Narrating the Future: Understanding How Student Narratives Relate to Outcomes in Community College

Tanzina Ahmed

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NARRATING THE FUTURE:
UNDERSTANDING HOW STUDENT NARRATIVES RELATE TO OUTCOMES
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

TANZINA AHMED

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Narrating the Future: Understanding How Student Narratives Relate to Outcomes In Community College

by

Tanzina Ahmed

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Narrating the Future: Understanding How Student Narratives Relate to Outcomes In Community College

by

Tanzina Ahmed

Advisor: Colette Daiute

Community colleges are an increasingly important entry point into higher education for adults in the United States (21st-Century Commission, 2012). Students often hold diverse opinions on and engage in complex meaning-making around the community college institution (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016; Deil-Amen, 2016). Furthermore, students’ varied interpretations of community college might influence and predict their academic performance. To investigate that assumption, this study asked 104 students to write about community college within three genres (i.e. types) of narratives that afford different author-purpose-audience opportunities for meaning-making. In the Letters genre, students wrote a letter to a close partner about their lives in community college. In the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres, they reflected on their best and worst experiences in community college. Narratives were analyzed using plot and script analyses. After Spring 2015, students’ cumulative year-end GPAs were collected. Eventually, this study used data from plot and script analyses within quantitative techniques to connect students’ interpretations of community college to their academic performance within community college. This work bypasses the qualitative/quantitative research binary to demonstrate that
students’ ability to make sense of the complex realities of community college relates to and predicts their institutional performance over time.

The design and analyses of this study indicate three major findings. First, students used diverse genres that afforded diverse author-purpose-audience opportunities to interpret the college institution and their college lives in varied ways. Students often used the Letters genre to relate to their family and friends, connecting their goals and activities within college to the goals and activities of partners outside of college. Meanwhile, they often used the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres to either align with or criticize the college community institution. These findings accord with past research on community college students’ flexible use of narrative genres and their lack of a single “characteristic” way of interpreting their college experiences (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). Furthermore, the flexibility with which students used diverse narrative genres to address varying aspects of community college indicated the complexity of their relationship with the college institution – a complexity that has often been portrayed in overly simplistic terms in public media and previous research.

Second, academically successful students with higher year-end GPA interpreted the community college institution differently compared to less successful students with lower year-end GPA. Across the diverse narrative genres, successful students wrote in ways that suggested that they affiliated more with the goals of the college institution, found more opportunities and affordances in college, and showed a greater interest in how college partners could both help and hinder their progress. Moreover, successful students created complex narratives that reflected the problem-solving lessons of the college institution insofar as their narratives were more likely to resolve difficulties than the narratives of less successful students. (This complexity was related less to the length of narratives – since more and less successful students wrote narratives of
comparable length within most genres – and more to how students structured plot and organized scripts within narratives). Thus, students’ ability to write and reflect on the community college institution in college-appropriate ways was related to their academic performance over time.

Finally, students’ use of plot elements and scripts within the diverse narrative genres were connected to year-end academic performance. For example, when students centered their Worst Experience narratives on irresolvable college difficulties, their GPA generally lowered over the school year. However, when students used their Worst Experience narratives to focus on conflicts with college partners or resolve difficulties in ways reinforced by the community college institution, their GPA generally increased. Thus, students’ use of plot and script elements to interpret the college institution predicted their year-end academic performance. The connection between students’ interpretations of community college and year-end performance depended on the narrative genre they used, demonstrating that the range and importance of the experiences students expressed differed across genres.

In summary, students used diverse narrative genres to make meaning of their experiences within community college, and these meaning-making processes were related to and predictive of year-end academic performance. How students interpreted their college lives connected to, predicted, and perhaps explained their academic performance. Future research could build on the results of the present study by exploring how different populations of students interpret and reflect on their college experiences with a greater variety of narrative genres, as well as how these meaning-making processes relate to different measures of academic performance. Educators and administrators can utilize the findings of the present study to prepare students to navigate the difficulties of community college. Finally, this study demonstrates that writing can serve as more than a basic skill to be taught or an indication of achieved knowledge in higher
education. Writing can also serve as an integral tool to help students develop a better understanding of their lives within community college – especially if their writing occurs within diverse genres and in relation to varied audiences and purposes.
Acknowledgments

I have so many people to thank in this section that it’s a wonder I did any of the following work myself. Then again, given that this dissertation is focused on how social support affects academic performance, it’s no wonder that I have so many people to be grateful for! If it takes a village to raise a child, it apparently takes a mid-size city to help a psychologist finish her degree. You are all the best evidence for the importance of social support that I can think of.

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(Just don’t hold it over my head the next time we do laundry!)
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Community colleges are an increasingly important entry point into higher education for adults in the United States, with almost 43% of freshmen currently attending 2-year institutions (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012). As they attend community college, students often hold diverse opinions on and engage in complex meaning-making around higher education (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). Indeed, students often view community colleges as complicated institutions that can both foster and frustrate their goals and development (Carrasquillo, 2014; Daiute & Kreniske, 2016; Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2012). Yet when the focus of research shifts from students’ perspectives on college to their institutionally measured performance within college, the problems faced by community college students are highlighted. Almost 45% of students in public 2-year institutions drop out after their first school year (ACT Institutional Data File, 2013). Even students who begin community college with high expectations can be deterred from their goals. Community colleges thus exist as important yet troubled institutions that offer a perilous path to higher education.

Students’ perceptions of community college might influence and relate to their academic success within community college. Yet no current research studies investigate whether students’ diverse interpretations of community college may relate to and predict their institutionally measured academic performance. Several existing research studies have used qualitative methods to investigate how students think of and navigate the community college institution (Carrasquillo, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2012). However, these studies do not involve detailed analyses of students’ actual written expressions on college or investigate how students might interpret college with diverse expressive genres that afford differing author-purpose-
audience opportunities (Daiute, Todorova, Kovacs-Cerovic, 2015). Instead, the existing qualitative research studies have utilized semi-structured interview protocols that treat students’ interpretations of college as authentic and unchanging within the context of the interview (Carrasquillo, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2012). Furthermore, the existing studies have investigated students’ views by means of themes identified by researchers – thus forgoing the chance to investigate how students interpret college by way of how they express themselves. Finally, given their assumptions about the separation of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the existing qualitative studies have not connected students’ perceptions of college to institutional measures of success such as grade-point average (GPA). Thus, the existing qualitative research on community college has faltered in capturing the full complexity of students’ perspectives on the college institution and their lives within it.

Meanwhile, studies that focus on students’ institutional performance in community college use quantitative survey scales to measure students’ experiences (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012; Brock, 2010; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). These quantitative studies argue that the financial, institutional, and academic obstacles that community college students face lead to their poor grades and low retention rates. However, these studies have not investigated how students themselves interpret their college experiences or how their interpretations of college might relate to and predict institutional success. There is currently no research that uses both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to connect people’s subjective interpretations of community college to their institutional performance within community college. The current study rectifies this short-
coming and argues that students’ ability to interpret the complex realities of college institution relates to and predicts their academic success over time.

The current study involved three multi-faceted goals and analyses. The first goal was to understand how students in community college interpret the college institution and their college experiences with the use of diverse narrative genres. Narrating is a cultural activity that people use to make meaning of their experiences, goals, relationships, and outcomes across a wide range of cultural contexts (Daiute, 2014). Furthermore, how people make meaning of their experiences can vary greatly across multiple expressive opportunities. Diverse narrative genres (or types) may elicit different forms of meaning-making aimed toward achieving different goals with different audiences (Daiute, 2014; Daiute, Todorova, & Kovacs-Cerovic, 2015). Previous research on community college discovered that students engaged in differing and complex meaning-making processes about the community college institution with the use of diverse narrative genres (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). This study expands on these findings with a larger variety of narrative genres that afford differing author-purpose-audience opportunities to elicit students’ diverse interpretations of community college. Students’ use of narrative genres was investigated through two forms of qualitative narrative inquiry known as plot and script analyses (Daiute, 2010; 2014). These analytic strategies demonstrated how students engaged in meaning-making and relational negotiating processes within the context of community college.

The study had two other goals related to long-term academic outcomes. It investigated how students who were more and less academically successful (as determined by differences in year-end GPA) differed in their use of narrative genres to interpret and integrate into the community college institution. Finally, it probed how students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) related to and predicted related to
and predicted their academic performance (as measured by year-end GPA). To answer these questions, narrative data derived from plot and script analyses was used in several forms of quantitative research techniques, including chi-square tests of independence, Pearson’s correlations, and standard multiple regressions.

In connecting students’ complex meaning-making processes to their academic performance, the study bridged the gap between qualitative research on students’ perspectives and quantitative research on students’ academic outcomes. The study found that community college students used diverse narrative genres as cultural tools to interpret their experiences within community college in differing ways and for differing audiences and purposes. In addition, students’ meaning-making processes were related to and predictive of their year-end GPA. Ultimately, this study demonstrated the flexibility with which students used diverse narrative genres to address varying aspects of the community college institution and connected this flexibility to students’ academic performance.

**Community College: A Complicated Gateway to Higher Education**

Community colleges have long served as a gateway toward higher education for many adult students in the United States (Brock, 2010). Rates of attendance in two-year institutions have soared in recent years, with almost 43% of undergraduates in the United States beginning their education at a community college (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012). Accordingly, researchers have become more interested in understanding how students in community college experience and interpret their surrounding symbolic, physical and relational environment.

Qualitative research investigating students’ perspectives has found that students often view community college as an environment that can both foster and frustrate their goals,
development, and achievements (Carrasquillo, 2014; Daiute & Kreniske, 2016; Deil-Amen, 2016; Francois, 2012). Furthermore, the analytic methods used by qualitative researchers affect our understanding of how students interpret community college and their lives within it. For instance, Daiute and Kreniske (2016) conducted a narrative study that investigated how 381 community college students evaluated the college institution. In this study, students reflected on their college lives with the use of two narrative genres – the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. Their study allowed students to narrate from different perspectives and use the qualities of narratives – in this case, genre – to share diverse understandings of the institution. In doing so, Daiute and Kreniske (2016) discovered that students could use diverse expressive genres to align with or criticize the institution in varying ways. Furthermore, the researchers found variability across student groups, with American-born students expressing different interpretations of the institution compared to foreign-born students. Thus, the narrative design of the study demonstrated diversity in how students made meaning of community college and distanced itself from the assumption that students would have one characteristic way of interpreting higher education.

Meanwhile, most other qualitative studies on community college have used research methods that forgo investigating students’ complex perspectives on higher education in relation to diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities. As an example, Carrasquillo (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 high-achieving (GPA of 3.0 or higher) students, analyzing the resultant transcripts for themes related to how students made sense of different opportunities and obstacles in community college\(^2\). She concluded that while students often reported both financial and organization obstacles, they believed that supportive relationships

\(^2\) Later in this chapter, I will further analyze Carrasquillo’s (2014) research study. Her analysis of “sensemaking” (as she labels it) is an interesting contrast to the analysis of meaning-making within this study.
with college instructors and staff helped them overcome those obstacles. Carrasquillo’s (2014) study echoes most other qualitative studies insofar as it looked for meaning within students’ explicit statements on community college, rather than within students’ flexible use of narrative features in relation to differing audiences, genres and purposes. Thus, Carrasquillo’s (2014) work did not explore the full diversity and complexity inherent in students’ interpretations of community college. However, Carrasquillo’s (2014) study and similar research projects do demonstrate that students’ perspectives of community college matter and should be explored further.

Students’ perspectives matter because academic success remains elusive for all too many students in community college institutions. Upwards of 45% of registered students in public community colleges drop out after their first year (ACT Institutional Data File, 2013). Only around half (46%) of the students who remain in community college beyond the first year earn a degree or certificate, transfer to a 4-year institution, or even remain enrolled after six years of attendance (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012). Though rates of retention, degree completion and enrollment are only one way to measure student outcomes in the college institution, this lack of academic success needs further explanation. Many students begin their journey in community college with the stated goal of transferring to a 4-year institution and receiving their Bachelor’s degree (U. S. Department of Education, 2011). Given the low rates of retention and degree completion, it is clear that many students do not achieve their initial goals in community college. Thus, it is important to explore the diverse factors that explain academic performance in community college. It is also important to explore how students’ complex interpretations of community college may shape that performance.
Explaining Student Performance in Community College. The extant studies on retention in community college use survey measures and institutional data to gather information on factors related to student performance. They often explain the low rates of retention in community colleges by focusing on the demographic, socio-economic, and educational challenges faced by the student population (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012; Brock, 2010). Students’ academic performance may also be influenced by other factors, including psychosocial factors within a given student, environmental factors related to the college institution, and factors linked to personal relationships experienced by the student (Tinto, 1978). One study by Porchea and colleagues (2010) used survey data and institutional outcomes to track thousands of community college students over a 5-year time span and highlighted the importance of goals and relationships in determining academic outcomes. This study found that expecting a 2- or 4-year degree strongly, having parents with a Bachelor’s degree, and having a greater family income predicted community college students transferring to a 4-year institution or receiving a 2-year degree (Porchea, et al., 2010). Hence, students’ goals and relationships appeared to influence their academic performance within community college.

However, none of the existing research on community college students has connected their perspectives on community college to their academic performance within community college. While the qualitative research has focused (albeit imperfectly) on the former and the quantitative research has focused on the latter, there is a dearth of mixed-methods research that connects the former to the latter. This study strives to fill in that gap and uses cultural-historical activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Leont’ev, 1978; Daiute, 2010; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004) to explain how students’ interpretations of the community college institution may shape their
academic performance. The next section explores how cultural-historical activity theory can be applied to connect students’ perspectives to their academic success in community college.

**Community College as an Activity Meaning System**

Understanding why students succeed in community college requires recasting the college environment as an *activity meaning system* in which students develop by making meaning of their experiences. This way of understanding community college pulls from the work of a modern day cultural historical activity theorist (Daiute, 2008; 2010; 2014) who was in turn influenced by Vygotsky (1978) and Leont’ev (1978). According to Daiute (2008; 2010; 2014), human development happens because of people’s social interactions with others across different activity meaning systems. Activity meaning systems are environments in every-day life that include ever-changing relationships with important social partners (Daiute, 2012). People develop and change through interpreting their daily life experiences within their cultural contexts. Thus, to understand why students experience certain institutional outcomes, researchers must explore how students interpret their diverse experiences within the community college activity meaning system (i.e. the community college system).

**Meaning Making with Cultural Tools and Narratives.** Culture is the way in which people engage in *meaning making processes* in real life situations. Meaning making (or sense making) is a major developmental activity that allows people to understand and interpret their context, actions, and development. It develops when people use *cultural tools* (such as language and other symbol systems meant to manage experiences and relationships) to engage in activities that have important social and cultural dimensions. These cultural tools, including narratives, also help people interpret and resolve *conflicts* (relational problems) and *difficulties* (organizational or practical problems) that arise from clashes within or between various activity
meaning systems. This study examined how students interpret their experiences and resolved difficulties in the community college system with the use of diverse genres that afford diverse author-purpose-audience opportunities. Narratives are explored further in the chapter.

**Relationships and Relational Complexity.** As people experience development in their activity meaning systems through using cultural tools to engage in socially important meaning-making processes, they engage in *relational complexity* (Daiute, 2012; 2014). Relational complexity is “the ability to interact meaningfully and flexibly with diverse others, in terms of their differing understandings, influence (power), expectations, and to adjust one’s expression with them in terms of goals and needs” (Daiute, 2012, p. 6). Development happens for people through their interactions with others, in their ability to make meaning of their relational experiences, and as they build important relationships by using different cultural tools across different environments. Previous research on community college students has emphasized how relationships with college partners, such as other students, professors, and staff, shape students’ perspectives and experiences (Carrasquillo, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2016; Francois, 2012). Daiute’s (2012; 2014) theory of relational complexity gives a better explanation for why and how students’ perspectives and experiences are influenced by those supportive relationship partners. Relationships will be further explored later in this chapter.

**Goals as Organizers of Development.** In cultural-historical activity theory, goals serve as cultural tools that organize both people’s *goal-directed actions* (i.e. activities executed to reach goals) and outcomes over time (Galperin, 1992; Leontev, 1947). Once a person creates a goal that relates to meaningful activities in their cultural context, their goal gives them further motivation to engage in goal-directed actions that bring them closer to fulfilling their goals. Over time, people’s goals and goal-directed actions organize the activities they take part in, the
meanings they give to their activities, their experiences with social partners, and their eventual goal-related outcomes. Students can enter community college with various goals, with many entering with the goal of transferring to a 4-year institution and receiving their Bachelor’s degree (U. S. Department of Education, 2011). These goals serve as important influences on students’ activities and meaning-making processes, which in turn shape their eventual outcomes. Goals will be further explored later in this chapter.

The Community College Activity Meaning System. The community college institution can be re-envisioned as an activity meaning system that exposes students to experiences, relationships, and goals that change their ways of making meaning of experiences. Eventually, these meaning-making processes influence students’ institutional performance. How students interpret their lives in the community college system may relate to and predict their long-term academic success, as their interpretations of college experiences, relationships and goals should shape their activities and outcomes over time.

