, and fall semesters, respectively and in attendance at the graduation ceremonies. The sampling strategy employed in this study was both purposive and one of convenience. A previous graduation survey of graduates on June 17, 2011 had a response rate of 72% (190 of 265 possible graduates). The researcher expected that between 200 and 250 students graduated in the Fall 2014 semester. Using a conservative 50% response rate for the survey, at least 100 to 125 graduates were anticipated to participate in the study. The Fall graduation had 111 participants, with 37% survey participation (36 of 111 possible graduates).

Determinations of sample size in qualitative research based on the concept of saturation (Mason, 2010). Saturation refers to the point at which the addition of further participants no longer adds new information pertinent to the objectives of the study (Bowen, 2008). The researcher based the selection of the sample size for the qualitative portion of this study on the goal of achieving saturation.

Data Analysis

The researcher further utilized the qualitative data to answer the research questions by substantiating the results of the quantitative data (Creswell, 1999). Anderson, Newell, and Kilcoyne (1999) successfully utilized this methodology when collating their survey results with the results of a focus group to study the motivation of college students who donated blood. The use of interviews in convergence with survey

data allowed the researcher to gain information concerning the career choices of technical college students.

Qualitative data in this study consisted of an individual face-to-face interview with five senior members of the administrative staff at four technical colleges. The researcher conducted a prior round of interviews using similar questions (see Appendix A) the week of January 23, 2012, with two administrators of the college. Interviews occurred on the school grounds to reduce travel burdens on participants. The researcher held the interviews in a private meeting room to decrease the likelihood of interruptions. For this round of interviews, the researcher scheduled interviews during the months of December 2014 and April 2015.

Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher reminded the participant that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The participant received an informed consent form to sign. Interviews lasted for a duration of 45–60 minutes. The researcher conducted interviews using an interview guide, which consisted of 11 questions. Interviews were audio recorded with written permission from the participants. The researcher then transcribed the audio recordings for textual analysis. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were debriefed, which included an explanation of the objectives of the study and contact information for the researcher.

The researcher modeled the analysis of the qualitative data in this study after the constant-comparative method, as described by Merriam (1998). Merriam characterized the process of constant-comparative method of data analysis as an iterative process in which the researcher moves repeatedly between the data and the interpretation of the data (Kauwulich, 2004). Based on the process described by Merriam, the researcher followed

a serious of procedures. First, the researcher read the transcripts to get a general idea of the content of the interviews. Data analysis began with coding of the raw data based on the arranging of data into groups of similar elements and data with similar connotations. This process resulted in the creation of various categories, elaborated by searching for pertinent pieces of data that inform the identified category (Kauwulich, 2004). Last, a label or theme was developed that succinctly and clearly conveyed a conceptually meaningful articulation of the data (Kauwulich, 2004). The researcher arranged and presented the themes according to the respective research question they addressed. Data analysis did not involve use of any computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze the qualitative data.

Quantitative data in the study consisted of responses to a forced choice survey. The researcher collected the data through the distribution of surveys at graduation ceremonies for students matriculating from the technical college. The researcher received permission from the President to conduct surveys of technical college graduates during their graduation. The researcher was present at the graduation ceremonies, with the first held on December 11, 2014. The number of graduates attending this ceremony was an estimated 200 to 250. Prior versions of the survey were administered to graduates in 2011 (see Appendices B and C). Participants also completed the surveys at the Spring graduation (Graduation 1) on March 25, 2011, and the Summer graduation (Graduation 2) on June 17, 2011. A total of 265 graduates attended the ceremony and 190 participated in the researcher's survey.

The 2014 survey design allowed quick and simple replies. The researcher disseminated the surveys to graduating students prior to the start of the ceremony.

Prospective participants were informed that the surveys were voluntary and were instructed to return the completed survey to the researcher after graduation if they wished to participate in the research. Based on the completion rates observed for the previous round of surveys, the researcher anticipated that approximately 50–60% of the surveys would be returned. Upon returning the surveys, participants received information explaining the objectives of the study and were provided with contact information for the researcher to discuss any questions or concerns relative to the study. No further follow-up procedures were required of the participants.

The researcher conducted frequencies and percentages for each of the survey questions. The researcher split the data between each graduation. The data were examined and combined separately. Graphs were constructed in order to present the data. Responses to Survey Questions 5 and 6 addressed Research Question 1, while responses to Survey Question 7 addressed Research Question 2.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the leadership of the technical college to conduct research within the school and to gain access to its graduating students for participant recruitment. The researcher also obtained permission to interview staff members of the school. The researcher then obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study, because this study involved the use of human participants. As outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), three primary ethical considerations are relevant in research using human participants: (a) justice, (b) beneficence, and (c) respect of persons.

The principle of justice refers to the equal assignment of benefit and burden in the selection of participants and the completion of the research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The researcher observed this principle of justice in the study by selecting participants based upon their attendance at graduation, which was directly related to the primary objectives of this investigation. Participant selection was not because of race, gender, class, or other such factors that did not clearly reflect the research objectives. Further, participants who agreed to complete the survey were asked to answer identical questions. Therefore, the researcher did not place any unequal burden on participants during the quantitative data collection. In addition, the researcher asked the five interview participants in this study similar questions, and each interview lasted roughly the same duration.

The researcher observed the principle of beneficence in the undertaking of this research. The process of data collection in this study posed a minimal risk of harm or discomfort to participants. The research topic was not considered highly charged or triggering. Further, the survey completions occurred anonymously to reduce any risk of discomfort for participants. Interview participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential, and survey respondents were instructed to complete the surveys anonymously. This research may be beneficial to participants in that the results add to the current knowledge concerning the career choices of technical school graduates and inform future guidance practices for technical college students.

The final principle, respect of persons, involves the treatment of participants as autonomous actors with free will and the mandate to protect those individuals whose ability to act with autonomy is compromised (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007). In

observing this principle, participants were informed through the informed consent form that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. A criterion for participation in this study was that the individual had successfully graduated from the technical college. As such, participants were not believed to have a diminished capacity to understand the purpose of the study, the requirements of their participation, or their ability to withdraw from the study. Participants received contact information for the researcher following completion of the survey or interview to address any questions or concern that arose.

Ethical Treatment of Data

The data collected from the graduates occurred anonymously. Participants were asked to provide demographic information, such as gender and age, but no other identifying information was collected from the graduates who participated. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to the administrative staff participating in the interviews to protect their confidentiality. Details concerning their exact positions within the school's administrative staff were withheld from any publication or presentation of the results of this study to further protect their confidentiality.

Only the researcher has access to the raw data. The raw data collected is stored in a secure, locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. Digital files and materials are stored on a secure, password-protected computer in the researcher's home office. The researcher will retain the data collected from the study for a period of 5 years. At the end of the 5-year period, the researcher will shred physical material and delete all copies of digital data and material.

The researcher did not have any known prior professional or personal relationships with the technical college, its employees, or its students. Therefore, no ethical issues related to power differentials related to this study. Further, the lack of any prior relationships between the researcher and the participants in the study reduced the influence of possible researcher bias.

