

EARLY TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF THE OBSTACLES AND STRATEGIES
THAT EMERGED IN A RURAL NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Dissertation

by

CYNTHIA SELF SMITH

Submitted to the Graduate School

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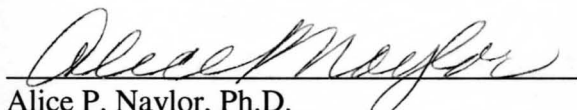
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Reich College of Education

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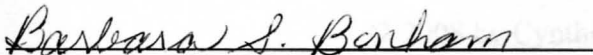
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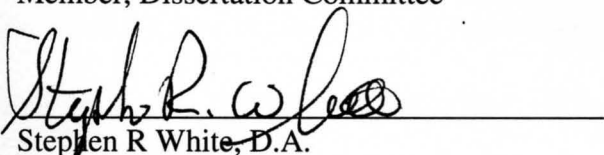
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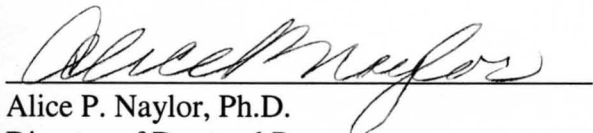
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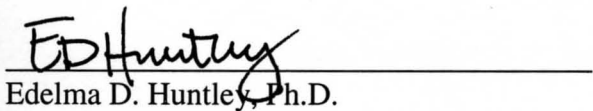
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ABSTRACT

EARLY TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF THE OBSTACLES AND STRATEGIES
THAT EMERGED IN A RURAL NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY
COLLEGE. (May 2008)

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This dissertation is an ethnographic case study. I set out to answer the question "What were the obstacles encountered and the strategies used in one North Carolina rural community college to provide dual enrollment opportunities for high school students in their local community college service area?" Research methodology included interviewing four faculty and staff members of this community college for their insight into the answer to the research question. They, along with the researcher, served as the primary contacts and personnel responsible for the dual enrollment initiative at this community college.

I used (a) data from their interviews, (b) personal archived correspondence related to the dual enrollment initiative, (c) existing documents and records of the community college, and (d) my personal experiences in researching this question. Analysis of the

data through triangulation and research coding practices revealed that the five primary obstacle areas were (a) structural obstacles that concerned policies, calendars, and any obstacles related to how a community college was organized; (b) communication obstacles that concerned publicity and marketing of the dual enrollment opportunities; (c) human resources obstacles that concerned needs and skills for college personnel; (d) cultural obstacles that concerned the established set of conventions and social practices associated with operating within the community college setting; and (e) physical obstacles in the form of geographical issues preventing students from being able to take dual enrollment courses.

Findings revealed that commitment was obvious to the dual enrollment initiative and that the established structural obstacles related to state and local policy and law served as the primary influence on the development of the dual enrollment initiative. Leadership strategies for sustainability were presented in Chapter Five.

Study recommendations include leadership strategies that incorporate (a) systems thinking to interconnect high school and community college programs, (b) further development of a vision for the program, (c) continuation of communication of the vision for dual enrollment as it is modified and changed, (d) construction of meaningful values and assumptions that are shared by all persons involved in the dual enrollment initiative, and (e) commitment to looking for new ways to provide accessibility for the learners in the dual enrollment initiative.

Additional recommendations include similar studies of community colleges in other settings and studies specific to the effects that taking dual enrollment courses have on the postsecondary educational experiences of students.