Moreover, students in the community college system can direct their meaning-making processes by deliberately engaging with their relationship partners and working toward different goals. Social experiences with important partners inside community college may affect students’ meaning-making processes by changing their experiences in relational complexity (Daiute, 2012). Goals may influence students’ relationships with others and their ways of interpreting the community college system. Thus, students’ social experiences and goals may work together within the community college activity meaning system to affect students’ meaning-making processes. Eventually, social experiences and goals will shape students’ institutional success.

Cultural historical activity theory helps reframe research on student success in community college. Community college can be recast as an activity meaning system, following
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the work of modern day cultural historical activity theorists (Daiute, 2008; 2014; Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). When students enter community college, they shape their eventual outcomes by engaging in meaning-making processes about their college experiences. These meaning-making processes are influenced by their use of cultural tools, such as narratives, as well as their relationships and goals. Ultimately, students’ academic success could be best understood by studying their ability to interpret their experiences, relationships, and goals within the community college system. The next section will discuss how students’ meaning-making processes are explored in relation to their use of diverse genres that afford diverse audiences, purposes and perspectives.

Narrating to Interpret Community College

Narratives are written or oral accounts of people’s every-day lives that allow them to communicate events, activities, characters, social interactions, cultural settings, and meanings to others who later read or listen to these accounts (Daiute, 2014). Narratives can exist in the form of written histories, newspaper stories, oral interviews, overheard gossip, and even technological innovations such as text messages and Facebook posts. More broadly, narratives can be seen as a form of culture in action – and as a diverse and flexible cultural tool that people use to engage in a myriad number of activities, social interactions, and forms of expression. Narratives can be used by people to communicate with and influence other people, to interpret their own development and experiences, to understand and deal with the social world they live within, and even to change the society they live in.

When people put together narratives, they take part in a complex social-cultural activity that expresses their meaning-making processes within relevant cultural contexts in the form of relevant characters (up to and including “I”) engaged in some kind of plot or meaningful activity
(Daiute, 2014). These meaning-making processes ultimately drive human development across a variety of activity meaning systems. Narratives also demonstrate how people interpret their daily life experiences, as well as how they resolve conflicts and difficulties that arise in diverse activity meaning systems.

**Narrating with Diverse Genres.** In narrating their experiences, students may demonstrate different ways of interpreting their experiences in community college, as well as different ways of affiliating with or being alienated from the college institution. These differences can be measured by comparing their ways of interpreting the community college system across diverse expressive genres of narrative. When planned for theoretically in terms of activity-meaning systems indicative of relations in a context – school, community, family, and so on – different genres are available for people to use to demonstrate variability in how they interpret and deal with various situations across the various relational contexts (Daiute, 2014).

Previous research has demonstrated that providing people with diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities allows them to interact with their circumstances in complex ways, revealing the distributed and integrated nature of meaning (Daiute, Todorova, Kovacs-Cerovic, 2015). Previous research has also shown that community college students can use two different expressive genres (the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres) to align with or criticize the college institution in varying ways (Kreniske & Daiute, 2016). Community college students may use these and other genres as cultural tools to interpret the different factors that influence their academic performance over time. Such factors can include their college goals, social experiences with college partners, and general affiliation with the college institution. Thus, diverse expressive genres allow students to share differing interpretations of the community college system with differing audiences for differing purposes. The flexibility with which
students use diverse genres to address varying aspects of community college should demonstrate
the complexity of their relationship with the college institution – a complexity that has often
been portrayed in overly simplistic terms in previous research.

**Narrating in Community College.** Community college students narrate to share their
interpretations of their lives as they maintain academic goals, engage in relationships with
college partners, and form a relationship with the college institution. Students’ flexible use of
narrative genres may relate to, predict or develop their institutional performance over time. They
may also use diverse genres to interpret and resolve conflicts and difficulties they experience in
the community college system. Thus, students can use diverse genres to express their complex
and contradictory perspectives and navigate the difficulties of community college.

Additionally, in most community college institutions, students are required to take
writing intensive courses in order to hone their reading, writing, and learning skills (Stout &
Magnatto, 1988). As a consequence of the increasing emphasis on writing to learn, students are
expected to express their understanding of complex phenomena through diverse narrative genres
(such as essays, research papers, notes, short stories, and so on). However, given the variation in
the student population’s reading and writing skills, students should differ in their ability to use
diverse genres to interact with the college institution and their lives within it. Some students will
inevitably be more adept than others at sharing their college experiences and interpreting the
complex factors that relate to academic performance across diverse genres. Similarly,
community colleges frequently hold student success courses that teach students to use problem-
solving skills to deal with conflicts and difficulties that are common to the student population
(Karp, Raufamn, Efthimiou & Ritze, 2015). Some students will inevitably be more adept than
others at learning and using those problem-solving skills. These students may demonstrate as much with their flexible use of narrative genres to interpret and resolve college difficulties.

Students’ varying interpretations of community college within diverse genres should demonstrate their differing ability to utilize the writing, interpreting and problem-solving lessons of the college institution. Some students will be more skilled than others at using narrative genres flexibly to interact and affiliate with the college institution. Likewise, some students will be more skilled than others at building complex narratives that resolve difficulties and conflicts introduced earlier in the plot. These more skilled students will write in ways that demonstrate greater affiliation with and acculturation to the implicit and explicit lessons of the college institution. I conjecture that these students will be more academically successful compared to students who are less skilled at using genres to interact with the college institution and at constructing complex narratives. Thus, how students narrate with diverse genres to interpret the community college system and their lives within it may predict their academic performance.

Narrative Inquiry. Researchers can use narrative inquiry to analyze the explicit and implicit meanings embedded in narratives. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to better understand how people develop by engaging in relevant social activities within culturally important activity meaning systems. It demonstrates that people narrate to engage in relational negotiating processes and to interpret their lives across a diverse array of developmental challenges and sociocultural contexts (Daiute, 2010; 2014; Daiute, Todorova, & Kovacs-Cerovic, 2015; Etengoff, 2013; Lucic, 2012).

In one example of narrative inquiry, Etengoff (2013) asked gay men and their religious family allies to write a letter to a religious figure on how their religious community should address the issue of sexual orientation and disclosure. Etengoff (2013) used narrative inquiry to
identify how people interpreted the conflicts and difficulties present within their letters and to characterize the negotiation efforts that people used to manage said conflicts and difficulties. Her work went beyond conducting a thematic or content analysis. Instead, she investigated how her participants used the letter genre as a cultural tool that allowed for complex and non-normative interpretations of religious conflicts and difficulties. Her work demonstrates how narrative inquiry is used to understand how people interpret their life experiences and resolve problems with the use of narrative features such as genre.

The present study will use narrative inquiry to investigate how students interpret the community college institution and the various experiences that may influence their academic performance with the use of diverse narrative genres. Eventually, the meaning-making processes that students enact within their use of diverse narrative genres should demonstrate their complex and multi-faceted interpretations of the community college system. Eventually, students’ interpretations of the community college system will be connected to their institutionally measured academic success, demonstrating how perspective is connected to performance.

**Relationships in Community College**

Students’ relationships are an important influence on their academic performance. Cultural-historical activity theory does not explicitly focus on academic achievement. However, it does suggest that people’s academic experiences and meaning-making processes should be influenced by their social interactions across multiple activity meaning systems as well as their use of language (Daiute, 2010; Engestrom, 2009). Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) theory of student retention and Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory of socio-academic integration also links students’ interactions with college partners (including other students, instructors and staff) to their academic engagement and performance in college settings. Furthermore, a growing body of
empirical work supports the idea that social experiences with college partners might influence the academic success of students attending community college (Carrasquillo, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2012). This section reviews these theoretical foundations, examines the existing research, and suggests new ways of understanding how students’ relationship experiences influence their meaning-making processes and eventual performance in community college.

**Cultural Historical Activity Theory’s View of Relationships.** Cultural history activity theory posits that development happens for people through their meaning-making processes and their culturally-mediated and relationally flexible interactions with others across various activity meaning systems (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontev, 1978; Daiute, 2010; 2012; 2014). When this theory is applied to students in community college, their development can be seen as being influenced by relationship experiences across two mutually interacting activity meaning systems: the community college and home.

First, the community college itself should influence the development of students by introducing them to new social partners, such as other students, professors, and staff. Following Daiute’s (2012) theory and research about relational complexity, these important new partners should shape the ways in which students interpret and resolve their academic experiences, conflicts, and difficulties. Community college is an important activity meaning system where students experience relational complexity with new partners in ways that influence and are influenced by their college experiences and eventual academic outcomes.

Second, cultural-historical activity theory suggests that important relationship experiences outside of the community college activity meaning system – such as family relationships within the home activity meaning system – may also influence academic goals and outcomes. Even as students begin forming relationships with new partners such as professors and
fellow students, they continue interacting with family and friends at home and similar systems. Indeed, some student may choose to attend community college due to the influence of or pressure from families and friends (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Sanchez, Esparza, Colon, & Davis, 2010). The community college system may influence the meaning-making processes that people engage in within their home activity meaning systems, and vice versa.

Cultural-historical activity theory predicts that people’s development in community college is related to their engagement in relational complexity and their interactions with partners across the community college and home activity meaning systems. In turn, this may influence the meaning-making processes that people take part in, as well as their outcomes. Unfortunately, there is no published empirical research that test these hypotheses and assumptions. Other theories that focus on the impact of community college students’ social relationships are examined below.

**Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure.** Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) theory of student departure focuses on understanding how a variety of intra-personal and inter-personal variables influence academic persistence in college students. This model assumes that students’ academic success is influenced by the subjective sense of belonging to college that comes from experiencing positive on-campus relationships. Positive relationships with other students, faculty, and staff create a sense of “academic integration” and “social integration.” Academic and social integration helps students commit to achieving their goals in their college system by demonstrating a normative fit between themselves and the values, rules, and expectations of college. However, a lack of academic and social integration leads to students isolating themselves from others and eventually withdrawing from college. Competing social and familial
commitments outside of college that interfere with college-related activities are assumed to derail academic and social integration. Outside commitments may lead eventually to college failure.

While Tinto developed his theory based on work conducted in 4-year institutions, his assumptions can be applied to adults in community college. For community college students, academic success may be influenced by social relationships across both the college and home activity meaning systems. Relationships across both systems may hinder and help with academic and social integration and shape academic performance. However, Tinto's model may not fit students in community colleges because it assumes that students must part from their home community to go to college (Tinto, 1993). Community college students – especially those who identify as minorities – may not want to part from their communities of origin, so this theory may have to be modified to apply to them (e.g., Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1999).

Furthermore, commuting, minority, and first-generation students at community college may face a vexing conundrum. These students may have less time and energy to invest in integrating into the community college system due to responsibilities at home (Torres, 2006). Yet they may need extensive help from other students, faculty and staff to navigate the unfamiliar college system and achieve academic success (Francois, 2012). How can community college students form supportive relationships within the college system that allow them to integrate into the college system within a limited time frame? Deil-Amen (2011) has a theory that expands on these ideas and explains student success as being influenced strongly by on-campus relationship partners.

**Deil-Amen’s Theory of Socio-Academic Integration.** Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory of socio-academic integration reconstructs Tinto's theory to reflect on the experiences of community college students. Deil-Amen posits that Tinto misunderstands community college
students by assuming that they must pull away from their intimate partners (such as family and friends) at home to invest in partners (such as other students, professors, and staff) at community college. Instead, Deil-Amen (2011) theorizes that community college students may experience moments of combined "socio-academic" (i.e. both social and academic) integration with college partners in ways that supplement, rather than replace, their relationships with family and friends. During those short but powerful socio-integrative moments, students experience both social and academic integration with college partners. They can experience both friendly interaction with and academic support from partners that should help them navigate the college institution, resolve conflicts and difficulties, and achieve academic success (Deil-Amen, 2011). Students’ socio-integrative moments with college partners might also shape their interpretations of the community college system, which in turn might shape their long-term academic outcomes. Thus, Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory offers another explanation for why relationships with college partners might shape students’ institutionally measured academic performance over time.

Deil-Amen (2011) conducted a qualitative study to validate her theory that involved intensive interviews with 125 students attending private and public community colleges. Interview transcripts were analyzed by a team of three researchers to identify themes based on students expressing a sense of or lack of commitment, belonging and integration in community college. Many of the interviewed students were minority and/or first generation college students. According to Deil-Amen (2011), these students generally reported that their friends and family at home could only offer moral and emotional, rather than institutional or informational, support while they attended community college. Such students reported relying on many different “institutional agents,” ranging from instructors, advisors, other staff, to other students, for help in navigating the college institution.
According to Deil-Amen’s (2011) content analysis, students perceived on-campus interactions with faculty as important in their building an academic identity, developing goals, and maintaining sense of competence and belongingness inside and outside of the classroom. Students stated that experiences with pro-active and helpful staff taught them how to navigate through bureaucratic problems (such as financial aid issues) that could cause them to drop-out. Experiences with other students were important as well, as those experiences often mingled social benefits with instrumental benefits, such as learning more of how to study for difficult courses. Thus, validation and instrumental support from a variety of on-campus institutional agents apparently helped students navigate the college institution and feel supported on campus. Support from college partners helped them feel more integrated into the college institution, which Deil-Amen (2011) speculated might help them achieve greater academic success.

However, though the results of her study are intriguing, Deil-Amen’s (2011) work has two major drawbacks. First, the study’s research design focused on eliciting and analyzing students’ descriptions of social and academic integration within a single semi-structured interview. While the study’s design allowed for an in-depth examination of students’ experiences, the design also assumed that students would report on views and beliefs that would not alter based on the expressive genres afforded to students. The research design thus forfeited the chance to examine how students’ expressions of social and academic integration might shift in relation to diverse genres affording diverse author-purpose-audience opportunities. In doing so, the study failed to capture the full complexity of students’ relationship with the college institution and assumed students had a “characteristic” way of interpreting their college lives.

Second, Deil-Amen’s (2011) study did not delve into how socio-academic moments experienced with college partners might relate to students’ academic performance. Were
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academically successful students (as defined by institutional markers of success such as GPA) more likely to experience socio-integrative moments than less academically successful students? Were students’ perceptions of greater social and academic integration predictive of later academic success? Unfortunately, these questions regarding long-term academic outcomes were left unanswered. Deil-Amen’s (2011) conjectures on the possible link between socio-academic integration and academic outcomes remain speculative.

**Empirical Research on Campus Relationships.** A few other empirical studies support Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory of how college relationships with other students, faculty, and staff can impact students’ experiences in community college. Francois (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with eight first-generation students to understand how students described the experience of community college and navigated their institutions. She conducted a content analysis that discovered several recurring themes across participants, such as inconsistent family support, balancing responsibilities, and concerns/fears. This thematic content discovered that while students reported that support from family and friends motivated them to go into college, instrumental and academic support from college partners often “filled in the gaps” left by a lack of institutional knowledge. While parents and non-college friends gave students important social and emotional support, they could not give students the instrumental and intellectual support that was important to retention over time. Students without supportive or knowledgeable family needed to rely more on partners within college, such as from guidance counselors, professors, advisors, and so on. Unfortunately, this sometimes lead to conflict between the college and the home activity meaning systems, especially if college was felt to disrupt the home environment.

However, as in Deil-Amen’s (2011) study, Francois (2012) did not investigate how students’ interpretations of their community college experiences might diversify in relation to
differing genres, audiences, and purposes and audiences. Moreover, Francois’ (2012) work did not examine how students’ perceptions of their experiences related to institutional measures of success. Left unanswered were the questions of whether more academically successful students might perceive greater support than less successful students or whether greater support predicted better academic performance. Future research could extend Francois’ (2012) study by examining how students’ perceptions of support vary in response to diverse genres with different audience-purpose relations, as well as how students’ perceptions of support relate to and predict academic performance.

Similarly, Carrasquillo (2014) conducted in-depth interviews a sample of 25 high-achieving, economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse, and age diverse (67% over 25 years of age) community college students. (High achievement was measured as the student having a GPA of at least 3.0, having completed at least 12 units, and attended the community college for at least part-time for at least two consecutive semesters). In this study, Carrasquillo thematically analyzed interview transcripts to understand how students made sense of their college lives using categories such as “identity as achiever,” “critical intervention by institutional agent,” and “tactics used to deal with discrimination.” Using this process, she discovered four overarching themes that she believed categorized the common and lived experiences of high-achieving students. These themes included The Immigrant Story (which was present in interviews that centered on how students’ immigration journey and status related to their college experiences), The Second Chance (which was present in interviews that centered on students’ previously interrupted academic trajectory and return to college), Leaving a Legacy (which was present in interviews of older students who believed that this was their last chance to pursue a college
education), and Yes, I Can (which was present in interviews of younger students who felt confident about achieving in community college).