Participants did not receive any incentives to participate. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point throughout the research. As such, issues of coercion were not a relevant ethical concern in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which social pressures influence the career choices of technical college graduates. This mixed-methods study involved both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the phenomenon of interest. Through use of a survey instrument administered to graduating students and interviews with administrative staff, the researcher explored the phenomenon of career decision-making among technical college graduates from multiple perspectives. In the next chapter, the researcher presents a brief overview of the analyses utilized in the study. The chapter proceeds with a summary of the collected data and a presentation of the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the results of both analyses.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the ways in which social pressures influence the career choices of technical college graduates. For the intent of the study, social pressures included pressure from family members, friends, the economy, governmental support, and job availability. The researcher employed two methods of data collection in this study: surveys and semistructured interviews. This chapter contains a presentation of the results of this study. The chapter begins with a presentation of the quantitative results obtained from the surveys. Following these results are the qualitative results obtained from the interviews. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of the chapter, and transitions to Chapter 5.

Survey Results

The researcher previously collected data from the 2011 graduation at two different campuses—Graduation 1 on March 25, 2011 and Graduation 2 on June 17, 2011. Data from these schools were collected prior to IRB approval and only served as a comparison to the new data collected on December 11, 2014—Graduation 3. A total of 45% of the walking students from Graduation 1 participated in the study, 72% of students from Graduation 2 participated in the study, and only 37% of Graduation 3 students participated in the study. Table 3 presents the participation statistics from each

graduation.

A significant difference existed in the percentage of participation in Graduation 1 at 72% and Graduation 3 at 37%. This difference was not as significant in comparing Graduation 2 at 45% to Graduation 3 at 37%. The first two graduations utilized members of the graduation team to hand out and collect the surveys. Because of this, the perception was that the survey was a step in the graduation process, thus more individuals were willing to complete the document. The researcher solely conducted the final round of surveys at the third graduation. Since the survey was not integrated through the graduation team, it was not perceived as a part of the graduation process.

Table 3

Participation Rates for Graduations

Graduation	Total walked	Participated	%
1 – March 25, 2011	157	71	45
2 – June 17, 2011	265	190	72
3 – December 11, 2014	111	36	37

The majority of the participants in all three graduations were female (73% at Graduation 1, 73% at Graduation 2, and 67% at Graduation 3). Graduation 1 was primarily 18–25 year olds (51%), while Graduations 2 and 3 had primarily 18–25 year olds (34% and 33%, respectively) and 26–35 year olds (35% and 31%, respectively). Table 4 presents the frequencies and percentages for gender and age for each graduation.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages for Gender and Age

Demographic	Graduation 1 (n = 71)		Graduation 2 (n = 190)		Graduation 3 (n = 36)	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender						
Male	19	27	52	28	11	31
Female	52	73	137	73	24	67
Total	71	100	190	100	36	100
Age						
18–25	36	51	65	34	12	33
26–35	18	25	66	35	11	31
36–45	14	20	34	18	8	22
46 and older	3	4	24	13	3	8
Total	71	100	190	100	36	100

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the technical college graduate's social pressures and career choices? Social pressures included family, friends, economy, state governmental support, job availability, and other items external to the graduates' control.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the career choices of technical college students and career satisfaction post-graduation?

To address Research Question 1, the researcher examined Survey Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Survey Question 3 asked participants, "Is this graduation the beginning of your first career?" Most of the students in all three graduations responded yes (71%, 66%, and 75% for Graduation 1, 2, and 3, respectively). In all three graduations, the students decided their career program student themselves. Only 6% in Graduation 1, 4%

in Graduation 2, and 8% in Graduation 3 answered that they did not decide their career program themselves. Survey Question 5 asked participants, "Your selection of this career or program was primarily determined by?" Most of the students in all Graduations 1, 2, and 3 selected *something I do well* (66%, 80%, and 72%, respectively). *Suggested by family or friends* was the second-highest selection among all Graduations 1, 2, and 3 (12%, 9%, and 19%, respectively).

Job availability became a more salient factor in Graduation 3, with 19% selecting this response compared to 10% in Graduation 1 and 8% in Graduation 2. However, some participants selected more than one response to this question in Graduation 3. Survey Question 6 was only asked to Graduation 3 students (to what extent was this career selection determined by social pressure?). The majority of the Graduation 3 participants selected no social pressure (20, 56%) or my own decision (18, 50%). Finally, the last question asked participants if they were happy with their career choice. All students but one in Graduation 1, all students but one in Graduation 2, and all students in Graduation 3 specified that they were happy with their career choice. Table 5 presents frequencies and percentages for Survey Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 for Graduations 1, 2, and 3.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages for Questions 3–7 for Graduations 1, 2, and 3

	Graduation 1 (n = 71)		Graduation 2 (n = 190)		Graduation 3 (n = 36)	
Question	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Is this graduation the beginning of your first career?						
No	21	29	64	34	8	22
Yes	50	71	125	66	27	75
Skipped	-	-	-	-	1	3
Total	71	100	189	100	36	100
Did you decide on your career program by yourself?						
No	4	6	8	4	3	8
Yes	67	94	180	96	32	89
Skipped	-	-	-	-	1	3
Total	71	100	18	100	36	100
Your selection of this career or program as primarily determined by?*						
Something I do well	46	66	151	80	26	72
Suggested by family or friends	15	21	16	9	7	19
Job availability	7	10	15	8	7	19
Aptitude test	2	3	2	1	2	6
Recommendation of career or guidance counselor	0	0	5	3	2	6
Total	70	100	189	100	44	100
To what extent was this career selection determined by social pressure?*†						

No social pressure	-	-	-	-	20	56
Slight social pressure	-	-	-	-	2	6
My own decision	-	-	-	-	18	50
Total					40	100
Are you happy with your career choice?						
No	1	1	1	1	0	0
Yes	70	99	188	100	36	100
Total	71	100	189	100	36	100

Note. Some participants selected more than one response. † Graduation 1 and 2 participants did not answer this question. There are percentages that exceeded 100%. The researcher found in survey question, "To what extent was this career selection determined by social pressure?" exceeded 100%. This was a result of a few participants selecting more than one response. Due to rounding error, some percentages may not sum to 100%.

To answer Research Question 2 quantitatively, the researcher planned to conduct a series of chi-square analyses between Survey Question 7 (are you happy with your career choice?) and Survey Questions 4 (decided on career by self), 5 (selection primarily determined by), and 6 (social pressure). However, all students in Graduation 3 selected that they were happy with their career choice. Since all participants stated they were happy with their career choice, no inferential statistics could be conducted to determine any relationships. The researcher did not conduct any statistics because no variables existed for comparison, as all participants with the exception of 1 were satisfied with their career choice. The preliminary analysis indicated that the technical college graduates who participated in the survey at the three graduations were well pleased with their career decisions made on their own, with little influence from the social pressures listed in the survey. The results also indicated that a small percentage utilized the resources provided through the career services offices at the technical college.