Regardless of what overarching themes organized students’ interviews on their college lives, Carrasquillo (2014) reported that students often emphasized the importance of nurturing relationships with college faculty and staff. These high-achieving students reported that faculty involvement was critical, as caring and engaged professors could serve as mentors who helped them succeed or as institutional agents who introduced them to new opportunities. Similarly, students reported that staff members – especially counselors – were important sources of help when it came to dealing with institutional problems that could derail student success. Meanwhile, students believed that disengaged or actively harmful professors and staff members could disrupt their ability to learn and navigate the college institution. Thus, this study reported that high-achieving community college students believed that supportive relationships with instructors and staff were important to their academic performance and retention.

Carrasquillo’s (2014) study was unique insofar as it connected students’ academic success (as measured through institutional markers such as GPA and retention rates) with students’ perspectives on the factors that shape their academic success in community college. However, though Carrasquillo (2014) was explicitly interested in the process of sense-making, her research design focused more on the themes and content that appeared within interview transcripts than on how students might organize their understanding of community college outside of the semi-structured interview protocol. Thus, like the other studies utilizing interviews reviewed in this chapter, this study did not investigate how students might interpret their college lives within diverse expressive genres that afforded different audiences, experiences and purposes. This study – like many of the other qualitative studies on community college reviewed
in this chapter – missed the chance to investigate meaning-making as demonstrated within students’ expression of information and use of narrative features such as genre.

Moreover, as Carrasquillo’s (2014) study only focused on the experiences of high-achieving students, it could not draw a contrast between their perceptions and the perceptions of lower-achieving students. While the study was interested in how academically successful students made sense of academic success, it did not discover how more and less successful students’ perspectives of success might relate to their divergent academic performances. Future studies may wish to explore how both more and less academically successful students interpret the factors that influence academic performance.

In summary, Deil-Amen’s (2011) Theory of Socio-Academic Integration posits that community college students may be influenced by their experiences of socio-academic integration in the college environment. Students’ sense of socio-academic integration may in turn be influenced by the relationships that students form with other students, faculty and staff in ways that supplement their relationships with family and friends outside college. Qualitative research studies conducted by Francois (2012) and Carrasquillo (2014) add to Deil-Amen’s (2011) work by suggesting other ways in which students’ perceptions of and experiences with important relationship partners might influence them as they attend community college. However, the existing qualitative research on students’ relationships in community college does not investigate the full complexity of students’ meaning-making processes. The existing research ignores how students might express diverse interpretations of the college institution and the partners embedded within it in relation to diverse expressive genres, audiences, purposes, and expectations. Furthermore, the existing work does not connect students’ interpretations of
community college and its related partners to students’ academic performance. As explained further in the chapter, the current study will rectify these short-comings.

**Goals in Community College**

Goals can be conceptualized as the achievements that people try to reach, and the focus of goal-related research is often on the connection between a person’s unique goal and the characteristics of the person that does or does not allow them to reach their goal (Lawrence & Dodds, 2003). This focus is relevant for research on community colleges because students often begin with concrete academic goals. The U. S. Department of Education (2011) reported that in a nation-wide cohort of freshmen students who enrolled in community colleges from 2003-2004, 81% reported a goal of achieving at least a Bachelor’s degree. However, out of that cohort of freshman students, only 14% received an Associate’s degree and 12% received a Bachelor’s degree after 5 years. Having academic goals does not guarantee achieving comparable outcomes.

**Goals’ Influence on Meaning-Making and Academic Success.** Given the distance between students’ goals and outcomes in community college, it is worthwhile to ask how students’ goals influence their academic success. It is also important to better understand why students’ goals do not always translate into commensurate institutional outcomes, given how often students struggle to remain enrolled or maintain a high-enough GPA to receive a certificate or a degree or to transfer to a 4-year institution. In addition, how do students’ goals influence the meaning-making processes that they engage in as they take part in the community college system? Both cultural-historical activity theory (Leontev, 1974; Galperin, 1992) and Lawrence and Dodd’s (2003) theory of goal directed development prove useful to answering these questions. A few empirical research studies also suggest the influence that academic goals may have on students’ meaning-making processes and academic outcomes.
Goals in Cultural Historical Activity Theory. Cultural historical activity theorists such as Leontev (1974) and Galperin (1992) viewed goals as a powerful way of organizing both people’s goal-directed actions (i.e. activities executed to reach goals) and their development. Once a person creates a goal that relates to meaningful activities in their cultural context, their goal gives them further motivation to engage in goal-directed actions that bring them closer to achieving their goal. Over time, people’s goals and goal-directed actions help to organize the activities that they take part in within their relevant environments, the meanings they give to their activities, the consequences of their activities, goal-related experiences with social partners, and their goal-related outcomes. Cultural-historical activity theorists understood people’s goals as important influences on the activities and meaning-making processes that make up their development.

Cultural-historical activity theory explains how the goals of community college students influence how they make meaning of their ongoing academic and social experiences and their ultimate outcomes. Many students begin their journey in community college with the goal of transferring to a 4-year institution and receiving their Bachelor’s degree (U. S. Department of Education, 2011). This and similar academic goals should motivate goal-directed actions (such as attending college full time or going to tutoring) that influence students’ meaning-making processes (such as how they interpret their pursuit of goals), relationship behaviors (such as the experiences they have with other students, professors, and staff) and academic performance (as measured by institutional markers of success such as GPA) over time. Thus, goals could shape students’ development by influencing their way of interpreting and directing their development toward desired ends, including successful academic performance.
The Bi-Directional Goal-Outcome Process. Lawrence and Dodd (2003) theorized that the goal-outcome process is bi-directional and that goals may be modified over time because of ongoing feedback from relevant environments. Goals do not develop and are not pursued by people within a vacuum. Rather, concrete goals are linked to the presence of a goal director (the person who generates motivation for and drives the goal forward) and result in goal-directed actions. In the mean-time, as an individual engages in goal-directed actions, their social interactions and resultant outcomes shape and are shaped by these internal and external goal-directed actions.

Ongoing relational experiences and environment feedback can both modify goal beliefs/actions and be incorporated into the existing goal structure. The relationship experiences that students have with various college partners and their ways of interpreting their college experiences should influence and revise their college goals over time. In turn, college goals may serve as powerful motivators that shape students’ ongoing college experiences, as well as their interpretations of said experiences. In summary, students’ relationship experiences and meaning-making processes may modify goals just as goals may modify relationship experiences and meaning-making processes.

Empirical Research on Goals. Though empirical research on students’ goals and resultant outcomes in community college is sparse, what exists suggests a link. In Porchea and colleagues’ (2010) 5-year longitudinal study using survey measures and institutional outcomes, degree expectations predicted the likelihood of community college students getting an Associate’s Degree or transferring to a senior institution, rather than dropping out. Similarly, another quantitative study utilizing survey measures and institutional data found that rates of degree attainment over a 6 year period were higher among a nation-wide cohort of community
college students with the goal of achieving a degree than those without (Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010).

However, more research needs to explore how community college students’ goals influence their success in college. Furthermore, given the quantitative, survey-based approaches of past studies on goals, more qualitative work needs to be conducted on how students interpret their college goals and create different navigational strategies to achieve their goals. Once more is known on how students make meaning of their goals in the community college system, their meaning-making processes should be connected to their institutional outcomes over time. That will help explain how students’ interpretations of college goals relate to and predict their academic success.

**Summary and Research Questions**

Community colleges are important but complicated gateways to higher education for many low-income or poorly skilled students who cannot enter into 4-year colleges (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012). As students attend community college, they often hold diverse opinions on the community college institution (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). Students often perceive community colleges as institutions that can both foster and frustrate their skills and development (Carrasquillo, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2016; Francois, 2012). Yet when the focus of research shifts from students’ perspectives on college to their institutionally measured performance within college, their lack of success in achieving their academic goals is highlighted (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012; ACT Institutional Data File, 2013).

Students’ perspectives on community college might relate to and predict their academic performance within community college. Yet no current research study uses both qualitative and
quantitative research techniques to connect students’ interpretations of community college to their institutional performance within college. The current study rectifies this short-coming and argues that students’ ability to interpret the complex realities of community college relates to and predicts their academic success over time. To do so, this study recasts the community college environment as an activity meaning system in which students make meaning of their new experiences within the college environment, including experiences related to their goals and relationships (Daiute, 2012; 2014). In turn, these meaning-making processes regarding experiences within the college system may relate to and predict students’ eventual academic performance.

Narrating is an important cultural tool that can be used to understand how students interpret their experiences, goals, and relationships within the community college system (Daiute, 2010; 2014). Additionally, students’ skill at narrating may demonstrate their ability to learn and use the writing, interpreting, and problem-solving skills emphasized by the college institution (Karp, Raufamn, Efthimiou & Ritze, 2015). How students narrate their experiences in and with the community college system might relate to or predict their academic performance, and shed light on how students’ interpretations of college affects their academic success. Additionally, to better understand students’ interpretations of community college, research should investigate how students react to the differing author-purpose-audience opportunities afforded by diverse genres (Daiute, Todorova, & Kovacs-Cerovic, 2015). Students may use diverse narrative genres as cultural tools to express complex and even contradictory interpretations of the community college institution and the various factors that can influence their academic performance within it (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016).
Finally, students’ academic performance may be affected by their goals and college partners within the community college system. Their relationships with other students, instructors, and staff could shape their interpretations of community college (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, students’ academic, social, and financial goals may serve as powerful motivators that shape their perceptions of the community college system (Lawrence & Dodds, 2003). It is possible that students’ perceptions of relationship experiences and goals may influence their academic performance. Thus, understanding how students interpret and communicate social experiences and goals in college may help explain their academic performance.

This research study will use narrative inquiry techniques to explore how community college students interpret their college experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres. It will use the quantitative technique of chi-square tests of independence to investigate whether more and less academically successful students use narrative genres differently to interpret their college experiences. Moreover, it will use the quantitative techniques of Pearson’s correlations and standard multiple regressions to investigate how students’ meaning-making with diverse narrative genres relates to and predicts academic outcomes over time. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do students in community college interpret their experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres?
2. How do students who are more and less academically successful use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences in and integrate into the community college system?
3. How do students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) relate to and predict their academic success over time?
I hypothesize that students will express different interpretations of their college experiences, especially their goal and relationship-related experiences, across diverse narrative genres. Students will use diverse genres as cultural tools to share varied experiences with different audiences for different purposes, demonstrating the complexity of the community college institution and their lives within it. Similarly, more academically successful students will narrate in ways that differ from less academically successful students, using genres to demonstrate a greater understanding of the writing and problem-solving lessons of the community college institution. Finally, how students interpret their experiences within community college will relate to and predict their academic performance (as measured by year-end GPA). In short, this work bypasses the qualitative/quantitative research binary to demonstrate that students’ ability to interpret the complex realities of the college institution with diverse narratives genres relates to and predicts their academic success over time. The flexibility with which students use diverse narrative genres to address different aspects of community college will demonstrate the complexity of their relationship with the college institution – a complexity that has often been portrayed in overly simplistic terms in public media and previous research.
Chapter 2: Method for Connecting the Process of Meaning-Making to Academic Performance

This chapter reviews the basic approach of the research study, which focused on how students interpret their experiences, especially their relationship and goal-related experiences, within community college. I asked students to use three different genres to narrate on their college lives in relation to diverse audiences, purposes and perspectives. I then applied two forms of narrative inquiry – plot and script analyses – to understand how students used diverse genres to interpret community college. This chapter reviews my use of plot and script analyses to understand students’ meaning-making processes. It also reviews the importance of diverse narrative genres that afford different author-purpose-audience opportunities to authors.

Additionally, this study investigated how more and less successful students used narrative genres in diverse ways to come to disparate interpretations of their college experiences. It also delved into how students’ meaning-making processes related to and predicted their year-end academic performance, as measured through year-end GPA. To achieve those objectives, I used narrative data derived from plot and script analyses in a series of quantitative analyses (chi-squares tests of independence, Pearson’s correlations, and standard multiple regressions) that connected students’ meaning-making processes to their academic performance. In doing so, my work connected students’ interpretation of their college experiences to their institutional performance in the community college system. This chapter accordingly reviews the mixed methods technique of incorporating narrative data in quantitative analyses and the construction of meaning-making variables for use in statistical techniques. This chapter concludes with information on study participants.

Overview of the Research Approach
Given research questions that tie students’ meaning-making processes (as enacted with diverse narrative genres) to their academic performance, this study relies on a mixed methods approach that connects students’ narrative data to their year-end GPA. This project has a longitudinal design which collects information about and from participants (specifically, adult students attending community college) at two time periods. Time 1 took place during the Fall 2014 school semester and Time 2 took place after the end of the Spring 2015 semester. The study covered the 2014 to 2015 school year.

**Time 1 of Study.** During Time 1, students wrote three narratives and fill out two quantitative survey measures. Specifically, they wrote narratives across three expressive genres (i.e. types) to elicit several different forms of meaning-making about their experiences in community college and way of relating to the college institution. Students also completed a demographics measure which elicited information on their age, household income, employment status and so on. Additionally, they completed a modified version of the Community College Student Report (CCSSE, 2005) to allow researchers another way of measuring their current goals in college, level of support experienced with important partners inside and outside of college, and current academic status (i.e. GPA and credits earned by Fall 2014). This information served as control variables in later standard multiple regression models.

**Time 2 of Study.** During Time 2, I collected institutional data on students’ academic performance over the school-year. Specifically, I collected students’ cumulative year-end GPA\(^3\),

\(^3\) GPA is an important indicator of academic performance in many institutions of higher education, including community college. Furthermore, the community college students of this study (and in general) needed to maintain an adequate GPA for two major reasons. First, the community college institution they were enrolled in would place them on academic probation, then suspension, and then expulsion if they went below a certain minimum GPA. Students with fewer than 12 credits needed a minimum GPA of 1.5, while students with fewer than 25 credits need a minimum GPA of 1.75 and students with more than 25 credits need a minimum GPA of 2.00. Second, most students at this community college received some form of federal financial aid (such as Pell Grants) or state financial aid (such as the New York State Tuition Assistance Program or TAP). Students must maintain a minimum GPA each semester to continue receiving such forms of financial aid. Thus, beyond being a standard institutional marker of
which has often been used as an indicator of students’ academic performance and/or success in quantitative research studies on community college (Arria, Caldeira, Vincent, O’Grady, Cimini, Geisner, & Larimer, 2017; Blustein, 1986; McClenny & Marti, 2006; Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016). This data was used as the outcome variable in regressions that used information on students’ meaning-making processes to predict students’ eventual academic success.

**GPA over Time.** Worth noting is the positive relationship ($r(102) = .719$, $p < .001$) between students’ self-reported GPA in Fall 2014 and students’ year-end GPA. For most students, GPA remained relatively consistent between Time 1 and Time 2 of the study.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a research method used to understand how people engage in meaning-making and relational negotiating processes across a diverse array of developmental challenges and sociocultural contexts (Daiute, 2010; 2014). Previous work on both fictional and autobiographical narrative genres demonstrates that narratives allow people to ruminate on their lives and interpret what has happened and could happen to them (Daiute & Lucic, 2010; Etengoff, 2013; Lucic, 2012). In addition to being a research method, narrative genres serve as cultural tools that people develop and use to understand what is going on around them, how they fit, and sometimes what they would like to change (Daiute & Nelson, 1997; Daiute, 2014). In this study, I used narrative inquiry to understand how students interpreted and navigated the community college system, even as they formed goals, experienced conflicts and difficulties, and cultivated relationships. In this study, students used three different narrative genres to interpret their college life in diverse ways.

**Narrative Genres**

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academic performance, GPA is an important measure of students’ ability to continue attending and receiving financial aid within community college.
In this study, students wrote narratives across three different expressive genres. Different genres (or types) of narrative can elicit diverse forms of implicit and explicit information and meaning-making from participants (Daiute, 2014; Jovic, 2014; 2015). Specifically, different genres of narrative can elicit diverse forms of meaning-making based on the goal given by the narrative prompt (to recount a story from the author’s own life or to teach a lesson to a reader?), by the audience the narrative is addressed to (researchers or an important relationship partner?), by the context in which the narrative may take place (the author’s home or school environment?), by the characters who appear and act throughout the narrative (including the author as a narrator or “I” figure), and by the plot that the characters are embedded within (what issue rests at the story’s high point or emotional climax? Is the story rich or deficient in resolution strategies that solve problems?). In this study, students were expected to use the different narrative genres to come to diverse interpretations of their college experiences (Daiute, 2014).

Different genres can also elicit diverse landscapes of action (i.e. plots and events that take place in the narrative) that illustrate diverse landscapes of consciousness (i.e. reasons why these events matter, why they were recounted, and what they mean to the author) (Bruner, 1986). Past work with community college students demonstrates that use of multiple narrative genres allows for variability in landscapes of action and consciousness within as well as across different groups (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). Additionally, students in community college can use different genres as cultural tools to align with or criticize the institution of community college in varying ways, demonstrating that there was no single “characteristic” way for students to interpret their college experiences (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). This study used three different genres to elicit students’ complex and diverse interpretations of the community college institution, as well as the goals and relationships embedded within it.
The participants in this study crafted three separate narratives from different genres. The genres were counter-balanced during Time 1 of the study. These narrative genres asked participants to address varying audiences with different intentions regarding different forms of information. Across the three genres, participants were expected to express different implicit meanings and landscapes of consciousness regarding their understanding of the community college system. The three genres are discussed in detail below.

**Letters Genre.** In the Letters genre, students were prompted to write narratives using the following guide: “Please write a short letter to an important person in your life. This person can be your parent, your romantic partner, your sibling, your child, your friend, your professor, or your boss – anyone who is important to you. What would you like to tell them about your experiences in community college?”

This narrative activity asked students to write a letter to a significant relationship partner about their experiences in community college. Using this genre, students had the chance to address their college experiences, narrate with the “I”/narrator stance about their emotions and perceptions, and write about relationship issues as they related to a well-known audience. While using this genre, students might demonstrate a more personal understanding of how they experienced their journey to and through the community college system.

By understanding how students narrated letters to a close relationship partner, I would better understand how students made sense of their lived-in experiences within an inherently relational format. Since students almost always addressed their narratives in the Letters genre to close friends and family, they narrated toward an audience of specific partners rather than at a more anonymous audience of readers and researchers. Thus, students might use the Letters genre to interpret more intimate experiences that extend beyond the community college system. They
might also position themselves as mentors and guides to their relationship partners, which might bring further insights on how they navigated difficulties and conflicts in the community college system.

**Best Experience Genre.** In the Best Experience genre, students were prompted to write narratives using the following guide: “Write a story about your best experience in college so far. What happened? Who was involved? How did it all turn out?”

This genre asked students to write about their best experiences within the community college system. Past research discovered that community college students often used the Best Experience genre to align with the goals, ideals, and relationships available within the college institution (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). In this study, students were also expected to use this genre to highlight the affordances and opportunities they might find within the college institution, as well as the ways in which the institution might help them further their goals and build supportive relationships. However, some students might “defy” the genre and focus on the problems and difficulties they endured in community college.

**Worst Experience Genre.** In the Worst Experience genre, students were prompted to write narratives using the following guide: “Write a story about your worst experience in college so far. What happened? Who was involved? How did it all turn out?”

This genre asked students to write about their worst experiences within the community college system. Past research discovered that community college students often used the Worst Experience genre to criticize the community college institution (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016). In this study, students were expected to use the Worst Experience genre to highlight the conflicts and difficulties they experienced in the community college system, as well as the ways in which the institution disappointed them or frustrated their goals. This genre would also allow students
to narrate about being thwarted in their goals by difficulties and conflicts in community college. However, some students might “defy” the genre and focus more on the opportunities they discovered within community college.

In this study, students used the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres as cultural tools to interpret their experiences, goals, and relationships within the community college system in diverse ways. To understand how students interpreted community college with different genres, this study used the narrative inquiry strategies of both plot and script analyses. Plot analysis allows researchers to investigate the underlying plot structure of narratives to better understand what issues narratives revolve around, as well as what strategies authors use to solve conflicts and difficulties within the narrative (Daiute, 2014). Script analysis allows researchers to take a more holistic look at what goal or intention students had for writing narratives, as well as what sort of information the narrative provides for its audience (Daiute, 2014). Both will be explained in further detail below.

Plot Analysis

Plot analysis is a form of narrative inquiry that seeks to identify the basic plot elements that create the underlying story “structure” of the narrative (Daiute, 2014). During plot analysis, the plot elements analyzed in the narratives studied include the initiating action (i.e. the action that begins the narrative), complicating action(s) (i.e. actions that build from the imitating action and lead to the high point), high point (i.e. the climax, greatest conflict, or turning point of the story), resolution strategy(ies) (i.e. strategies used by the narrator and/or other characters to deal with conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose ends in the narrative), resolution/ending (i.e. the final resolution and/or ending where the conflict is finished in some way), and coda (i.e. the reflection, take-away message, and/or moral). The use of plot elements by students demonstrates
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how they structure their narration of experiences in the community college system. Plot analysis also reveals how students situate and interpret their relationships, goals, conflicts, difficulties, and ways of resolving conflicts and difficulties within their narrative. Plot analysis offers an important window into more than just what students narrate about or around. It offers an understanding of how students use narratives as cultural tools to highlight meaningful experiences and relationships they’ve encountered within the community college system. It also demonstrates how skilled students are at narrating complex plots that introduce and resolve difficulties and conflicts in ways taught by community college institutions.

**Using Plot to Organize Narratives.** Plot elements can appear in many different forms, combinations, and sequences within any given narrative (Daiute, 2014). Authors may use plot elements to organize their narratives in different ways based on the norms of their culture and community, as well as their own sociopolitical leanings or personal inclinations (Bakhtin, 1986). For instance, one author may write many complicating actions but no resolution strategies within his narrative, demonstrating a preoccupation with the unsolvable conflicts and difficulties that beset his characters. Another author may choose to focus more on resolution strategies in her narrative, showing a greater emphasis on resolving difficulties and tying up loose ends in the plot. This difference in people’s use of plot elements within narratives may signal a difference in how the two authors consider the importance and feasibility of resolving conflicts and difficulties. These differences may also demonstrate differences in their skill at narrating in ways that follow local cultural norms and practices.

In this study, understanding how students used plot elements to structure their narratives helped me understand how students interpreted their college experiences, including their conflicts and difficulties. It also illuminated students’ skill at constructing complex narratives
that follow the norms of higher education. For instance, students who crafted narratives with more resolution strategies demonstrated their use of narratives to interpret and resolve college conflicts and difficulties. Institutions of higher education use novels, essays, and writing intensive courses to teach their students to narrate stories that resolve difficulties introduced earlier in the plot (Stout & Magnatto, 1988). Community college institutions often go a step further and mandate student participation in programs that teach students problem-solving skills that may be reflected in students’ use of resolution strategies (Karp, Raufamn, Efthimiou & Ritze, 2015). Thus, students who narrate with plot-relevant resolution strategies demonstrate their understanding of how narrating can serve as a functional skill for navigating the difficulties of community college. They also demonstrate greater acculturation to the norms and problem-solving expectations of the community college institution.

Analyzing Plot Elements. Once plot elements are located within a narrative, they may be analyzed further to understand what themes, experiences, relationships and goals are important to the narrative’s author. Eventually, these important themes, experiences, relationships and goals embedded within the plot may be compared across narratives to reveal important within- and across-person differences.

This narrative inquiry technique is present in Daiute’s (2010) study on the development of youth growing up in the aftermath of war within the former Yugoslavia. Daiute’s (2010) use of plot analysis demonstrated that young people growing up in diverse communities (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and the United States) demonstrated differences in their use of resolution strategies in narratives that looked at adult-conflict issues. Young people growing up in Serbia cited psychological resolution strategies 63.2% of the time in their narratives, while young people growing up in the United States cited psychological resolution strategies 15.8% of
the time. This difference suggests that young people in Serbia differed greatly in their conflict-solving tactics as compared to young people in the United States, which in turn might stem from differences in the youth-environment interactions experienced in diverse communities. Similar analysis will be conducted in this current study to understand how students’ use of plot elements demonstrates differences in their interpretations of the community college system. For instance, a study of the resolution strategies used by more and less academically successful community college students may reveal great differences in how diverse student groups resolve conflicts and difficulties by seeking support from others.

**Issues at High Points.** This study focuses on identifying the issues at the high point of students’ narratives. A narrative’s high point serves as the plot’s most important conflict, turning point, or emotional climax. The issue at a narrative’s high point usually serves as the point in which the participant experiences their greatest difficulty/triumph or comes to an important conclusion/understanding of their experiences. The issue at the high point also represents the central issue that the entire narrative revolves around. Students’ conflicts, difficulties, relational experiences, moments of triumph and growth, emotional responses, and goals can all serve as the issue at a narrative’s high point, depending on how students structure their plot.

**Resolution Strategies.** This study also focuses on students’ use of resolution strategies to solve conflicts and difficulties. Resolution strategies represent the author’s attempts to solve the main plot issue or to resolve any other kind of conflict or difficulty brought up within the plot. In this study, resolution strategies represent students’ attempt to navigate obstacles situated in the community college system. Furthermore, when students use resolution strategies to tie up the loose ends of their story, they demonstrate that they can narrate in ways that are taught and
encouraged by the community college institution. When students use more resolution strategies in their narratives, they demonstrate greater skill at narrating in college-appropriate ways.

In summary, plot analysis is an appropriate strategy for this study for several reasons. First, understanding how students use plot elements in their narratives gives a better understanding of how they interpret their experiences, goals, and relationships within the community college system. Second, analyzing students’ resolution strategies illuminates how students navigate and overcome the difficulties and conflicts they experience in community college. It also reveals how skilled students are at the task of narrating in college-appropriate ways. Third, plot analysis can be used to understand how students narrate their interpretations of community college differently across the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres. Finally, plot analysis can be used to better understand differences in how more and less academically successful students interpret their experiences in college. The last two objectives will required mixed methods strategies, which will explored later in the chapter.

**Methodology of Plot Analysis.** The process of plot analysis involves identifying the major plot elements as presented by the author of a narrative (Daiute, 2014). As described by Daiute (2014), the process in this study also included parsing each narrative into one or more thought-unit (t-unit) segments. T-units are defined as “the shortest grammatically allowable sentence into which (writing can be split) or minimally terminable unit” (Hunt, 1965). After each narrative was parsed into one or more t-units, each t-unit was coded as a major plot element in Atlas.ti version 7. They could be coded as any of the following: initiating action (IA), complicating action (CA), high point (HP), resolution strategy (RS), or ending (END). Each t-unit could only be coded as one major plot element. Every narrative was coded as having one (and only one) high point, as each had to feature an emotional climax or turning point that the
narrative revolved around. Additionally, any t-units that were coded as a high point or resolution strategy were later given sub-codes based on the issue revolving around the high point or the type of resolution strategy invoked.

**Example of Plot Analysis Process.** An example of the plot analysis process comes from a narrative by Maria. She wrote the following in the Worst Experience genre:

"My worst experience was Spring 2014 when I signed up for classes. I had to withdraw because of family issues (deaths, multiple). But I didn’t give up. I felt as much as my family needed me, I was neglecting myself. Fall 2014, I was registered again."

I parsed Maria’s narrative into t-units and coded for major plot elements, as follows:

1. My worst experience was Spring 2014 when I signed up for classes. [*Initiating Action – the action that begins the plot.*]

2. I had to withdraw because of family issues (deaths, multiple). [*Complicating Action – an event that complicates the plot – in this case, a difficulty encountered while attending community college.*]

3. But I didn’t give up. [*High Point – the turning point and emotional apex of the plot that the narrative revolves around.*]

4. I felt as much as my family needed me, I was neglecting myself. [*Resolution Strategy – an attempt to solve the difficulty introduced earlier in the plot.*]

5. Fall 2014, I was registered again. [*Ending – the event that ends the plot.*]

**Issues at High Points.** Further analysis of students’ high points revealed that there were several recurring issues that rose at the high point of narratives. These issues were identified after I reviewed a complete list of the high points of all 312 narratives in this study. Following Daiute’s (2014) recommendations, I explored similarities and differences in the themes, ideas,
and concerns that students structured their narratives around. During this process, I discovered that there were four common issues that students placed at the high points of narratives in every genre. These high point issues will be identified briefly in this chapter, as they were used as variables in later quantitative statistical analyses and are revisited in the Measures section. High point issues will be reviewed in greater detail within the next results chapter.

The four issues that appeared during students’ narrative high points are as follows:

1) College Experiences: issues of college experiences appeared at high points when students constructed narratives that revolved around their lived experiences in the community college system. For instance: “I ended up withdrawing from a class and failing a class that put my financial aid and GPA at risk” (Participant 36, Worst Experience genre).

2) Developing: issues of developing appeared at high points when students constructed narratives that revolved around their developing socially, mentally, or emotionally from their experiences in the community college system. For instance: “I can see what they teach us is more relating to everyday life” (Participant 70, Letter genre).

3) Emotion: issues of emotion appeared at high points when students constructed narratives that revolved around their expression or experience of emotion. For instance: “I feel a strong sense of accomplishment as I come to the end of the semester” (Participant 47, Letter genre).

4) Relationships: issues of relationships appeared at high points when students constructed narratives that revolved around their relationships with partners inside or outside of the community college system. For instance: “We [friend and I] work, studied, and went to class together.” (Participant 28, Best Experience genre).
I identified the issue at the high point in Maria’s narrative as that of emotion, as her emphasis is on not “giving up” after enduring the difficulty of family deaths while attending community college. She expresses a sense of optimism that serves as a turning point to her initially grim narrative.

**Resolution Strategies.** I also analyzed the resolution strategies that students narrated to solve or ameliorate difficulties and conflicts introduced within the plot. The specific types of resolution strategies that studies employed were identified after I reviewed a complete list of all resolution strategies used across 312 narratives. Following Daiute’s (2014) recommendations, I explored similarities and differences in how students navigated the community college system to solve obstacles that blocked them from their goals. During this process, I discovered that there were four common resolution strategies that students used. Resolution strategies will be identified briefly in this chapter, as they were used as variables in later quantitative statistical analyses and are revisited in the Measures section. Resolution strategies will be reviewed in greater detail within the next results chapter.

The four types of resolution strategies that students used in their narratives are as follows:

1) **Being Practical About College:** resolution strategies that emphasize the practical benefits of attending community college in general or a specific community college in particular.

   For instance: “The experiences in community college is that it’s a little [more] affordable than being in debt with the college or university” (Participant 63, Letter genre).

2) **Connecting:** resolution strategies that rely on connecting with relationship partners to receive emotional, informational or instrumental support. For instance: “…and everyone [in class] explained how to make it better what we should and should do” (Participant 76, Best Experience genre).
3) Psychological Reframing: resolution strategies that rely on re-evaluating one’s experiences to look for a solution or revise one’s way of understanding a problem. For instance: “After I went home that day, I started thinking and decided not to let others bring me down” (Participant 48, Worst Experience genre).

4) Acting by Self: resolution strategies that rely on the student solving their problems on their own, without the support of others. For instance: “I started studying better, had to” (Participant 99, Worst Experience genre).

In Maria’s narrative, Maria used the resolution strategy of psychological reframing to resolve her difficulty of withdrawing from community college due to deaths in her family. She revisited how she thought of her situation (“I felt as much as my family needed me, I was neglecting myself”) to solve her difficulty and return to community college eventually. A plot analysis of Maria’s narrative shows that even though she was writing about her worst experience, her way of structuring her plot demonstrated her surprising optimism and her ability to deal effectively with difficulties she encountered while attending community college. Her use of plot elements demonstrated how she used the Worst Experience genre to affirm her place within and demonstrate her knowledge of the community college system.

**Reliability Coding.** Reliability coding was conducted by a graduate student colleague and I across 20% (i.e. 21/104) of the narratives. It found inter-rater reliability of 91% across high point codes and 80% reliability across resolution strategy codes. Our differences in coding were resolved through further analysis and discussion.

**Script Analysis**

Script analysis is a form of narrative inquiry that builds on plot analysis to identify the overall meaning, intention or goal of a narrative (Daiute, 2014). Scripts are collective and shared
ways of knowing that authors use to organize their interpretations of the events they recount. They rise from an understanding of how a collective group of narratives’ plot structures (in this study, high point issues and resolution strategies) interact and are logically connected by authors to achieve certain goals or communicate certain ways of interpreting experiences.

**Performing Cultural Scripts and Master Narratives.** For individual authors of narratives, scripts are their “ways of knowing, interpreting, [and] acting in the world” (Nelson, 1998) that allows them to perform, transform, or contest existing master narratives. Master (or dominant) narratives are widely and commonly used scripts that are disseminated or propagated by cultures or institutions to achieve goals such as justifying war or explaining inequality. They may have been “frozen” by previous circumstances, such as war or trauma. The process of cultural development involves individuals, groups, and societies transforming scripts either gradually over time or abruptly due to crises. For that reason, analyses of narrative scripts by individuals and groups at the center of social change, such as students in community colleges (Daiute & Kreniske, 2016), reveal the ways of knowing that are enacted in those dynamic contexts.

Though people are socialized from a young age by their families and cultures in the performance of standard scripts and master narratives (such as scripts that prescribes norms of patriotism), people can transform the scripts they narrate with throughout their life. For instance, Daiute’s (2010) work on youth living in postwar contexts found that young people sometimes used scripts to interpret and push back against cultural norms of interpersonal conflict. Yet how youth used scripts to either distance themselves from or get further involved in conflict situations differed across their postwar environments. Daiute’s (2010) research demonstrates script
analysis’ utility in discovering differences in how people conform to existing societal scripts or construct counter-scripts to interpret their experiences.

**Basic Process of Script Analysis.** In this study, the scripts that community college students used to interpret their experiences within the community college system were studied. To discover what scripts students used and how their use of scripts differed across the three expressive genres, I conducted script analysis. This process involved several steps.