Interview Results

The researcher also collected data through face-to-face, email, and phone interviews with an Academic Support Coordinator (ASC), a Director of Career Services (CSD), the Vice President of Career Services (VPC), a Student Life Coordinator (SLC), and a Director of Career Services and Counseling (DCS) at four southern technical colleges. The researcher asked participants a series of 11 open-ended questions regarding the topic of student career selection. The interview objectives were to obtained data to contextualize, clarify, or explain the results obtained from the surveys. The researcher summarized and assessed the interview responses for commonalities. The themes presented summarize the associated responses. As the question order and question content varied between participants, Appendix A details a synthesized interview question list. The questions listed in the subsequent subsections follow the question order displayed in that list. The following sections present interview questions and summaries of commonalities among the participants' responses.

Interview Question 1

IQ1 stated, please tell me a little about your position at this institution. All participants indicated that their roles involved facilitating student decision-making. The CSD placed emphasis on career-related decisions and job preparedness, saying that "job readiness or soft skills" are a primary objective. The ASC described the facilitation as more programmatic decision-making with the following:

> [The Student Success Coordinator] assists students in making program choices, assists students with academic issues, and test preparation. This office is considered a starting point for students that are not certain what they want to do. Not all students have a clear direction of where they want to go.

The DCS shared that maintaining communication with employers and with employment resources to inform students and alumni of available employment opportunities was a significant function of the director's position. The DCS implied that more emphasis was placed on the process of finding a job than on selecting a career. Students are encouraged to use online career exploration services on the college's website. The SLC also shared that the coordinator position was designed to work with business and industry employers to help fill positions they have available with current students and recent graduates. The VPC stated that students are encouraged to start with the end in mind, with a focus on their career and program completion.

Interview Question 2

IQ2 asked, what is the role of the counselor in assisting students in their career selection? Several participants described the role of the counselor as a provider of information to facilitate informed decision-making. The ASC pointed out that the counselor must begin by "listening to what the student has to say. Then help that student by providing the necessary information to make their choice." The CSD offered a similar take, saying that students typically come to the office to resolve ambivalence between two career choices. As the CSD explained, "They want to look at the various salaries, duties, and possible employment availability," and the CSD provides them with this vital information. Armed with information, students are empowered to make their own academic and career-related decisions. On this topic, the DCS said:

> Primarily, career advisors answer questions regarding various majors and program levels. Students who have no idea at all regarding desired career paths are encouraged to use the online career exploration MCP [My Career Profile] at the college web site. Effective July 1, 2014, prospective and current students will be able to access Virtual Job Shadow in the College website.

The SLC indicated that the coordinator's role is to assist students in recognizing "what unique skills and gifts they have and suggest careers… that will build on their natural abilities." The VPC indicated the role of the vice president is to "help students identify their strengths through Career Scope" and to "explain what requirements for success [exist] in a particular field or program, [such as] skill and abilities with prior performance in education."

Interview Question 3

IQ3 asked what possible factors influence students to select a particular technical program. The participants cited different sets of factors as influential components of technical program selection. The CSD noted salary expectations and program length as important considerations in the decision-making process. The CSD reported: "The office also stressed that they look at something they would like doing. This office also looks at the student's aptitude level as shown in a Compass Assessment Test." The ASC named a different set of factors, pointing to significant others as influential parties in the decision-making process. The ASC stated: "Sometimes what drives a student is what a significant person in the student's life wants them to do. That person might be a parent, spouse, employer, or friend."

In addition to significant others, the ASC cited long-range career goals as a motivating factor in program selection. Finally, the ASC also discussed the influence of monetary considerations:

> This office also sees students impacted by negative things. Their circumstances may have change[d]. The person may have been married or fully supported by a parent. This could lead to financial pressures driving the student's selection of a particular program.

The DCS stated: “Most often, we are questioned about job placement after graduation and expected salary ranges. We believe that students are expecting to go into majors that will provide a good pay level and quick employment after graduation.” The SLC indicated that “length of the program and job placement opportunities” were possible factors influencing students’ selection of a technical program. According to the VPC, the possible factors influencing the selection of a particular program are “learning style, prior skill, self-efficacy, and career interest-family members.”

Interview Question 4

IQ4 asked, in your opinion, what influence (if any) do the following factors have on student career selection: (a) family, (b) friends, (c) economy, (d) governmental support, and (e) job availability? Four of the five participants ranked family and friends as large influences on career selection. Three of the five interviewees ranked the economy as the next most significant influence. This factor followed unanimously by governmental support, with job availability ranked as the least influential factor. The CSD emphasized the influence of friends and family stating: “Parents push children toward certain program areas. And friends have influence simply by telling them what their experience was with a particular instructor or what program they planned to enter.” The ASC offered a similar take saying that familial support, or the lack thereof, could dramatically alter a student’s career plans. As an example, the ASC explained:

> Also, lack of family support of the student’s ability influences the career selection. A student may have a desire for a particular program but the parent thinks they should do another program. This leads the student to dialing their expectations down.

The participants also noted that governmental support influences career selection. The ASC offered the following:

> Pell Grants do not pay for short term technical certificate programs. Hope alone pays no fees, buys no books, and only a portion of tuition. The level of training student may want, Technical Certificate, is not a financial possibility. Students may qualify for WIA (Workforce Investment Act), which only covers certain programs of study. Veterans are also influence by governmental support as there are certain programs available to them. They can only go into high demands professions or fields of employment, as determined by the Veterans Administration. This impacts the options that are available to students.

The CSD also discussed the influence of governmental support on career decision-making, saying, "Governmental support can be a factor through financial aid, unemployment and childcare."

In addition to friends, family, and state governmental support, the ASC also discussed the influence of the economy and job availability on students' career decisions. The ASC argued that the economic downturn has necessitated "retraining" and that "small business owners are coming back to school as their businesses have failed." Further, the availability of jobs within the field is another important consideration for students. The ASC reported: "This office has many sources to help students determine the availability of jobs in particular programs. This occurs often when students have possibly relocated here and their former job is not available. They are concerned about their salary." The DCS ranked family and friends as minimal influences on career selection, and ranked the economy and governmental support in the form of scholarships HOPE and Pell grants as high influences. The SLC placed family, friends, governmental support, and job availability as large influences, with the economy having a medium influence. The VPC cited family and friends as important influences on career selection but minimized the significance of the other three factors.

Interview Question 5

IQ5 asked, please name the three factors that you believe have the most influence on technical college graduates' career selection. Familial influence was the only common factor noted by four of the five participants as an influential component of technical college graduates' career selection. The DCS did not include family and friends among the top three influences. The ASC argued: "The most influencing factor is family. It would not necessarily be family saying I think you should do this or that. It would be …more inclined to be family responsibilities." The CSD also named family within the top three influential factors, along with friends and the student's personal interests. The DCS cited three factors as cost of the program, entry-level compensation, and employment after graduation. In addition, the other two factors noted by the SLC were personal preference and length of the program. For the VPC, however, the other two factors were reputation of the employer and current skill level.

Interview Question 6

IQ6 asked, in what ways do the career selection methods, tools, and instruments offered by this institution assist students in managing/addressing these influences? Four of the five participants referenced the use of computerized assessment and guidance tools that assist students with measuring their interests and aptitudes, and exploring suitable areas of employment. Two interview participants referenced the Georgia Career Information System, in particular. As the ASC explained: "the Georgia Career Information System is also utilized to focus on one specific field. This system allows the office to review growing or declining professions throughout the state of Georgia."