First, I analyzed all 312 narratives with plot analysis to understand how students placed issues at high points and used resolution strategies to solve conflicts and difficulties. Then I analyzed students’ use of plot elements along with the audience they addressed to understand the basic goal of their narratives. For instance, one student may construct a narrative that revolves around their relationship with a family member and use connecting resolution strategies to advise their family member on solving problems within community college. Altogether, their use of plot elements reveals that they used their narrative to reach out to a loved one and share information on navigating community college. If there were other narratives that addressed a similar audience and had a similar way of utilizing high point issues and resolution strategies to achieve a similar goal, a script (in this case, the Reaching for Family and Friends script) was identified.

Script analysis revealed both genre-specific and genre-spanning scripts that students used to communicate ways of knowing around relevant community college experiences. Six scripts emerged from the 312 narratives of this study and will be reviewed in greater detail in the next chapter. However, these scripts will be reviewed briefly in this chapter, as they were used as variables in later quantitative statistical analyses and are revisited in the Measures section.

The scripts that emerged from the narratives of this study are as follows:
1. Communicating Experiences (128/312 or 41.03% of all narratives): students used this script across all genres to communicate their lived experiences in community college to their audience.

2. Analyzing College Partners (65/312 or 20.83%): students used this script in the Best and Worst Experience genres to explain how their relationships with partners in college (other students, professors, and staff) helped or hindered their goals.

3. Reaching for Family and Friends (45/32 or 14.42% of all narratives): students used this script in the Letters genre to reach out to partners outside college (i.e. their family and friends) and tie these partners to their goals and activities within college.

4. College Changed Me (37/312 or 11.86% of all narratives): students used this script in the Letter and Best Experience genres to demonstrate how community college changed them.

5. Solving Problems (19/312 or 6.09% of all narratives): students used this script in the Worst Experience genre to demonstrate their resiliency and competency within community college.

6. Countering the Genre (18/312 or 5.77% of all narratives): students used this script to reject and push back against the assumptions of the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres.

When Maria wrote her Worst Experience narrative about overcoming difficulties she encountered while attending community college, she organized her narrative using the Solving Problems script. Her use of the Solving Problems script demonstrated that she understood herself as a strong actor who could find solutions to difficulties she encountered in community college.

**Applying Script Analysis in Atlas.ti.** After I identified scripts through an examination of all student narratives, I entered each genre-linked script label into Atlas.ti and applied the
script codes as was relevant. Eventually, every narrative was coded as being organized by one (and only one) script.

**Mixed Methods: Using Narrative Data in Quantitative Analysis**

This project’s second research question investigates whether students who are more academically successful use narrative genres to come to different interpretations of the community college system, as compared to students who are less academically successful. The third research question investigates how students’ meaning-making processes (as enacted within and across narrative genres) relate to and predict their academic performance over time. To answer both questions, I used a mixed methods approach that turns qualitative plot and script information coded in Atlas.ti into continuous and categorical variables. I then inserted these variables into SPSS and used them in a series of quantitative analyses, including chi-squares tests of independence, Pearson’s correlations, and standard multiple regressions. More information on how narrative plot and script data was transformed into variables lies in the Measures section.

**Differences between More and Less Academically Successful Students.** One goal was to understand whether academically successful students used narrative genres to interpret their college experiences in ways that differ from the interpretations of less successful students. To better understand differences in how more successful and less successful students interpreted their college experiences in Fall 2016, two groups of students were created. Based on the year-end GPA ($M = 2.65, SD = .92$) of the 103 participants with outcome data, students were placed in either the higher-than-average GPA group (GPA at least 2.65 or higher, also called the more academically successful group) and lower-than-average GPA group (GPA of less than 2.65, also called the less academically unsuccessful group). The more successful group consisted of 58 participants, while the less successful group consisted of 45 participants.
After dividing participants into the more and less successful groups, individual participants were coded as being either more or less successful in Atlas.ti so that their narrative data could be compared across genres. I could then compare the different groups in terms of their use of high point issues, resolution strategies, and scripts across all narrative genres. I later transferred their narrative data into SPSS. Finally, I ran chi-square tests of independence to understand if there were statistically significant differences in how more and less successful students used narrative genres to interpret college experiences. Results are detailed in chapter 4.

**Narratives and Academic Outcomes.** The last major goal was to understand whether any of the students’ meaning-making processes (as enacted through their use of high point issues, resolution strategies, and scripts) within and across narrative genres related to or predicted their academic performance. (Performance was measured by students’ year-end cumulative GPA). To fulfill this goal, data on student’s narration of high point issues, resolution strategies and scripts was transferred from Atlas.ti into the SPSS file that also contained information on their year-end GPA and results from their demographics and CCSSE (2005) survey. Later, I conducted a series of Pearson’s correlations and standard multiple regressions using this transformed narrative data. How narrative data was constructed into categorical and continuous variables for use in correlations and regressions is detailed in the Measures section.

I conducted a Pearson’s product-moment correlation between students’ narrative data and their year-end GPA. This allowed for a better understanding of whether students’ skill in narrating, use of high point issues, and use of resolution strategies to resolve difficulties were related to their academic success. Results are examined further in Chapter 5.

Additionally, I ran a series of standard multiple regression models to see how well students’ meaning making processes (as enacted through their use of plot elements and scripts to
organize narratives) would predict their academic performance (i.e. year-end GPA) over time. I ran a series of regression models to predict students’ year-end GPA from some combination of background control variables (including students’ age, gender, total household income, semester, number of children, employment status, Pathways program status, ESL class attendance status, Remedial Reading, Writing, and Math class attendance status, GPA and credits in the Fall 2014 semester), relationship support variables (including support from immediate family, extended family, friends and romantic partners, as well as quality of relationships with other students, instructors, and staff), goal importance variables (including importance of the goal of a Certificate, Associate’s degree, transfer to a 4-year institution, gaining job skills, experiencing self-improvement and/or enjoyment, and change of career), and narrative variables (including total and genre-segregated use of high point issues, resolution strategies and scripts). The background, relationship support, and goal importance variables served as controls to isolate the unique predictive power of the narrative variables. More information on how I constructed these control and narrative variables lies in the Measures section. Results are examined further in chapter 5.

Measures

This section reviews how I constructed variables from plot and script analysis for use in later quantitative analyses. It also reviews how I constructed variables from information students gave on the demographic and CCSSE (2005) surveys about their background (such as employment status), the relative importance they gave to goals, and the relationship support they received from partners inside and outside of community college.
Note that all narrative variables were first coded in the qualitative analysis program Atlas.ti. They were later entered into an SPSS data-file and transformed into categorical and/or continuous variables suitable for use in quantitative analyses.

**High Point Issue Variables.** For all participants across the 3 genres (Letters, Best Experience and Worst Experience), I created several categorical variables based on narrative high point issues. These categorical variables were later used in standard multiple regression models predicting students’ cumulative year-end GPA. First, there were 12 genre-specific binomial categorical variables (coded as either 0 = did not have as high point issue or 1 = did have as high point issue) created for each participant. The variables included:

1. College Experience High Point Issue variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)
2. Developing High Point Issue variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)
3. Emotion High Point Issue variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)
4. Relationships High Point Issue variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)

Next, I created continuous “total” high point issue variables to count how often students used a particular high point issue across the three expressive genres. A score of 0 meant they never narrated the high point issue across the three genres, while a score of 3 meant they narrated the high point issue three times across the three genres. In other words, these total variables were the sum of the three previous genre-segregated high point issue variables. These variables were
also used in later correlation and regression models. Altogether, there were four continuous “total” high point issue variables, including:

1. Total College Experience High Point variable (how often students narrated the high point issue of College Experiences across the three genres)
2. Total Developing High Point variable (how often students narrated the high point issue of Developing across the three genres)
3. Total Emotion High Point variable (how often students narrated the high point issue of Emotion across the three genres)
4. Total Relationships High Point variable (how often students narrated the high point issue of Relationships across the three genres)

**Resolution Strategy Variables.** For all participants across the three genres (Letters, Best Experience and Worst Experience), I created several continuous variables based on their narration of resolution strategies. I coded students’ use of resolution strategies as continuous variables (looking at how often student participants used different types of resolution strategies in each genre and in total) rather than dichotomous categorical variables (resolution strategies were either used or not used). The vast majority of participants used 0, 1 or 2 resolution strategies across their individual narratives in each genre, with few large outliers. Since there was relatively normal distribution of resolution strategies across participants, it was appropriate to code students’ resolution strategy use in a continuous fashion.

First, I created 12 genre-specific continuous variables for each participant. These variables measuring how often students narrated a particular type of resolution strategy in each genre. The variables included:
1. Being Practical Resolution Strategy Use variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)

2. Connecting Resolution Strategy Use variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)

3. Psychological Reframing Resolution Strategy Use variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)

4. Acting by Self Resolution Strategy Use variables (three different variables for Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres)

Next, I created several continuous “total” resolution strategy use variables to count how often students used a particular type of high point in total across the three genres. A score of 0 meant they never narrated with a particular type of resolution strategy across the genres, while a score of 5 meant they narrated with the resolution strategy type 5 times across the genres. In other words, these total variables were the sum of the 12 previous genre-segregated resolution strategy use variables across genre. These variables were also used in later correlation and regression models. Altogether, there were four continuous “total” resolution strategy use variables, including:

1. Total Being Practical Resolution Strategy Use variable (how often students narrated with the Being Practical resolution strategy across the genres)

2. Total Connecting Resolution Strategy Use variable (how often students narrated with the Connecting resolution strategy across the genres)

3. Total Psychological Reframing Resolution Strategy Use variable (how often students narrated with the Psychological Reframing resolution strategy across the genres)
4. Total Acting by Self Resolution Strategy Use variable (how often students narrated with the Acting by Self resolution strategy across the genres)

**Script Use Variables.** There were six possible scripts that students could use to narrate with across the three genres. One appeared in all three genres, three appeared in two genres, and two appeared in only one genre. Scripts also had unequal frequencies. Some scripts were used more often than others in every genre or more in some but not other genres. Given students’ uneven use of scripts across genres, I simplified the script coding by creating 11 binomial categorical variables that separated students’ use of scripts by genre. This allowed me to utilize the script use variables in regressions predicting students’ later academic performance (i.e. year-end GPA). It also helped me better understand if students’ use of the same script across different genres predicted their year-end GPA in different ways. For instance, I discovered that students’ use of the Communicating Experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA. However, use of same script in the Letters and Best Experience genre did not predict year-end GPA. More results are revealed in chapter 5.

Script use variables were coded as either 0 (script not used in genre) or 1 (script used in genre). The script-use variables were as follows:

1. Use of Communicating Experiences Script in the Letters Genre
2. Use of Communicating Experiences Script in the Best Experience Genre
3. Use of Communicating Experiences Script in the Worst Experience Genre
4. Analyzing College Partners in the Best Experience Genre
5. Analyzing College Partners in the Worst Experience Genre
6. Reaching for Family and Friends in the Letters Genre
7. College Changed Me Script in Letters Genre
8. College Changed Me Script in Best Experience Genre
9. Solving Problems Script in Worst Experience Genre
10. Countering the Genre Script in Best Experience Genre
11. Countering the Genre Script in Worst Experience Genre

Note that the least commonly used script variables had to be excluded in models that used all scripts within a genre to predict for year-end GPA. This is because SPSS regression models automatically exclude one out of four of the genre variables as being redundant to the model, since each of the variables within a genre are exclusive. As an example, in a regression that used all script use variables for the Worst Experience genre, a regression model using the variables measuring use of the Communicating Experiences, Analyzing College Partners, Solving Problems, and Rejecting the Genre scripts might automatically drop the Rejecting the Genre Script variable as being redundant. This is because if a student has a 1 in any of the other variables, they will not have a 1 in the Rejecting the Genre Script variable. This follows the rule that if there are k levels to a categorical variable (say, 4 levels to a categorical variable measuring how many scripts students can use to narrate in the Worst Experience genre), there should only be k-1 (4-1 or 3) binomial categorical models in a regression. Therefore, regression models that used all scripts within a narrative genre excluded the variable measuring the least common script. In the case of the Letters genre, this was the College Changed Me script. In the case of the Best and Worst Experience genres, this was the Countering the Genre script.

**Background Characteristic Variables.** I created several background characteristic variables (including students’ age, gender, income, semester, number of children, employment status, Pathways program status, ESL class attendance status, Remedial Reading, Writing, and Math class attendance status, GPA and credits in the Fall 2014 semester) to serve as controls for
regressions predicting year-end GPA. This section reviews any transformations of these variables from their original items in the demographic and CCSSE (2005) surveys.

In the demographic survey, employment status was treated as a categorical variable, with values ranging from 1 (full-time) to 2 (part-time) to 3 (not employed) to 4 (retired). I remade this variable into a continuous variable, which ranged from 0 (not employed and/or retired) to 2 (full-time). No participants reported being retired.

I coded the Pathways program status as a binomial categorical variable, with 0 standing for the student not being in the Pathways program and 1 standing for the student being in the Pathways program. This was measured by looking at students’ year-end outcome data, which included information on students’ overall academic history.

I coded English as a Second Language and Remedial Courses as binomial categorical variables, with 0 standing for the student not having taken the class previously or in the Fall 2014 semester and 1 standing for the student having taken the class previously or in the Fall 2014 semester. This was also measured by looking at outcome data.

The CCSSE survey measured GPA in Fall 2014 with an item which asked students about their current GPA. The scale ranged from 1 (3.5 to 4.0) to 6 (1.9 and below). I reverse-coded and transformed this into a continuous variable for regressions, such that 1 now stood for 1.9 and below and 6 now stood for 3.5 to 4.0 GPA by Fall 2014.

Similarly, the CCSSE survey measured credits earned in Fall 2014 on a scale from 1 (0 credits) to 6 (60+ credits). This was treated as a continuous variable for use in later regressions.

**Goal Variables.** I used variables representing the level of importance students gave to various goals for attending college as controls in regressions. The CCSSE (2005) survey included six goal variables which measured students’ reasons and/or goals for attending
community college. Students could choose among the goals of completing a Certificate degree, obtaining an Associate’s degree, transferring to a 4-year institution, obtaining or updating job skills, self-improvement and/or personal enjoyment, or changing careers. They rated the goals on a scale from 1 to 3, with 1 meaning the goal was primary, 2 meaning the goal was secondary, and 3 meaning the goal was not a present for them.

Initially, goals were sorted to find if students had an underlying hierarchy of academic goals, such as from most ambitious (goals of Transfer) to middling in ambition (goal of Associate’s) to least ambitious (goals of Certificate). However, 20 student participants did not list any goal as being primary. That system would exclude many participants from analysis. Therefore, I reverse-coded the goal variables from the CCSSE survey (such that 1 meant the goal was not important and 3 meant the goal was of primary importance). Then, I treated goals as continuous variables that ranged from least to most important to students.

**Relationship Variables.** I also used variables representing the amount of support students reported receiving from partners inside and outside of college as controls in later regressions. There were seven major variables on the CCSSE (2005) study that related to students’ relationships inside and outside of the community college environment. First, participants rated the quality of relationships with people at college (student peers, instructors, and staff) on a Likert scale of 1 to 7, with 1 meaning that they felt the relationship with unfriendly and unsupportive and 7 meaning that they felt the relationship with friendly and supportive. Since these three relationship quality variables were all highly correlated with one another, they could not all be used in a regression. They were added together to create a new variable that captured overall relationship quality experienced with partners in community
college. This new Relationships at College variable has values ranging from 7 (very low quality of relationships) to 21 (extremely high quality of relationships).

**Support Outside College Variables.** There were four variables that measured relationship support experienced with partners largely outside of college, including immediate family, extended family, friends, and romantic partners. Relationship support from these partners was measured on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 standing for extremely supportive and 4 for not very supportive. For ease of analysis, I reverse-coded variables so that 1 stood for not very supportive and 4 stood for extremely supportive. Since these four relationship quality variables were all highly correlated with one another, they could not all be used in a regression. Additionally, only 49 students were partnered and thus had an answer to give about how supportive their relationship partners were. Therefore, I added support from immediate family, extended family, and friends together to create a new variable that captured overall support from these partners. This new Relationships at Home variable has values ranging from 3 (very little support) to 12 (extremely high support).

**Romantic Partner Support Variables.** To capture information about romantic partner support from both partnered and single student, I created a new Partner Support variable. This variable was continuous and had values ranging from 0 to 3. 0 meant that the student either reported having no partner or reported receiving little partner support (original score of 4). 1 meant that they reported moderate support from partner, 2 meant they reported somewhat high support from partner, and 4 meant they reported extremely high support from their partner. Thus, students who had no partner were placed on the same level of support as students who reported little support from their partners.

**Participant Information**
This section reviews information on the 104 student participants of the study. 104 undergraduates (68 female, 36 male) at a large public Northeastern community college in the U.S. participated in this study in exchange for psychology course credit. Participants were required to be a matriculated community college student and be over the age of 18. They were asked to take at least 45 minutes to fill out a survey, which included a demographics questionnaire, 5 separate narrative genres, and the CCSSE (2005) questionnaire. Average time to fill out the survey was 1 hour.

Survey Versions. 4 versions of the survey were handed out to participants. All surveys began with the demographics questionnaire and ended with the CCSSE (2005) questionnaire. However, the surveys differed in terms of the order of narratives genres presented to participants.

1. Survey A: Newspaper, Letters, Terri, Best Experiences, Worst Experiences. \( n = 35 \)
2. Survey B: Letters, Terri, Best Experiences, Worst Experiences, Newspaper \( n = 23 \)
3. Survey C: Terri, Best Experiences, Worst Experiences, Newspaper, Letters \( n = 22 \)
4. Survey D: Best Experiences, Worst Experiences, Newspaper, Letters, Terri \( n = 24 \)

Overall, there were 104 participants, 35 of whom took Survey A, 23 of whom took Survey B, 22 of whom took Survey C, and 24 of whom took Survey D. Since this study did not analyze the Newspaper or Terri narratives, these survey categories were collapsed into 2 categories.

1. Survey E: Letters genre, then Best Experiences genre, Worst Experiences genre
   (Collapses Surveys A and B) – \( n = 58 \)
2. Survey F: Best Experiences and Worst Experiences genres first, then Letters genre
   (Collapses Surveys C and D) – \( n = 46 \)

Differences between Versions. Altogether, 58 participants took Survey Version E, while 46 participants took Survey Version F. These two participant groups were compared against each
other in terms of narrative results. Chi-square tests of independence found no significant differences between the two groups in how they placed issues at the high points of narratives, used resolution strategies, or organized narratives through scripts. This was true of total narratives and across individual genres.

**Age.** The mean age of the sample was 24.00 years ($SD = 5.91$). The range of ages of the participants was from 18 to 45.

**Ethnicity.** 51.9% of the sample identified as Latino, 21.2% as African American, 17.3% as African-Caribbean-American, 5.8% of the sample identified as White, and 3.8% as Asian.

**Country of Origin.** 16.3% of students identified themselves as from the United States, 76.9% as from 1 other country outside of the United States, and 6.7% as from 2 other countries.

**Languages Spoken and Fluency in English.** 34.6% reported they only spoke English, 64.4% as speaking 1 additional language besides English, and 1% as speaking 2 additional languages. 67.3% of the participants said they were very fluent in English, 21.2% said they were fluent, 7.7% said they were somewhat fluent, 2.9% said they were a little fluent, and 1% said they were not fluent. 18.3% of participants stated that they were an international or foreign national student, while 81.7% of students stated they were not.

**Household Income.** 72.8% of participants reported they had a total household income of 49,999 or less and 27.2% reported they had a total income of 50,000 or more. The most common reported incomes were 10,000 – 14,999 at 10.7%, 20,000 – 24,999 at 10.7%, and 40,000 to 49,999 at 11.7% of the entire participant pool.

**Work Status.** 35.9% reported that they worked full-time, 35.9% that they worked part-time, and 28.2% that they were not employed. No one reported being retired.

**Source of Educational Funding.** 23.8% of participants reported that their personal
income was a major source of funding for their education, while 26.7% said it was a minor source and 48.6% said it was not a source. 11.4% said that their parent or spouse’s income was a major source of funding for their education, while 15.2% said it was a minor source and 72.4% said it was not a source. 6.7% of participants said that their employer was a major source of funding for their education, while 7.6% said it was a minor source and 84.8% said it was not a source. 45.7% of participants said that grants or scholarships were a major source of funding for their education, while 6.7% said it was a minor source and 46.7% said was not a source. 16.2% said that student loans were a major source of funding for their education, while 5.7% said it was a minor source and 77.1% said it not a source. Finally, 27.6% of participants said that public assistance was a major source of funding for their education, while 6.7% said it was a minor source and 64.8% said it was not a source. Thus, out of 103 participants, the most common major source of funding for education was grants and scholars (n = 48, 45.7% of sample). The least common major source of funding was an employer (n = 7, 6.7% of sample).

**Parenting and Romantic Partner Status.** 62.5% of the participants reported they were childless while 41.1% reported they had children. 22.1% of the entire pool reported they had one child, 14.4% that they had 2 children, and 1% that they had three children. 62.1% reported that they were single and had no current partner, 26.2% that they were partnered but not married, 7.8% that they were married, and 3.9% that they were separated/divorced and not partnered. Overall, there were 51 single childless participants, 14 partnered childless participants, 18 single parents, and 21 partnered parents.

**Living Arrangements.** 54.4% of the participants reported living with their parents/guardians, 12.6% with their spouse or domestic partner, 9.7% with their child(ren), 8.7% with other relatives, 7.8% alone, and 6.8% with friends/roommates.
**Semester and Enrolment.** 45.2% of participants reported that they were in the 1st semester, 14.4% that they were in the 2nd semester, 22.1% that they were in their 3rd semester, 8.7% in their 4th semester, and 9.6% in another semester. 72.1% reported that they were enrolled full-time and 27.9% reported that they were less than full-time.

**Previous Educational Experiences.** 64.4% of participants reported that they started at the community college that was surveyed, while 34.6% reported that they started elsewhere. 47.1% of participants reported that they never went to another other school previously, 19.2% that they attended another community college or technical school previously, 18.3% that they attended a 4-year college or university previously, 7.7% that they attended a proprietary/private school previously, and 7.7% that they attended public vocational-technical school previously.

**Previous Degree.** 4.8% of participants stated they had no higher academic credential, 81.6% stated that a high school diploma or GED was their highest academic credential, 8.7% stated a vocational/technical certificate was their highest academic credential, 2.9% stated that an Associate’s Degree was their highest academic credential, and 1.9% stated that a Bachelor’s Degree was their highest academic credential.

**Future Plans.** 72.1% of participants stated that they planned to take classes at college again within the next 12 months, 8.7% stated that they would accomplish their goals during this term and would not be returning, 2.9% stated that they had no current plan to return to return after this semester, and 16.3% were uncertain about when they would return. 89.4% of participants stated that they would recommend this college to a friend or family member, while 10.6% of participants stated they would not.

**Current Class Schedule and Credits.** 58.7% stated that they were primarily taking day classes, 26.9% stated that they were primarily taking evening classes, and 14.4% said they were
primarily taking weekend classes. 30.8% of participants stated that they had not earned any total
credit hours yet (not counting the courses they were taking during the Fall 2014 term), 37.5%
stated they had between 1 – 14 total credits, 19.2% stated they had between 15 – 29 total credits,
4.8% stated they had between 30 – 44 total credits, 4.8% stated that they had between 45 – 60
total credits, and 2.9% stated they had more than 60 total credits. (However, this count might
include credits from another country).

**Pathways and Degree Enrolments.** 87.5% of the participants were enrolled in the
CUNY Pathways general education requirements initiative while 11.5% of students were not.
4.8% of students were enrolled for a certificate program degree, 45.2% for an Associate in Arts
(AA) Degree, 18.3% for an Associate in Science (AS) Degree, and 30.8% for an Associate in
Applied Science (AAS) Degree.

**Major Status.** 35.6% were in taking Liberal Arts as a major, 11.5% were in Human
Services, 7.7% were in Nursing-Prerequisites, 7.7% in Dietics and Nutrition Science, 6.7% in
Business Administration, 5.8% in Criminal Justice, 5.8% in Radiologic Technology, 2.9% in
Education Associate, 1.9% in Liberal Arts/Biology, and 1.9% in Animal Care and Management.
The remaining 8% (1 participant each) were enrolled in various other majors, including Digital
Arts, Biotechnology, Therapeutic Recreation, Electronic Engineer Technology, Nuclear Medical
Tech, Assistant Child Special Needs, Medical Lab Technology, and Accounting.

**End of Semester Academic Outcomes.** One participant’s Spring 2015 records could not
be located. Thus, all end of Spring semester records only hold for 103 participants. The mean
GPA by the end of the Spring 2015 semester was 2.65 (SD = .92, Range = 0 – 4). The median
GPA was 2.80 and the mode GPA was 4.0 (3.8% of the participant pool, or 4 participants each).
Visual inspection of a histogram made up of GPA showed that GPA skewed right and that 50.5%
of participants earned a 2.80 or higher GPA.

**Summary**

This study examines how community college students use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, within the community college system. I analyze students’ meaning-making processes across genres with the use of plot analysis (which considers how people enact meaning through plot elements) and script analysis (which examines how people use scripts to organize their meaning-making processes). This chapter presented the study’s research designs, use of surveys, use of plot and script analyses, explanation of the coding process, use of mixed-methods techniques, and participant information. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I present the results of a mixed methods analysis of how students enact meaning-making across genres with their use of plot elements and scripts.
Chapter 3: Students' Diverse Understandings of Relationships, Experiences and Navigational Strategies in Community College

Introducing the Results Chapters

As noted in Chapter 1, community college students can use diverse narrative genres as cultural tools to make meaning of their experiences, especially their relationship and goal-related experiences, within the community college system. This study extends that observation to posit that students’ meaning-making processes should relate to and predict their academic performance (as measured through year-end GPA) as the school year progresses. The following results chapters explore these ideas with a mixed methods technique that used both qualitative and quantitative analyses to connect students’ interpretations of community college to their performance within community college. Plot and script analyses are used to explore how students interpret their college life with the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres. Students’ narrative data are then connected to their performance data through the use of statistical techniques to consider relationships. It is important to point out that this range of genres offers information about the complexity of students’ perspectives on college, as each genre occurs in a different relational author-purpose-audience setting.

The current results chapter, entitled “Students’ Diverse Understandings of Relationships, Experiences, and Navigational Strategies in Community College,” addresses the first research question. Namely, how do students in community college interpret their experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres? This study discovered that students in community college use narrative genres as cultural tools to interpret their experiences in college by expressing different types of information to different audiences. More specifically, students tended to use the Letters genre to focus on relationships, especially
experiences with family outside the college system. Comparatively, they used the Best Experience genre to align with college partners and the goals of community college while they used the Worst Experience genre to criticize or even condemn the community institution. Their varying use of genres displayed their complex interpretations of the community college system in relation to diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities.

The following results chapter, entitled How More and Less Successful Students Understand Community College, addresses the second research question. Namely, how do students who are more and less academically successful use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences in and integrate into the community college system? Analyses reported in the chapter indicate that students who are more academically successful use narrative genres differently from less successful students. More successful students display a greater awareness of how their partners in community college affect their progress, as well as a greater interest in how the community college system shapes their development. They also narrate in ways that demonstrate a better understanding of the writing and problem-solving skills taught by the community college institution. Less successful students focus more on their non-relational experiences and in doing so, demonstrate a lesser understanding of how to interpret their development and outcomes in community college.

The final results chapter, entitled Narrating the Future: How Students’ Narratives Relate to and Predict Academic Success, addresses the last research question. Namely, how do students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) relate to and predict their academic success over time? This study found that students’ ability to use the tool of narrating to interpret their problems and conflicts in college relates to and predicts their long-term academic outcomes. Moreover, only students’ use of the Worst Experience genre
predicted their year-end GPA, demonstrating the importance of offering students the opportunity to critique the community college system and their experiences and difficulties within it.

The implications of each of these findings are also explored in terms of understanding how students’ academic success is influenced and predicted by their use of narrative genres and skill at narrating.

Students Interpret Community College with Genres

As detailed in previous chapters, narrating is a cultural activity that people use to make meaning of their experiences, goals, relationships, and outcomes across a wide range of cultural contexts (Daiute, 2010; 2012; 2014). Furthermore, how people make meaning of their experiences can vary greatly according to the narrative genres they use (Daiute, 2014). In this chapter, the focus is on the first research question: how do students in community college interpret their experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres? I applied both plot and script analyses to consider how students use genres to interpret their experiences and interactions within the community college system.

Hypotheses. I hypothesized that students would narrate differently about their goals, relationship partners, and college institutions across genres since different genres might elicit different forms of meaning-making. Students would demonstrate their different meaning-making processes through enacting different issues at high points, different types of resolution strategies, and different scripts across the three genres. Students were expected to use differing genres to express the complexity of their college experiences, especially as it relates to their relationships and goals. Different community college students would also demonstrate different forms of meaning-making within each genre, demonstrating variance within as well as across students.
I expected some students to narrate in ways that would demonstrate more affiliation with the college institution across genres. Meanwhile, other students would narrate in ways that demonstrated more alienation from and dissatisfaction with the college institution across genres. There would not be one uniform and characteristic way in which all community college students use a particular genre to explore their experiences. Rather, students would vary in their use of each genre to explain how their goals, partners, and institutions influenced their college progress – and these differences would eventually be linked to their year-end academic success.

**Major Results: Students Narrate to Interpret Community College**

Students in community college used different narrative genres to interpret their experiences in community college in differing ways. While students often narrated in ways that emphasized their relationships with family and friends in the Letters genre, they emphasized alignments with the community college system in the Best Experience genre and critiques of the community college system in the Worst Experience genre. In addition, differences appeared between students in their use of genres. Some students consistently used plots and scripts to unite closely with the goals and relationships available within the community college system. However, other students used plots and scripts that demonstrated greater alienation from and disenchantment with the community college system. Later chapters explore how these patterns of affiliation or alienation are linked to students’ academic performance.

The contrasting narratives of two participants, Luisa and Tom demonstrate how students can differ in their use of genres to interpret community college system. Luisa was a 24-year-old female student who identified herself as a single-mother with one child. At the time of the study, she was a full-time student in her third semester who ended the school-year with a GPA of 3.88. She constructed narratives that revealed the central impact of relationships on her college
progress. She built her Letters narrative around her connection to her son, her Best Experience narrative around her friendship with fellow students, and her Worst Experience narrative around her conflict with her son. Below are her three narratives, starting with her letter to her son.

“Dear [Son]: First let me start by saying how much I love you. I know it may seem as if I don’t care or don’t have time for you, but you’re the driving force behind me continuing my education. I don’t want you to ever think that being uneducated and content with a “job” is okay. A career, a passion for something is all I could ever hope to teach you is important. You have inspired me beyond words could explain to better myself and you.”

Luisa narrated her letter in a way that placed her familial relationship with her son at the center of her college goals. Her goal of serving as a good role model to her son drove her goal of discovering “a career, a passion for something” within community college. Through her use of plot and script, Luisa tied her desire to be a role model to her son with her drive to achieve college success. Something similar appeared in her Best Experience narrative:

“My best experience in college so far was meeting new people in my classes that I now consider friends and keep in contact with.”

In her Best Experience narrative, Luisa again placed her relationships as central to her understanding of community college. However, as was common for students narrating with the Best Experience genre, she focused on partners within the community college system. Meanwhile, her Worst Experience narrative centered on how the community college system interfered with her family relationships. She wrote:

“My worst experience in college so far was sacrificing my personal time to attend classes instead of spending time with my son. My son feels neglected and sometimes he says I never have time for him. Because of that, I took on more classes to be able to graduate sooner.”
In Luisa’s Worst Experience narrative, she expressed her belief that the demands of community college could lead to conflict with her son, which in turn complicated her academic progress. Luisa’s narratives thus demonstrate how complex students’ interpretations of the community college system could be. Luisa used different genres to express both the blessings and the burdens she experienced while attending community college. Thus, her narratives demonstrated how students can use different genres to expose different types of information about their college lives. Likewise, her use of narrative genres expressed her complex interpretation of community college as a system that allowed her to find “a career, a passion,” even as it demanded the sacrifice of family time. The diverse genres allowed for this range of expression and students’ engagement of differing viewpoints addressed the complexity of their understanding of community college.

More specific insights emerge in the detailed plot and script analyses that are explored later in the chapter. For instance, Luisa’s focus on relationships, especially within the Letters and Best Experience genres, is typical of many students. As is explored further in the next chapter, Luisa’s ability to resolve college difficulties within her narratives related to and predicted her higher-than-average year-end GPA. Thus, Luisa’s narratives illustrate major statistical trends related to students’ focus within narrative genres and narrative factors that predicted later academic success.

In contrast, Tom (Participant 93) demonstrated a different way of interpreting community college through his use of plot and script across genres. Tom was a younger, childless male student who reported being a full-time student in his first semester. His eventual year-end GPA was 1.54. In his Letters narrative, he wrote:
“Dear Ma, This college blows major beef. I do not want to spend another minute with these fugazy (fake, unhelpful) teachers anymore. There is some good ones but this college is not for me. I’m going to leave after this semester since my grades are up to par with the requirements for other colleges.”

Though Tom noted the possibility of helpful relationships with college professors, he was also adamant in expressing his belief that the community college system did not suit him. His use of plot and script to demonstrate his alienation from community college also appeared in his Best Experience and Worst Experience narratives. For the former, he wrote:

“I did not have a best experience in college. I didn’t come here to enjoy myself. I came to learn, acquire credits, and leave.”

For the latter, he wrote:

“Every day I attend this college it’s the same thing, go to class, come out, go home. I have not had a worse experience other than just having to be here.”

Tom’s focus on college experiences, especially within the Worst Experience genre, is typical of many students. As is explored further in the next chapter, his sense of alienation from the community college system and his inability to resolve many of the underlying difficulties within his narratives related to and predicted his lower-than-average year-end GPA. Tom’s narratives illustrate major statistical trends related to students’ focus within narrative genres and narrative factors that predicted later and lower academic success.