In addition to this resource, the CSD also mentioned O-Net, saying, "O-Net has employment wage and availability information on every occupation in the world." The ASC also listed Degree Works as a useful tool. The ASC noted that Degree Works "will give students much more flexibility in possibly changing programs by utilizing the 'what if' button." The ASC also discussed Career Scope, an instrument that measures interests and aptitudes. The ASC described the instrument in detail saying, "Career Scope provides an assessment on the person's strengths and weaknesses. This assessment is often used on students that do not see any possibilities are maybe unable to narrow the possibilities."

According to the DCS, career selection methods and tools significantly influence career selection. The My Career Profile tool matches occupations with self-reported skills, values, and personality. Career titles can be searched for the level of education required, entry-level salary expectations, and the employment needs of the occupation. Virtual Job Shadow provides current videos of individuals in various occupations, as well as statistical data regarding the occupations. The SLC stated, "We focus on the likes and abilities of the student and build on that to see what possible program would be a good fit for the student." The VPC reported using Career Scope to determine the student's areas of interest.

Interview Question 7

IQ7 asked, how does this institution evaluate the students' success or satisfaction in the career selection process? The participants collectively noted that the institution utilizes a student satisfaction survey to evaluate students' satisfaction with the career selection process. The CSD also discussed the institution's "Wall of Success." The CSD

championed the wall saying: “This wall has pictures of graduates in their profession at their actual jobs. This provides a sense of accomplishment and the fact that the graduate can be successful in their chosen profession.” The DCS stated that each graduate is followed-up with a year after graduation to collect data to construct an employment report. The institution uses the Graduate Follow-up and Employer Follow-up Surveys. The SLC and VPC also reported using post-graduation surveys to assess placement rates.

Interview Question 8

IQ8 asked, based upon your experiences, how satisfied do students appear to be with their career at graduation? And is there an instrument in place to measure such satisfaction? Participants offered little new insight regarding their responses to this question. The CSD expressed that the response to Question 7 had addressed this issue and offered no further comment. The ASC reported no direct knowledge of students’ career satisfaction at graduation, but did impart that “students have come back to share that initially they did not like the advice they were given but the advice turned out to be right.” The DCS shared that, based on survey results, graduates tend to be pleased with their education and their level of preparation for the job market. According to the SLC, students appear satisfied with their career choices. Conversely, the VPC observed that students are somewhat satisfied.

Interview Question 9

IQ9 asked, what commonalities, if any, have you observed among students who report high career satisfaction? The participants named different traits inherent to students who report high levels of satisfaction with their careers. The ASC listed “openness” both to new experiences and “expanding their initial program selection,” as

key characteristics of students with high career satisfaction. The ASC also cited the matching of careers with personal aptitudes and traits as an important factor in career satisfaction. The CSD, however, stated that a "high level of motivation and dedication among students is typically associated with greater career satisfaction." The DCS, admitting that no statistical data exists to back up the statement, maintained, "our graduates seem to be self-confident and well prepared for the work force." The SLC shared that the main commonality was that students with high career satisfaction do not return to take a different program of study. The VPC maintained that the primary commonality among students with high career satisfaction was that they work for reputable organizations and are well paid.

Interview Question 10

IQ10 asked, in your opinion, how do student career choices affect post-graduate career satisfaction? The participants emphasized the effects of informed decision-making on career satisfaction. The CSD argued that taking the time to assess one's skills and interests, and utilize the services of the Career Services Office, leads to increased career satisfaction and longer tenure within the field. Similarly, the ASC linked a lack of prior career research with low career satisfaction post-graduation. The ASC shared students completing a program of study who did not make an informed decision in the beginning do not like what they are doing. The ASC shared these students often share that they completed a program, got a job doing what they went to school for, and hate it, or they share that they cannot find a job in their field. The DCS stated "Our placement rate averages 99%, 90-94% in the field of study. Our graduates are actually getting jobs after graduation." The SLC argued that choosing a career one want to be in will significantly

determine one's satisfaction in the workforce. The VPC stated that those who made the right career choices based on skills, abilities, and interests were much happier with their decision.

Interview Question 11

IQ11 asked, based on your knowledge and experience, what factor(s) play the largest role in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation? Regarding this question, the participants offered divergent responses. The CSD focused on the development of employability skills as the largest determining factor in career satisfaction post-graduation. The CSD shared, "The largest factor is students that use the [institution's career] service for interview, resume, and job search long-term experience the most satisfaction." The DCS said the largest factor in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation was high paying employment. The SLC provided a similar response, pointing to salary and job placement ability as key factors in career satisfaction. The ASC, however, cited several external career forces as major determinants of career satisfaction and noted the work environment as a particularly vital issue. The ASC stated, "Part of [career satisfaction] is the student's ability to find employment in a place that person enjoys working. The work environment or policies make the graduate uncomfortable which affects job satisfaction." The ASC also remarked on unrealistic expectations that can contribute to low satisfaction with a chosen career, saying: "The advancement opportunities may not be what were expected. A reality check for some of the students at the very beginning to set realistic expectations can avoid frustration at the end. This will help with the retention rate." Echoing the sentiments of the DCS and SLC, the VPC declared the three most influential factors in determining student career

satisfaction post-graduation to be in-field or related field job placement, earning a good salary, and working for a reputable organization.

Overall, the results of the interviews indicated that students have increased satisfaction in their jobs after graduation when their aptitudes are linked to the work they do. Some of the most important influences on students, in beginning and continuing on in school, included the support of family and friends. The reason students gave for starting programs included family, the economy, and the availability of government support, such as Pell Grants. The interviewees did not reach any major consensus on factors that determined career satisfaction for students. The answers they provided included, job placement, salary, work environment, use of career services, working for a reputable organization, and the development of job related skills. The most frequently mentioned measures of satisfaction were salary and having a good secure position and career field.

The direct services provided by the college's career counselors included computerized career aptitude assessment, aid in choosing appropriate programs, and talking with students about careers, including job outlook, salaries, and job placement. Indirect services included creating and maintaining relationships with local employers. The college followed-up with students 1 year after graduation to collect employment data and conducted a survey to ascertain satisfaction with career selection. Other that this information, the institution collected little statistical data, and the interviewees' responses were based on personal opinion and observation.

In reconciling survey and interview data, although students were pleased with the career decisions they made with little outside influence, students still identified family as

one of the most important influences on their decision to begin and continue school. While students made career decisions on their own, outside influences, such as job placement, salary, work environment, and use of career services, were involved in the process of selecting a career. Although survey responses indicated that a small percentage of students utilized the resources offered at the career services center, the center did offer a variety of services to assist students including aptitude assessments, program choice assistance, job outlooks, salaries, and job placement.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which social pressures influence the career choices of technical college graduates. Through use of a survey instrument administered to graduating technical students and face-to-face interviews completed with senior student advisement staff, the researcher aimed to explore the phenomenon of career decision-making among technical college graduates from multiple perspectives. The data collected in this study yielded several insights.