Tom narrated to demonstrate his independence and alienation from the community college system while Luisa narrated in ways that demonstrated her interdependence and affiliation with the community college system. Their contrasting narratives reveal the complexity with which students interpret the community college system, with different students focusing on
and engaging with different issues within and across genres. Furthermore, they demonstrate how
different students develop differing ways of affiliating with or being alienated from the
community college system – patterns of affiliation and alienation that later relate to better or
worse academic performance over time. Both Tom and Luisa are revisited later in this chapter.

**Word Count across Genres**

Before I began plot or script analyses, I analyzed the number of words students wrote
within their Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience narratives. I did so by counting each
participant’s use of words within a narrative genre in Microsoft Word and then transferring this
data into IBM SPSS. I discovered that in the Letters genre, students wrote a total of 9,700 words
\( M = 93.27, \ SD = 43.65 \). In the Best Experience genre, students wrote a total of 4,464 words \( M = 42.92, \ SD = 21.86 \) and in the Worst Experience genre, students wrote a total of 4,498 words
\( M = 43.25, \ SD = 24.55 \). In total and on average, students wrote longer narratives in the Letter
genre than in the Best and Worst Experience genres.

I ran a series of paired-sample t-tests to discover if students wrote significantly longer
narratives in any one genre compared to other genres. I discovered no significant differences in
how many words students wrote in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. However,
students wrote significantly more in the Letters genre \( M = 93.27, \ SD = 43.65 \) than in the Best
Experience genre \( M = 42.92, \ SD = 21.86 \), \( t(103) = 12.216, p < .001 \). Additionally, students
wrote significantly more in the Letters genre \( M = 93.27, \ SD = 43.65 \) than in the Worst
Experience genre \( M = 43.25, \ SD = 24.55 \), \( t(103) = 11.787, p < .001 \).

These findings suggest that students used the Letters genre for expressing extended and
more detailed interpretations of the college institution than with the other genres. Later findings
from plot and script analyses reveal that students often use the Letters genre to explore the
connections between their college and home activity meaning systems. Meanwhile, students focused only on college experiences and the college system within the Best and Worst Experience genres. This difference in focus on diverse activity meaning systems helps to account for the differences in writing length across genres.

**Plot Analysis Overview**

Plot analysis was conducted on the 312 narratives (104 each from the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres) created by student participants. As presented in more detail in Chapter 2 (Methodology), plot analysis involved parsing each narrative into one or more t-units and then coding each unit as a plot element (initiating action, complicating action, high point, resolution strategy, or ending) in Atlas.ti. Afterwards, I identified the issues that arose at students’ high points as well as the types of resolution strategies they used to solve conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose ends. Plot analysis allowed for a greater understanding of how students constructed the plots of their narratives and enacted meaning through them.

Each narrative was coded as having one high point, which was defined as the narrative’s turning point or emotional climax. As discussed in Chapter 2, these high points are the tension that the narrative revolves around. There were four major issues that rose at the high point of students’ narratives, which included issues of college experiences (actual experiences of students in the college activity meaning system), developing (narrators developing socially, mentally, emotionally or intellectually due to their experiences), emotion (narrators expressing emotion or the experience of feeling), and relationships (relationship experiences with partners inside or outside of the community college activity meaning system). This method provides a way to delve into the meaning of the narrative as shared by the author. Interestingly, the focus on “relationships” emerged as the most prominent high point issue among student narratives.
However, the high point analysis revealed other issues of tension as expressed in how the participants shared their experiences. Students differed in how they narrated issues at high points across genres, showing that the diverse genres elicited different types of information from students based on their varied audiences and purposes.

Narratives could also contain resolution strategies, which students used to solve the conflicts and difficulties introduced in their plots and to tie up loose ends. There were four major types of resolution strategies that students narrated. They included the strategies of being practical about college (emphasizing the practical benefits of the community college institution), connecting (reaching out to others to receive emotional, informational or instrumental support), psychological reframing (mentally re-evaluating one’s experiences or actions to look for a solution or recast a problem as less harmful), and acting by self (proactively solving a difficulty in ways that do not explicitly involve the support of others). Students differed in how they narrated types of resolution strategies across genres, showing that diverse genres elicited different problem solving strategies from students based on their varied audiences and purposes.

**Issues at High Points: Relationships versus Experiences**

This section presents results for most common issues at high points across narratives. I compared students’ use of high point issues across their Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience narratives to find differences in students’ focus across genres.

**Most Common Issues at Narrative High Points.** First, this study examines the most common issues that students placed at high points across all narratives. Table 3.1 lists the number and percentages of different issues at the high points of total narratives. The most common high point issue was that of relationships, which made up 38.46% of all issues. The
second most common issue at high points was that of college experience (30.77% of issues), followed by issues of emotion (19.87% of issues) and developing (10.89% of issues)

Table 3.1: Issues at Narrative High Points in Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues at the High Point</th>
<th>Use (% of Total Issues)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>120 (38.46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Experience</td>
<td>96 (30.77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>62 (19.87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>34 (10.89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Issues</td>
<td>312 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship Issues at High Points.** The most common high point issue that students centered their narratives around was that of relationships, which made up 120 of 312 or 38.46% of high points of total narratives. For instance, Luisa’s narratives revolved around her relationships with either her son or her fellow students. Another example comes from Julius’ letter to his brother. The relationship issue that his narrative centers on is bolded. He narrated:

“Dear brother, college isn’t what the movies make it out to be, no crazy parties, no endless drinking, the football team don’t walk around with no girls in short skirts, professor don’t go to frat parties and most of all you don’t meet a girl right away. So yeah, you need to pick a good college and focus.”

Julius organized his narrative around his goal of giving practical advice about community college to his brother. Like Julius, many students placed relationships at the center of their narratives. Script analysis later reveals that when students narrated relationships at high points, they focused on friends and family outside college in the Letters genre and focused on college partners in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres.
**College Experience Issues at High Points.** The second most common issue that students centered their narratives on was their college experiences, which made up 96 of 312 or 30.77% of high points of total narratives. For instance, Tom’s narratives predominantly revolved around his disappointing experiences with the community college institution. Another example comes from Julissa’s narrative in the Worst Experience genre. Her high point issue is bolded. She wrote the following:

“The worst experience was actually when I was admitted into the hospital. [It] Causing me to miss a week of class.”

Julissa’s narrative revolves around her experience of missing college classes due to her medical troubles. Script analysis later reveals that when students placed issues of college experiences at high points, they focused on joyful experiences in the Best Experience genre and on difficult experiences in the Worst Experience genre.

**Emotional Issues at High Points.** The third most common issue that students centered their narratives on was of their emotional reactions to college experiences, which made up 62 of 312 or 19.87% of high points of total narratives. Students used this high point issue to organize narratives across all genres. For instance, Jordana organized her Letters narrative around her feelings of confidence and competence in the community college system. She wrote the following. Note that her high point is bolded.

“For my younger sister: I did the way you told me. Even though you are my younger, you advised me to do the best. Now I did the best I can. Overall, I am really confident about myself. This will help me to do better next semester. I can promise you that I would do a lot better than this.”
Meanwhile, Natalya organized her Best Experience narrative around the hope she felt in reaction to her improving grades. She wrote the following. Note that her high point is bolded.

“My best experience was seeing my hard work pay off for Fall 2014. Seeing my grades improving from last semester gave me the hope and strength to keep on.”

In contrast, Andrea organized her Worst Experience narrative around the sadness she experienced in reaction to her academic difficulties. She wrote the following. Note that her high point is bolded.

“My worst experience had to be of my psychology class. I scored a D in psychology midterm because my professor decided to use 2 exam grades as a midterm grade [rather] than an actual test. I was extremely upset about that being that I had failed my first two exams.”

Students such as Jordana, Natalya, and Andrea wrote narratives that revolved around their emotional responses to the community college system. Script analysis later reveals that when students narrated emotions at high points, they focused on positive emotions in the Letters and Best Experience genres and on negative emotions in the Worst Experience genre.

**Developing Issues at High Points.** The least common issue that students centered their narratives around was how they were developing due to their college experiences, which made up 34 of 312 or 10.89% of high points of total narratives. Students narrated issues of how they were developing most often in the Letters and Best Experience genres and rarely within the Worst Experience Genre. One example of its use comes from Raul’s letter to his mother. He organized his narrative around how he changed through courses at community college. Note that his high point is bolded.

“Dear Mom: After not being in a higher education system in 3 years, coming back to school has been very overwhelming. X Community College has given me the opportunity to
develop my reading and writing skills by taking different types of courses. Before I attended X Conservatory and didn’t take as many core classes as I am taking at X Community College. By taking core classes my mind has expanded to see new ideas that I can develop in my own career as a musician.”

Some students also organized their Best Experience narratives around how they are developing due to positive college experiences. For instance, Aaron centered his Best Experience narrative on how he developed a greater understanding of the world due to community college. He wrote the following. Note that his high point is bolded.

“Education has ever been my number one priority as it is essential to humanity. So I decided to continue from wherever I got to from my country when I first got here. Going to college has given me a broader perspective. I’ve set up my own objective as to where I want to reach in the future. I have made up my mind no matter what happens to accomplish my goals for the better.”

Few students organized narratives around the issue of how they are developing in the Worst Experience genre. The few who did concentrated on the negative changes they experienced due to college difficulties. For instance, Nora wrote the following. Note that her high point is bolded.

“My worst experience in college was spring 2014. I was very lost, didn’t know where to go for help, got lost on campus, felt overwhelmed by professor. It affected the transition from high school to college.”

When students narrated developing issues at high points, they focused on positive changes in the Letters and Best Experience genre and focused on negative changes in the Worst Experience genres.
In summary, students focused their narratives around issues of relationships, college experiences, emotional responses to relationships and experiences, and developing due to their relationships and experiences. The next section will discuss how students used different narrative genres to focus on different issues at high points.

**Issues at High Points across Genre.** An interesting note in this study is whether students narrated different high point issues across the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres. Analyses indicated that community college students focused more on relationship and developing issues in the Letter and Worst Experience genre and on college experience issues in the Worst Experience genre. Thus students used differing genres as tools to focus attention to different tensions within the college activity meaning system.

To understand whether students narrated different high point issues across genres, I conducted a chi-square test of independence between issues at high points (i.e. the issues of relationships, college experience, emotion, and developing) and narrative genre (Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience). For all the following analyses, more than 80% of all the expected cell frequencies were greater than five.

There was a significant association between high point issues and genre, \( \chi^2(8) = 37.681, p < .001 \). The association was small to moderate (Cohen, 1988), Cramer’s V = .246. Community college students were more likely to center their Letters and Best Experience narratives on relationship and developing issues and center their Worst Experience narratives on college experience issues. Students were almost equally likely to focus on emotional issues across the different genres.

Table 3.2 lists the number and percentages of high point issues crafted by students across the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres.
Table 3.2: Cross Tabulation of Issues at High Points across Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues at High Point</th>
<th>Letter (% of Total Issues)</th>
<th>Best Experience (% of Total Issues)</th>
<th>Worst Experience (% of Total Issues)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>44 (42%)</td>
<td>48 (46.15%)</td>
<td>28 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Experience</td>
<td>23 (22%)</td>
<td>20 (19%)</td>
<td>53 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>21 (20%)</td>
<td>21 (20.19%)</td>
<td>20 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>16 (15%)</td>
<td>15 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Issues</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square.</td>
<td>37.681</td>
<td></td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A notable pattern indicated in Table 3.2 is that a majority of Letters and Best Experience narratives revolved around issues of relationships, while the majority of Worst Experience narratives most frequently revolved around issues of the college experience.

Mario, a young male Latino student, offers an example of how many students enact issues at high points across the Letters, Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. High points in the former two genres predominantly revolve around issues of relationships. High points in the latter genre predominantly revolve around issues of college experiences. Note that the issues at the high points of the following narratives are bolded. In the Letters genre, Mario wrote the following:

“Dear Christine: College is not as hard as you say it is. We are both in college, so we’re both pretty busy. Always listen to my advice! And you won’t slack at all!”

Mario’s letter narrative revolved around his relationship with his friend as he offered support to help her overcome college difficulties. Similarly, Mario structured his Best Experience narrative around his relationship experience with a college staff member. He wrote:
NARRATING THE FUTURE

“I have had many great experiences in my first semester of college. One memorable moment would be during my FYS [Freshman Year Seminar] class. We had a guest speaker come in, he was I believe head of security at [community college]. He tells us very humorous stories about his work experience.”

Like many students, Mario focused his Best Experience narrative on relationships with partners inside community college – in this case, a staff member. In contrast, Mario focused his Worst Experience narrative on his lived experience in community college. He wrote:

“Worst experience so far would have to be my 2 hour breaks during class time. I would have a class at 10 AM and the next one at 2 PM. I know there is a lot to do in 2 hours, but when you don’t have any work to do, its torture. This occurred during the beginning of the semester, I didn’t have any friends nor did I know my way around the campus. I did find the cafeteria so I would spend 2 hours in the cafeteria either sleeping or eating a BLT. I ended up making friends and spending these 2 hours with them.”

Although Mario uses various resolution strategies to solve his difficulties, his high point (and central conflict) revolves around his difficulty in college. His narratives illustrate a common trend among students – namely, that they used the Letters and Best Experience genre to focus on and make meaning of their college-related relationships while they used the Worst Experience to focus on their (often difficult or tedious) college experiences. Different genres elicited different focal points from students.

Summary of Issues at High Points. Students centered their narratives around several different issues as they made sense of their experiences in community college. The most common narrative focal point was that of relationships, which demonstrates the importance of relationships to students’ understanding of community college. Students also focused their
narratives on issues of lived college experiences, emotional responses to their relationships and experiences, and developing from their relationships and experiences. Additionally, students placed different issues at the high points according to genre, revealing that the aspects of college life that students focused on differed across genres. In the Letters and Best Experience genres, students often staged narratives around issues of college-related relationships and developing from college experiences. Meanwhile, in the Worst Experience genre, students were more likely to center their narratives on lived experiences. Thus, students used varying narrative genres as tools to enact meaning-making about different relationships and experiences inside and outside the college activity meaning system. This demonstrates the importance of allowing students to have diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities as they express their interpretations of community college.

**Resolution Strategies: Connecting versus Acting by Self**

This section presents results for student’s use of resolution strategies to solve conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose plot ends in narratives. I also compared students’ use of resolution strategies across their Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience narratives to find differences in students’ problem solving skills across genres.

**Most Common Resolution Strategies.** First, I investigated the resolution strategies that students used. Table 3.3 lists the number and percentages of the types of resolution strategies students used across all narratives. In total, 104 students narrated 337 resolution strategies across 312 narratives. On average, each student narrated 3.24 resolution strategies across three genres. This average adds up to more than 1.0 because spontaneous narrating often involves a sequence of attempts to resolve the issue at the high point (Daiute, 2014). (This characteristic indicates, moreover, the dynamic nature of narrating for meaning-making.)
As indicated in table 3.3, the most common resolution strategy was that of connecting to others, which made up 44.51% of all resolution strategies narrated. The second most used resolution strategy was that of psychological reframing (31.16% of resolution strategies), followed by acting by self (12.76% of resolution strategies) and being practical about college (11.57% of resolution strategies).

**Connecting Strategies.** The most common resolution strategy was that of connecting with relationship partners to receive or give emotional, instrumental or information support, which made up 150 of 337 or 44.51% of all resolution strategies within narratives. Narrators used these supports to overcome their own or their partner’s conflicts and difficulties. For instance, Lamont narrated connecting strategies to demonstrate how his adviser offered him support while he dealt with a serious institutional difficulty. His connecting resolution strategies are underlined. Lamont wrote the following in the Worst Experience genre.

“My worst experience so far was forgetting to get advised and almost getting kicked out. I emailed my adviser and he helped me get back on track. I was able to appeal my case and my
appeal was granted. So now I’m pushing myself to do better in school and to keep in check with my adviser at all times.”

Though Lamont showed initiative in solving his issue, his use of connecting strategies also demonstrated his understanding of how to find effective support in the community college system. In his narrative, Lamont’s enactment of plot demonstrates his understanding of how relationships can influence outcomes in community college. Anita used connecting resolution strategies in another way. She narrated connecting strategies to solve difficulties that her partner previously experienced in the college system. In her Letter narrative, she wrote the following. Note that her connecting strategies are underlined.

“Dear brother, Hi, how are you? I would like to talk a few minutes to try to convince you to go back to school. I know that you had bad experiences on that college that you were attended, but not all colleges are the same. X Community College is a great college. They will help you get your degree. There are too many great people here. I want you [to] come and take a look. I know you will be loving it!”

Like many students in the Letters genre, Anita used connecting strategies to reach out to her partner and offer him informational support based on her understanding of community college. Script analysis later reveals that when students like Anita used connecting strategies in the Letters genre, they advised their partners on how to navigate effectively through college. Meanwhile, when students like Lamont used connecting strategies in the Best Experience and Worst Experience, they made sense of the vital supports they received from college partners.