The interview participants described the role of the career counselor as a provider of information to facilitate informed decision-making and emphasized the effects of informed decision-making on career satisfaction. Participants mentioned both salary expectations and program length as important considerations in the technical program decision-making process. Four of the five interview participants ranked family and friends, as well as governmental support, among the most influential factors in student career selection. The interview participants stated that openness, motivation, finding a job in-field, receiving a good salary, working for a reputable organization, dedication, and the ability to find a career that matches one's personal aptitudes are associated with

increased career satisfaction. The participants references the use of computerized assessment and guidance tools that assist students with measuring their interests and aptitudes, and exploring suitable areas of employment. In addition to the aforementioned personal characteristics, participants also noted good paying jobs, the ability to secure employment, a positive work environment, and realistic expectations as chief determinants of career satisfaction post-graduation.

The interview data generally supported the survey results. Survey respondents tended to report that their career decisions were their own, and represented an occupation for which they had an aptitude and in which jobs were available, which for some came at the suggestion of friends and family. The respondents generally indicated that they were happy with their career decisions, which was expected based upon the factors cited by the interview participants as determinants of career satisfaction.

In the next chapter, the researcher presents a brief overview of the results of the study. The chapter proceeds with the researcher's interpretation of the results and a discussion of the results in the context of the literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of the findings and suggestions for future research.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Because of the rapidly changing economic landscape, advances in technology, and constraints of legislation, the modern workforce continues to rely more on educational and career counseling opportunities (DeWitt, 2007). Career development in academia has coincided with political and social movements in order to properly usher students into technical college programs and align them with career paths that fit the students' needs (Singaravelu et al., 2005). During a time of societal change involving a shifting and aging workforce, the researcher of this study focused on the factors that influenced career development of a technical college graduate. High unemployment rates and the continual loss of jobs in all sectors of the economy elevated the significance of this study, which determined a need for technical college graduates and vocational counselors to collaborate during the career decision-making process.

Career-related decisions are heavily influenced through personal interests; knowledge strengths and aptitude; social pressures, such as family and friends; job availability and the economy; state governmental supports; and other items external to the graduate student's control (Bluestein, 2006; Emmett & Minor, 1993; Holland, 1973; Niles, Anderson, & Goodnough, 1998; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Selecting a career has many variables. Understanding such variables and how the variables influence decision-making is a necessary step toward a student's self-awareness. Self-awareness is a life skill that is important to the development and growth of any student. The following sections within

this chapter feature a discussion of the research and analysis of data collected through surveys and interviews at four southern technical colleges in south Georgia. Conclusions were drawn from the exploration of the research questions. The first section includes the Statement of the Problem, which is an overview of the research problem, and a review of the background to the problem. Following the problem and background is the discussion of the results and interpretation of the findings. Then, the chapter presents the discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research, which details areas of research that emerged while this researcher conducted this study. Following the recommendations is a comparison of the research findings and the literature. Conclusions follow the recommendations and comparisons as the researcher describes how technical colleges can better guide their students into positive career decisions as well as make the technical college students more self-aware. The conclusions elucidate a continued need for research into the area of career and guidance counseling in order to better address the business and economic landscape of the nation.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher attempted to understand the efficacy of technical college career counseling and a student's ability to make positive career decisions. Three major factors place undue stress on a technical college student's ability to make positive career decisions: advances in technology, national and state legislation, and lack of self-actualization by students.

Additionally, the cost of post-secondary education has increased. As such, technical college graduates at southern technical colleges are graduating in career areas that may not be appropriate for their interests or aptitude, and therefore, they are falling

further into debt. Technical college graduates need to address basic career questions before determining their career direction. Many of these questions require personal introspection, which might be quite difficult when external or internal factors place pressure on a student. How to overcome the economic and personal demands is paramount to a student entering technical college with a clear plan and the ability to graduate with a degree or certification in a field where they will find lasting satisfaction and gratification.

Discussion of the Findings

The researcher collected data from surveys conducted with technical college graduates in March 2011, June 2011, and December 2014. Graduation in March 2011, also labeled as Graduation 1, had 157 graduates who participated in the ceremony, of which 71 (45.2%) graduates participated in the survey. June 2011, or Graduation 2, had 265 graduates, of which 190 (71.7%) participated in the survey. December 2014, or Graduation 3, had 111 graduates, of which 36 (37%) participated in the survey. A total of 55.7% of the total number of graduates participated in the surveys, which was higher than expected because the surveys were taken before the graduation ceremonies.

In order to supplement the data collected from the surveys of students, the researcher conducted semistructured interviews with academic and career services coordinators at four southern Georgia technical colleges. Interview participants were asked 11 questions to investigate the students' role at the institution, the influences affecting student decisions, and the tools available for students. Common responses emerged from the questions that supported the students' decision-making process and satisfaction.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study asked, what is the relationship between the technical college graduate's social pressures and career choices? The results from the analysis of the surveys showed that 89% of the responders of three graduations selected their career on their own, and 72% chose their career because it was something they do well. Only 6% selected their career because of an aptitude test given by the career guidance office at the southern technical colleges. During the interview process, career administrators expressed that few students seek the services provided by their offices, but administrators highly recommend that all technical college students take the aptitude and career evaluations provided by their offices as well as participate in the career workshops.

Aptitude was the primary influence of career decision-making. Family also influenced students to choose one career instead of another. Respondents asserted the no social pressures influenced their decision to enter their field of choice. From the interviews, the DCS and ASC described family as a common factor guiding a student's career decisions. Two participants described family influence regarding Interview Question 5 as family responsibilities. A majority of the students were 25 years and older, placing them within the nontraditional student category. Many adults older than 25 were employed full-time or had dependents. Within the surveys, only 20% of 18–24 year-old graduates supported the assertion of family as an important influence. Research literature confirms that family and peer pressures during decision-making are hurdles for students to acknowledge, if not overcome (Chang et al., 2004; Holland 1973; Saunders et al., 2000; Singaravelu et al., 2005). Participant responses and the results from the interviews described support the existing research literature. Therefore, a student who understands

his or her familial and peer influences will make decisions that coincide with achieving a positive career choice more so than because of economic or legislative pressures.

From the interviews with career service providers, within the institutions, computer-based tools are available for student use and often encouraged to use during the decision-making process; however, the tools were under-utilized by students, which may be an indication of student self-actualization and reticence to investigate their possibilities beyond their current beliefs. Career service providers described the goal of computer and Internet based portals that assess and match students' aptitude with their fields of interests, which may reduce future career adjustments and changes. One such computer-based program described by the DCS was Degree Works. An important factor within Degree Works was the flexibility to show alternative possibilities through changing programs, whereas other programs, such as Career Scope, narrowed the focus and presented fewer possibilities. One reason for the lack of utilization of these programs may be the students' perception that the programs execute upon knowledge they are already aware of; therefore, the process is redundant. Making students aware of alternatives and career directions not previously perceived may be a direction for career counselors to pursue when advertising the services and products.

Job availability as an influence in career decisions was described by 19% of the participants in Graduation 3, more than the combined percentages from the first two graduations, which differentiated this group from the others. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of participants from Graduation 3 expressed that the decision-making process was not influenced by social pressure, and was of their own volition. Conversely, less than 10% felt that the process was slightly influenced by external social

pressure. The results indicate that the students were aware of their needs and intentions to achieve educational goals to begin careers in fields that fit their aptitudes and predilections. For the students who answered job availability, the present economic conditions, and possible future ramifications of their job prospects may have influenced their decisions to pay close attention to job availability. In addition, personal financial situations may have contributed to their need for available employment, especially for the nontraditional students who have dependents and other financial obligations to account for in their daily lives. A student's self-awareness and an understanding of the different occupations and majors lead to better career choices. Moreover, when external economic and legislative forces exert pressure on the job market, graduates described their choices with confidence and were self-aware of the career and satisfaction with their decision.

Research Question 2

The second research question for this study asked, what is the relationship between the career choices of technical college students and career satisfaction post-graduation? As stated in the results of this study, all participants answered survey question as being happy with their career choice. Because of the students' unanimity, the researcher did not perform the proposed chi-square analyses. Students' needs for self-actualization and discovering their areas of proficiency appear to be the main factor in career success and happiness (Holland, 1973; Shepard, 2006; Stochel, 2008). Picklesimer and Miller (1998) found that students felt successful after developing an interest in going to college, making the final college choice, and choosing a major. Finally, a need for self-actualization builds upon each of these human needs, making people more self-aware (Willis, 2004). Conversely, some scholars and practitioners have

embraced career exploration as a lifelong pursuit and a means to cope with a variety of career transitions (Blustein, 1997; Niles et al., 1998).

Career service counselors and administrators expressed the importance of self-actualization as a path toward knowledge regarding a proper fitting career and increased career satisfaction. Another area of concern was goal setting and the setting of realistic expectations for students to avoid stressful situations that may incur financial hardships and added time in school to complete their program. Students who have self-actualized their aptitudes have higher levels of satisfaction at graduation. Informed decisions and a willingness to be open to alternate career choices were important factors contributing to career satisfaction. Another contributing factor was an elevated level of motivation, which increased student dedication and drive to persist within their program. Finally, student self-confidence was important with regard to counselor perceptions of student career satisfaction. Combined, self-awareness, self-confidence, motivation, and self-actualization were important factors in student career satisfaction, but participants did not single out any as a specifically critical or important factor. Therefore, the participants in this survey achieved a level of awareness and confidence to persist toward graduation. Prior researchers suggested factors, such as home environment, social pressure, and state government, influence technical college graduates' career selections (Chang et al., 2004; Willis, 2004). The graduate survey results showed that 76.1% of the participants selected their careers because it was something that they believed they did well. It seemed, based on technical college graduates' career selections, that technical college graduates do not desire or utilize formal career selection support. Flanagan et al. (1971) found that only 2% of the college students in the Project Talent sample were sorry about the kind of work

they had chosen, and only 5% were unhappy about their choice of their major field. Research Question 2 asked about the relationship between career choices of technical college students and career satisfaction post-graduation. The participants' survey results reflected 99.2% of the survey participants were happy with their career choice. The percentages appear to refute social pressures, described as family, friends, economy, state government support, job availability, and other items external to the graduates' control as having a significant role or influence on the graduates' career choices (Dewitt, 2007; Holland, 1973; Nichols, 1964; Willis, 2004; Shepard, 2006; Stochel, 2008).

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research is warranted on this topic and consideration should be given to begin research earlier, when the technical college student initially enrolls in the technical college, through graduation, and several years into their career. A longitudinal study may help address the limitations presented in this study because technical school graduates only perceived and not actualized career satisfaction. Through a longitudinal study, future researchers may also investigate the assertions by Blustein (1997) and Niles et al. (1998) regarding career satisfaction and the student's ability to be flexible during difficult economic periods or during changes in his or her chosen industry.

Surveying the students affected by legislative acts and gubernatorial programs can allow researchers to investigate the efficacy of public service programs, such as Georgia Work Ready, Complete College Georgia, and Go Build Georgia. Many of these programs, during a time of budget cuts and awareness, need to have metrics to point to the efficacy of the legislation in place. Each of these institutions could benefit from the information, as well as the state legislature, and other state legislatures across the country,

which may result in investing tax dollars into work programs that promote positive career choices.

In addition, future researcher should use an increased sample size to cover more postsecondary systems in Georgia and other regions of the United States. The sample size could also include 4-year universities and community colleges, as well as high schools. Another aspect of future research, postsecondary dropouts, remains to be investigated and could possibly increase the sample size. As the surveys have shown, graduates have made strong and positive decisions prior to graduating and only a few did not. The sample size increase for all students entering technical college can adjust for the students who fail to achieve a career decision or drop out completely.

In examining and analyzing a variety of peer-reviewed publications on this topic, the intention is to unveil such opportunities for further research. Consideration of a range of articles, interviews, and case studies in career counseling and decision-making, produced a more comprehensive picture of the research to date.

The researcher believes that although additional research may be warranted on the influences guiding students' career selection, not only for technical college students but also for university students little will be done. Post-secondary institutions, at least a couple of those participating in this research project, appeared to have been more inclined to focus on student enrollment, student retention, and student graduation rather than actual student satisfaction in the career selection process.

This research of Technical College Graduates Career Decisions at Four Southern Technical Colleges provides administrators and counselors' pertinent data and information on the utilization or lack of utilization of their current counseling systems.

Though retention was not a factor of this study, one would assume students selecting a program or career in which their aptitude did not support such selection would affect the graduation, retention and enrollment rates.

Comparison of Research Findings and Literature

Aptitude was the primary influence of career decision-making. This influencer reflects in the three graduation surveys, in which technical college graduates made their career choice based on something they believe they did well or selected on their own. However, a very small percentage of technical graduates participating in the surveys stated an aptitude test influence their career decision. The graduates believe they were smart enough or had the natural ability to be successful in their program selection. This reflects the technical college graduate aptitude in their natural ability.

Family also influenced students to choose one career instead of another. Respondents asserted that no social pressure influenced their decision to enter their field of choice. The participants' survey results reflected that 99.2% of the survey participants were happy with their career choice. The percentages appear to refute some explanatory variables related to social pressures. The survey refutes what has been found regarding the explanatory variables of social pressures related to economy, state government support, job availability, and other items external to the graduates' control (Chang et al., 2004; Willis, 2004). Research suggests factors, such as home environment, social pressure, and state government, influence technical college graduates' career sections (Chang et al., 2004; Willis, 2004). The graduate survey results showed that 76.1% of the participants selected their careers because it was something that they believed they did well. The survey results also support literature relating to variables influencing technical

college graduates' career decision to aptitude as the primary influence (Bandura, 1977). Research supports these items, as Holland (1973) pointed out in the research of technical college graduates. The analysis of the surveys showed that 89% of the respondents of three graduations selected their career on their own, and 72% chose their career because it was something they do well. Only 6% selected their career because of an aptitude test given by the career guidance office at the southern technical colleges.

Conclusion

Because of the continual loss of jobs in all sectors, the significance of this study determined a need for technical college graduates and vocational counselors to collaborate better. From the findings of this study, career selection has several factors that are important in understanding career choice and direction. In addition, understanding how those factors influence decision-making is a necessary step toward self-awareness, which is an important life skill in the development and growth of any student. The issues affecting technical college graduates also affect 4-year university graduates, as well as high school students. Self-actualization contributes significantly to career decision-making and satisfaction with that choice.

After a review of literature concerning this topic, the variables regarding a student's ability to choose a career are known, but the student needs to feel empowered to commit and succeed. The research on these variables, such as family, peers, and other external influences, conducted in this study coincides with the literature on this topic and the interviews of professional career counselors supported the literature as well. A student needs to become self-aware in order to have the confidence to go forward with a career choice. Career counselors can benefit students early in their education, and quite

possibly save them time, money, and alleviate anxiety, if consulted. An academic institution's hurdle is to make these services mandatory as well as to devote larger amounts of resources for positive career choices.

After an investigation of the peer-reviewed articles and other sources concerning the issues stated in the problem, no single factor appears to influence career decisions. Much of a student's home environment plays a major role in his or her decision-making, and knowing whether these pressures are positive or negative can alleviate stress and pitfalls when going through career options. Aptitude and personality testing are only a couple of tools students and administrators use to gain insight into career choices. Development of life skills, especially building a student's self-awareness, helps to further understand the choices and eliminate any confusion to the right career path. No one-size-fits-all solution exists, nor is there a single test that can best describe a student's best-case scenario. Many aspects, such as aptitude, interests, and environmental pressures, effect and direct a student's path toward a positive career choice.

The researcher discovered during one of the interviews that a technical college previously offered a class, Careers 101. The intent of this class was to give all first time enrollees in the technical college an introduction to the various programs available, including job opportunities and the possible pay scale. The design of Careers 101 provided opportunities for first time enrollees to participate in Career Scope. Career Scope was the instrument designed to assist participants in career selections based on their aptitude and answering basic questions pertaining to their general likes, dislikes, as well as their general human nature and behavior. This was not a required class and had low enrollment. According to the career counseling administrator, discontinuation of the

class was because of limited resources and little student demand. In addition, the career-counseling administrator explained that enrollment was more of a focus than career choices because the retention of students generated revenue. The administrator expressed an understanding of the decision, but believed the class should be mandatory.

When placed in context of a campus environment, students are becoming more self-aware directly, or indirectly, within these institutions because of programs and counseling, even though they may not choose to seek out guidance. With the surveys and review of research literature, technical college graduates' career decisions appear to not be influenced by state governmental programs or incentives, nor aptitude tests, or career counselors.

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Appendix A:

2012 and 2015 Interview Responses

Interview Questions, Directors of Career Services (CSD)

January 25, 2012

1. Please tell me a little about your position at this institution.
2. What methods, tools, and instruments does this institution have in assisting students in their career selection?
3. How are or what is the most popular method of assessing students for their career selection?
4. How does this institution measure the students' success or satisfaction in their career selection process?
5. What are possible reasons students/graduates select a chosen or particular career / program?
6. How does, if at all, demographics of a student affect their career selection. By demographics I mean age and gender, as well as previous work experience.
7. How are students made aware of the career services offered by your office?
8. What is the counselor's role in assisting students in their career selection?
9. Are there ways for technical college graduates to provide feedback on their satisfaction of their career selection? If so, what are they?
10. What are three ways you would like to incorporate to improve students' participation in career services? And, do you believe students are currently taking advantage of the services provided by Career Services.
11. Finally, please name three factors that you believe has the most influence on technical college graduates career selection.

Interview Questions, Academic Support Coordinator (ASC)

January 26, 2012

1. Please tell me a little about your position at this institution.
2. What methods, tools, and instruments does this institution have in assisting students in their career selection?
3. How are or what is the most popular method of assessing students for their career selection?
4. Does this institution measure the students' success or satisfaction in their career selection process, if so how is this measurement done?
5. What are possible reasons students/graduates select a particular career / program?
6. How do, if at all, demographics of a student affect their career selection. By demographics I mean age and gender, as well as previous work experience.
7. What methods does academic support incorporate to assist in making students aware of the many services provided by your office?
8. What is the counselor's role in assisting students in their career selection?
9. Are there ways for technical college graduates to provide feedback on their satisfaction of their career selection? If so, what are they?
10. What are three ways you would like to incorporate to improve students' participation in their career selection? And, are students currently taking advantage of the services provided by Academic Support?

11. Finally, please name three factors, based on your experience in academic support, which has the most influence on technical college students/graduates career selection.

Interview Questions, Director Career Services and Counseling (DCS)

April 8, 2015

1. Please tell me a little about your positon at this institution.
2. What is the counselor's role in assisting student in their career selection?
3. What possible factors influence students to select a particular technical program?
4. In your opinion, what influence (if any) do the following factors have on student career selections?
5. Please name the three factors that you believe have the most influence on technical college graduates' career selection.
6. In what ways are career selection methods, tools, and instruments offered by this institution assist students in managing/addressing these influences?
7. How does this institution evaluate the students' success or satisfaction in their career selections?
8. Based upon your experiences, how satisfied do students appear to be with their career at graduation? And is there an instrument in place to measure such satisfaction?
9. What commonalities, if any, have you observed among students who report high career satisfactions?
10. In your opinion, how do student career choices affect post-graduation career satisfaction?

11. Based on you knowledge and experience, what factor (s) play the largest role in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation?

Interview Questions, Student Life Coordinator (SLC)

April 10, 2015

1. Please tell me a little about your position at this institution.
2. What is the role of counselor in assisting students in their career selections?
3. What possible factors influence students to select a particular technical program?
4. In your opinion, what influence (if any) do the following factors have on student career selections?
5. Please name the three factors that you believe have the most influence on technical college graduates career selection.
6. In what ways do the career selection methods, tools, and instruments offered by this institution assist students in managing/addressing these influences?
7. How does this institution evaluate the students' success or satisfaction in their career selections process?
8. Based upon your experiences, how satisfied do students appear to be with their career at graduation? In addition, is there an instrument in place to measure such satisfaction?
9. What commonalities, if any, have you observed among students who report high career satisfactions?
10. In your opinion, how do student career choices affect post –graduate career satisfaction?
11. Based on your knowledge and experience, what factor(s) play the largest role in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation?

Interview Questions, Vice President of Career Services (VPC)

May 8, 2015

1. Please tell me a little about your position at this institution.
2. What is the role of the counselors in assisting students in their career selections?
3. What possible factors influence students to select a particular technical program?
4. In your opinion, what influence (if any) do the following factors have on student career selection?
5. Please name the three factors that you believe have the most influence on technical college graduates career selection.
6. In what ways do the career selection methods, tools, and instruments offered by this institution assist students in managing/addressing these influences?
7. How does this institution evaluate the students' success or satisfaction in their career selection process?
8. Based upon your experiences, how satisfied do students appear to be with their career at graduation? In addition, is there an instrument in place to measure such satisfaction?
9. What commonalities, if any, have you observed among students who report high career satisfaction?
10. In your opinion, how do student career choices affect post-graduate career satisfaction?
11. Based on your knowledge and experience, what factor(s) play the largest role in determining student career satisfaction post-graduation?

Appendix B:

Graduate Survey Results: Graduation 1

Spring March 25, 2011

What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

As you continue to move forward in your career choices, you are asked to participate in a brief survey relating to your career selection. I assure you that your participation will remain confidential as no identification of the participants is required.

1. What is your gender?
   a. Male (19) b. Female (52) c. Transgendered (0)
2. What age group are you?
   a. 18-25 (32) b. 26-35 (17) c. 36-45 (14) d. 46 + (3)
3. Is this graduation the beginning of your first career?
   Yes (51) No (18)
4. Is this a career change?
   Yes (33) No (34)
5. Did you decide on your career or program by yourself?
   Yes (56) No (13)
6. Your selection of this career or program was determined by: (select one)
   a. Something that I do well (45)
   b. Suggested by my family or friends (15)
   c. Job availability, based on labor market information (7)
   d. An aptitude test given by career/ guidance counselor office (2)
   e. Recommendations by a Career/ Guidance Counselor (0)
7. Are you happy with your career choice?
   Yes (70) No (1)
8. How many careers changes have you had?
   a. None (35)
   b. One (26)
   c. Two (6)
   d. Three (3)
   e. Four or more (1)

Thank You!

Appendix C:

Graduate Survey Results: Graduation 2

Summer June 17, 2011

What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

As you continue to move forward in your career choices, you are asked to participate in a brief survey relating to your career selection. I assure you that your participation will remain confidential, as no identification of the participant is required.

1. What is your gender?

   b. Male (52) b. Female (136) c. Transgendered (0)

2. What age group are you?

   b. 18-25 (65) b. 26-35 (83) c. 36-45 (34) d. 46 + (24)

3. Is this graduation the beginning of your first career?

   Yes (126) No (66)

4. Is this a career change?

   Yes (103) No (86)

5. Did you decide on your career or program by yourself?

   Yes (141) No (8)

6. Your selection of this career or program was determined by: (select one)
   f. Something that I do well (151)
   g. Suggested by my family or friends (17)
   h. Job availability, based on labor market information (14)
   i. An aptitude test given by a Career/ Guidance Counselor (2)
   j. Recommendations by a Career/ Guidance Counselor (5)

7. Are you happy with your career choice?

   Yes (188) No (1)

8. How many careers changes have you had?

   f. None (77)
   g. One (55)

h. Two (45)
i. Three (9)
j. Four or more (3)

Thank You!!

Appendix D:

Southern Technical College Description of Career Counseling

Career Counseling

Career Counseling is one of the most significant procedures in the Student Success Center (SSC) in terms of the impact on student success. Time and care must be devoted to providing the student with the best assistance possible. The decision remains the student's; the information to make the decision is the counselor's responsibility.

1. Check the student or returning student's identification IF accessing academic record. Potential students need not show ID.
2. Discuss the student's academic and employment history. Whether the student possesses a high school diploma or GED is important for establishing potential programs of study. Ability to meet technical standards of programs, family responsibilities, and other factors influence career choices, so try to include those in the discussion. Allow the student to provide information. Exercise care in asking questions.
3. Discuss the student's interests and long-term plans, if any.
4. Explain the five types of programs (business, computer science and digital media, health care, professional services, and technical & industrial) taught at the technical college and the three levels of credentials (technical certificate, diploma, and associate degree) available to graduates. Encourage the student to consider nontraditional programs. Use the technical college website as a visual aid for describing programs. Demonstrate use of the website so that the student may continue exploration at home.

5. Discuss in detail particular programs in which the student expresses an interest. Print descriptions of these programs from the website if appropriate and especially if the student has limited internet access.
6. If the student wishes to meet with a program coordinator for additional information, provide contact information so that an appointment can be scheduled. If time permits, a student may be accompanied to speak with instructors during non-instructional periods.
7. If the student is unsure of his/her choice, recommend Career Scope. If the student has time to complete the test, try to accommodate him/her immediately. If the student needs to come back later, schedule an appointment in the SSC calendar.
8. Encourage student to return if he/she wishes to consider options before deciding.
9. Assist a potential student in locating application materials when he/she makes the decision to enroll. Explain in general the application and financial aid application processes.
10. Direct a current or returning student to Admissions to complete a change of program or dual major if appropriate.

Appendix E:

Institutional Review Board Exemption Report

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTIONREPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-03142-2014 INVESTIGATOR: Alvin Payton, Jr.

PROJECT TITLE: Technical College Graduate Career Decisions

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) :1. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

NONE

☐ If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth W. Olphie 12/8/14

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 12.13.12

Appendix F:

Institutional Review Board Certifications and Required Signatures

☐ **Category 5** - Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected, solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

☐ **Category 6** - Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

☐ **Category 7** - Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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26. CERTIFICATIONS AND REQUIRED SIGNATURES

(Note: Please print this page to sign. Applications without all required signatures will be returned by the IRB unreviewed.)

Statement of Responsible Researcher:

I certify that I have completed required training regarding human participant research ethics and am familiar with the ethical guidelines and regulations regarding the protection of human participants from research risks. I will adhere to the policies and procedures of the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I will ensure that all research staff working on the proposed project who will have direct and substantive involvement in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting this research (including students fulfilling these roles) will complete IRB required training. I agree to obtain and document the informed consent of participants in this project as required by the IRB. I understand that potential research participants under the age of 18 may not participate without the permission of a parent or legal guardian, and in addition to parental permission, minors must assent to participate. I will not initiate this research project until I receive written exemption or approval from the IRB. I will not involve any participant in the research until I have obtained and documented his/her informed consent as required by the IRB.

I agree to (a) report to the IRB any unanticipated problems or adverse events which become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions taken as a result; (b) cooperate with the IRB in the continuing review of this project; (c) obtain prior approval from the IRB before amending or altering the scope of the project or the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent form; and (d) maintain documentation of consent and research data and reports for a minimum of three (3) years and in accordance with approved data retention and procedures and confidentiality requirements after completion of the final report or longer if required by the sponsor or the institution. I understand that my department chair/unit director/cognizant administrator (or faculty advisor if I am a student) will receive a copy of my IRB exemption or approval report.

SIGNATURE: Alvin Payton, JD — Date: 12-4-14

Responsible Researcher

Statement of Faculty Advisor if Responsible Researcher is a Student:

I certify that I am familiar with the ethical guidelines and regulations regarding the protection of human participants from research risks and have completed training required by the VSU IRB. I agree to provide guidance and oversight as necessary to the above named student regarding the conduct of his/her research. I will ensure the student's timely requests for protocol modifications and/or continuing reviews, compliance with the ethical conduct of human participant research, and the submission of the final report. I understand that an IRB protocol cannot be closed until final report is submitted, and I agree that, if the student fails to complete a final report, I will be responsible for timely completion and submission of the report. I understand that a copy of the IRB's exemption or approval report for this protocol will be provided to my department chair/cognizant administrator.

SIGNATURE: Jana N. Peterson — Date: 12/10/14

Faculty Advisor

Please remember to attach your CITI training certificate, answers to applicable questions, copies of recruitment materials, letters of permission if you are recruiting participants through another organization, the informed consent scripts and/or documents you intend to use, and the data collection instruments you plan to use. If your research is or will be externally funded, please also include a copy of the portion of the proposal or award that describes the use of human participants.

Please do not start your research project without a formal exemption or approval notification from the IRB.

For additional information or assistance, please contact the IRB at irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.