**Psychological Reframing Strategies.** The second most common resolution strategy was that of psychological reframing, which made up 105 of 337 or 31.16% of all resolution strategies within narratives. Narrators used psychological reframing to better cope with or revise their
understanding of their college difficulties. One example comes from Gina’s Best Experience narrative. She wrote the following. Note that her psychological reframing strategies are underlined.

“My best experience in college happened three weeks ago. Their [there] was a lady in one of my classes we didn’t really see eye to eye. I didn’t care much about her. Until she stop[ped] me in the always and we had a conversation. It turned out that she was a great individual who was passionate in her beliefs. I realize that I should stop be[ing] so judgmental and look at things from someone else’s point of view.”

Part of Gina’s resolution to the conflict between herself and another student involved changing her perspective of herself. Additionally, Gina used connecting strategies (“we had a conversation”) in conjunction with psychological reframing to better understand her student peers. Similarly, many students who narrated psychological reframing strategies did so along with connecting strategies, as learning from others often meant learning more about themselves. In another example, Anna wrote the following letter to her mother. Note that her connecting and psychological reframing strategies are underlined.

“Dear mom: I am thankful for your sacrifices. Because of you, I have a better reason to pursue my dreams. I will make sure I learn hard to interpret your sacrifices. College is not an easy place to be. Walking in the cold and sitting at long lectures can be very boring at times. I have made a passion out of it, so that I can learn more easily and get it over with. I have met friends with the same purpose. I will make you proud.”

Gina’s and Anna’s joint use of connecting and psychological reframing strategies reveals that for many community college students, learning from others accompanies learning to control one’s thoughts on the world.
Acting by Self Strategies. The third most commonly narrated resolution strategy was that of acting by self, which made up 43 of 337 or 12.76% of all resolution strategies within narratives. Narrators used acting by self strategies to deal with conflicts and difficulties on their own without involving the support of others. For instance, June used acting by self strategies to solve her academic difficulties in her Worst Experience narrative. She wrote the following. Note that her acting by self strategies are underlined.

“My worst experience in college thus far was failing a quiz with a 54. Never in my life have I ever gotten a score that low that I’ve actually tried. It was just shameful. I took another quiz today and I’m sure I got about a 90. I started studying better, had to.”

June’s use of acting by self strategies demonstrated her solitary attempts at solving her academic difficulties. Instead of reaching for the support of partners such as her professor or other students, she studied on her own to receive a better quiz grade in class.

Often, students like June who used acting by self strategies set themselves apart from others as they solved problems. However, sometimes students used acting by self strategies because potential partners denied them social support. One example of this comes from Tyrone’s Worst Experience narrative. He wrote the following. Note that his acting by self strategies are underlined.

“My worst experience in college would be when I first joined the basketball team. The coach saw potential in me so he decided to work me until I break in to the type of basketball player he envisioned me to be. At one time I was willing to quit the team but he said if I do so I won’t ever be allowed to play for this school every again. So for the love the sport I sucked it up and did what he asked for.”
Tyrone used acting by self strategies *because* he could not receive support from his relationship, the basketball team coach. In fact, his coach *caused* difficulties that Tyrone had to solve on his own. June and Tyrone’s narratives demonstrate how students’ use of acting by self strategies often serve as a counterpart to the more socially integrated connecting strategies.

**Being Practical about College Strategies.** The least common resolution strategy was that of being practical about college, which made up 39 of 337 or 11.57% of all resolution strategies within narratives. Narrators used being practical strategies to emphasize the functional reasons for entering into or attending the community college system. For instance, Manuel used being practical strategies to persuade his friend in her Letter narrative. Note that his being practical strategies are underlined.

“Dear Friend, I will be glad to tell you about my experience at X Community College. *First I will start to tell you about being in the environment that is conducive for learning. XCC has one of the best libraries that you would not want to leave and go home. Secondly you choose the best time for classes which as is a great opportunity to work and still be in college. Lastly but not least you will meet with different students from different ethnic backgrounds and you can learn from these students on how their country operate. You will also meet with nice instructors.*

Yours, Manuel.”

Manuel used being practical strategies in conjunction with connecting strategies to convince his friend to join her at community college. Like many other users of being practical strategies, he used these strategies to position himself as an experienced mentor to newcomers in the community college system. However, even students who did not posit themselves as mentors used being practical strategies to signal their savvy in navigating community college. For
instance, Jenny wrote the following letter to her grandmother. She wrote the following. Note that her being practical strategies are underlined.

“Dear Grandmother: You have allowed me to attend college by taking care of my two girls, even at the age of 84. You are going strong and I thank you truly. I come to night and weekend classes and I have the chance to explore any needed materials on the campus library. The teachers are usually available to help me with any questions. As [and] you are familiar with the campus, since Daddy graduated from here many years ago. They have many resources available and hours that can work with my schedule. Love, Jenny.”

Jenny used both connecting strategies and being practical strategies to demonstrate her competence to her audience, her grandmother. Her use of resolution strategies thus demonstrated her understanding of the community college system. Like Jenny, many students who used being practical strategies did so to prove to themselves and others that they were capable of navigating the community college system and reaching their goals.

Resolution Strategies across Genres. Another note of interest in this study is whether students narrated different resolution strategies across the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres. Analyses indicated that students were more likely to narrate resolution strategies in the Letters genre than in the Best Experience or Worst Experience genres. This may reflect both structural issues (i.e. that students wrote longer narratives in the Letters genre than in other genres) and the way students positioned themselves for the audience they imagined reading the different narrative genres. See table 3.4 for the full list on students’ resolution strategy use across genres.

Table 3.4: Cross Tabulation of Resolution Strategies across Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Strategies</th>
<th>Letters (% of Total Strategies)</th>
<th>Best Experience (% of Total Strategies)</th>
<th>Worst Experience (% of Total Strategies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

90
As revealed in table 3.4, different genres elicited differing uses of resolution strategies by students. Students narrated more connecting strategies in the Letters and Best Experience genres, while they narrated more acting by self strategies in the Worst Experience genre. Students used differing genres as tools to highlight different ways of dealing with difficulties and conflicts.

**Number of Resolution Strategies across Genre.** Students differed in the number of resolution strategies they narrated across genres. 104 students narrated 267 strategies in the Letters genre, as opposed to 31 strategies in the Best Experience genre and 39 strategies in the Worst Experience genre. On average, students narrated 2.57 resolution strategies in the Letters genre. Meanwhile, they narrated an average of .29 resolution strategies in the Best Experience genre and an average of .38 resolution strategies in the Worst Experience genre.

Each student narrated an average of 2.27 *more* resolution strategies in the Letters genre compared to Best Experience genre. Similarly, on average, each student narrated 2.19 *more* resolution strategies in the Letters genre compared to the Worst Experience genre. In other
words, students narrated considerably more resolution strategies in the Letters genre than in the Best and Worst Experience genres.

There are two explanations for why students narrated more strategies in their Letters versus their Best and Worst Experience narratives. First, students usually wrote longer narratives in the Letters genre than in the Best or Worst Experience genres. Thus, students had more time to elaborate on high point issues and resolve any difficulties introduced in the Letter genre. Second, students may have used more strategies in the Letters genre because they addressed their letters to a specific relationship partner. When students wrote to specific partners, they often posited themselves as mentors or experienced guides to community college, using the genre to demonstrate their knowledge of the community college system. Thus, students may have narrated resolution strategies within the Letters to demonstrate their competence to their imagined audience. Such a finding demonstrates the importance of providing students with diverse genres that afford differing audiences and purposes.

**Type of Resolution Strategies across Genre.** Given the disparity in students’ use of strategies across genres, I investigated whether students narrated different types of strategies across genres. I discovered that students narrated more of every type of resolution strategy in the Letters genre as compared to the Best and Worst Experience genres. A chi-square test of independence was conducted between the different types of resolution strategies (i.e. connecting, psychological reframing, acting by self, and being practical) and genres (Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience). For all the following analyses, more than 80% of all the expected cell frequencies were greater than five.

There was a significant association between resolution strategy type and genre, $\chi^2(6) = 57.079, p < .001$. The association was moderate (Cohen, 1988), Cramer’s $V = .442$. Students
used different types of resolution strategies depending on the genre. Students were more likely to use the connecting, psychological reframing, acting by self, and being practical strategies in the Letters genre, as compared to the Best or Worst Experience genres. This was not surprising, given that students narrated the most resolution strategies in the Letters genre.

Additionally, there was an interesting difference that appeared between the Best and Worst Experience genres. Students were more likely to narrate connecting strategies in the Best Experience genre and acting by self strategies in the Worst Experience genre. In other words, students relied more on and/or offered more social support within their Best Experience narratives. However, their use of acting by self strategies in the Worst Experience genre demonstrates that students’ worst experiences in community college often involved a lack of social support. This interpretation is in accord with students’ emphasis on relationship issues at the high points of Best Experience narratives and on college experience issues at the high points of Worst Experience narratives. When students narrate their best experience in community college, they recall the support they experience with important partners. Meanwhile, when students narrate their worst experience, they highlight more isolated experiences where they could not rely on support from others.

An Example of Resolution Strategies across Genres. Khadija’s narratives demonstrate common trends in students’ use of resolution strategies across genres. Note that her resolution strategies are underlined in the following narratives. Within the Letters genre, she wrote:

Dear [Sister]: I will recommend you to attend to X Community College because the staff are really helpful and the professors help you to work and achieve a good grade during the end of the semester. There are writing center, tutor for math, and professors have hours that you can see them if you need extra help with the assignments and etc. The students are wonderful and the
school have library, and a lot of computer labs that you can go there and do your work. There is a group study that you can join if you have difficulties in one of your classes. I am glad I attend to this school and about to graduate in 2015.”

In Khadija’s letter to her sister, she narrated resolution strategies to persuade her sister to join Khadija at her specific community college. For instance, she narrated being practical strategies to emphasize how her sister would benefit academically from attending college (including: “there are writing center…”). Khadija elaborated with connecting strategies that emphasized the supportive partners (including: “there is a study group that you can join…”) that her sister could find in the community college system. Khadija used being practical and connecting strategies to illustrate how well she herself navigated the community college system to reach her goals (“graduate in 2015”). She also used resolution strategies to demonstrate how her sister could use similar resources and achieve similar goals by following in her foot-steps. Thus, Khadija’s use of resolution strategies allowed her to elaborate on the issue at her high point (“I am glad I attend this college and am about to graduate in 2015”) and posit herself as a wise guide on community college to her sister. Khadija’s use of resolution strategies reveals that Khadija used the Letter genre to connect with her sister and shape her sister’s goals and activities. Likewise, her use of resolution strategies demonstrated her close affiliation with the community college institution and her understanding of the institution as one that helps students achieve their dreams.

Khadija continued to demonstrate her complex interpretation of community college in her Best Experience narrative. She wrote:

“My experience at this college have been good so far. I love the environment and the students. I made friends here and I learn new stuff every day. The only difficulties I face
sometimes is the tap [financial aid] department and every day someone somewhere always delete my information in the system. But the counselors are helping out in choosing my classes and the professors are helping me learn new things every day."

Though Khadija acknowledged the difficulties she faced in conflicts with college staff, she used resolution strategies to align with the community college system and highlight the helpful social partners available within it. In addition, her use of relationship issues at her high point (“every day someone somewhere always delete my information in the system”) and connecting resolution strategies (“but the counselors are helping out… and the professors are helping me learn…”) demonstrates her complex understanding of how college partners can both help and hinder her academic progress.

Finally, in the Worst Experience genre, Khadija wrote:

“*My worst experience in this college is when I wanted to rent a book from the library and they didn’t allow me to because I owe the school. For some reason, tap [financial aid] took forever to process and it took a while for it to clear all my bill. I came to the tap department to write me a note to give to the library staff but they said no. I ended up using the book in the library because I couldn’t take it home. I was real pissed.”*

In her Worst Experience narrative, Khadija criticized the community college institution for causing her unnecessary difficulties and rebuffing her attempts to garner social support. Although she initially tried to connect with college staff (“I came to the tap department to write me a note to give to the library staff”), they rebuffed her attempts at garnering social support (“but they said no”). In the end, she turned to acting by self to solve her difficulty on her own (“I ended up using the book in the library because I couldn’t take it home”). Khadija’s narrative offers an example of why students may concentrate more on acting by self strategies in their
Worst Experience narratives. Namely, students’ worst experiences in the community college system may revolve around being denied the support they need to solve their problems.

Khadija’s narratives illustrate several trends in students’ use of resolution strategies across genres. Like many students, Khadija used more and varied resolution strategies in the Letters genre than in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. She wrote her longest and most elaborate narrative in the Letters genre, which allowed her to narrate a complex array of resolution strategies within the genre. Furthermore, she used resolution strategies to send a message to a specific relationship partner, which demonstrated the impact of audience on her enactment of meaning through plot. Since Khadija addressed her letter to her sister, she narrated resolution strategies to persuade her sister to join her at community college. She lacked this close audience in the Best and Worst Experience genres, which addressed a more impersonal audience of researchers. Thus, she lacked a social motivation to narrate as many resolution strategies in the Best and Worst Experience genres. Khadija’s differing use of resolution strategies across genres demonstrates how the different audience-purpose opportunities within genres result in different forms of meaning-making.

**Summary of Resolution Strategies.** Different genres elicited differing uses of resolution strategies from students. Students were more likely to use diverse resolution strategies in the Letters genre than in the Best and Worst Experience genres. This may be related to their narrating to an audience of close partners in the Letters genre, as opposed to the more impersonal audience of researchers in the Best and Worst Experience genres. It may also be related to how students structured their narratives across genres. Since students wrote more elaborate narratives in the Letters genre, they had more room to narrate resolution strategies to tie up loose plot ends.
and resolve difficulties. Diverse genres afford diverse author-purpose-audience opportunities, which in turn leads to diversity in students’ use of resolution strategies.

Furthermore, students favored narrating connecting strategies in Letters and Best Experience genres and acting by self strategies in Worst Experience genre. This aligns with their focus on relationship-related issues at the high points of the first two genres and on college experience issues at the high point of the last genre. In other words, students narrated more relationship-centered narratives in the Letters and Best Experience genres, while they narrated more experience- and individual-centered narratives in the Worst Experience genre. When students narrated to relationship partners or reviewed their best college experiences, they focused on the relationship support they have received from or given to others. However, when students narrated their worst college experiences, they focused on moments when they lacked support from others and had to resolve difficulties on their own. This will be discussed further in the section on scripts.

**Scripts: Different Information for Diverse Audiences**

After surveying the 312 narratives written by 104 students across the three genres (Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience), I conducted script analysis. As reviewed in Chapter 2 (methodology), script analysis takes a step back from the elements of the plot to review an author’s overall purpose in addressing a particular audience. Script analysis also involves identifying the combined plot-purpose that authors use to organize their narratives, including their use of issues at high points, resolution strategies, and the causal connections between plot elements (Daiute, 2010; 2014). My script analysis revealed six scripts that students used to organize their narratives and communicate their understanding of the community college system to particular audiences. The six scripts were distributed unevenly across the genres, with
one script appearing in all three genres, three scripts appearing in only two genres, and two scripts appearing in only one genre. The varying distribution of scripts demonstrates how students used genres as tools to interpret the complexities of college life.

**Distribution of Scripts across Total Narratives.** There were six scripts that students used to organize all 312 narratives. See table 3.5 for a list of frequency and percentages regarding often each script was used to organize narratives in the study.

*Table 3.5: Distribution of Scripts across Total Narratives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Scripts</th>
<th>Frequency (% of Total Narratives)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Experiences</td>
<td>128 (41.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing College Partners</td>
<td>65 (20.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching for Family and Friends</td>
<td>45 (14.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Changed Me</td>
<td>37 (11.86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving Problems</td>
<td>19 (6.09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countering the Genre</td>
<td>18 (5.77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Narratives</td>
<td>312 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common script was the communicating experiences script, which students used to organize 41.03% of all narratives. The next most common scripts were the analyzing college partners script (which organized 20.83% of narratives), the reaching for family and friends script (which organized 14.42% of narratives), and the college changed me script (which organized 11.86% of narratives). The least common scripts were the solving problems script (which organized 6.09% of narratives) and the countering genre script (which organized 5.77% of narratives). Each of these scripts are detailed later in this chapter.

**Scripts across Genres.** The six scripts were distributed unevenly across the genres. Students used the communicating experiences scripts to organize narratives in the Letters, Best
Experience, and Worst Experience genres. They used the analyzing college partners script to organize narratives only in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. They used the reaching for family and friends scripts to organize narratives only in the Letters genre. They used the college changed me script to organize narratives only in the Letters and Best Experience genres. They used the solving problems script to organize narratives only in the Worst Experience genre. Finally, they used the countering genre script only in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. Table 3.6 indicates students’ use of scripts across the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres.

Table 3.6: Distribution of Narrative Scripts across Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Scripts</th>
<th>Letters</th>
<th>Best Experience</th>
<th>Worst Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing College Partners</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching for Family and Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Changed Me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejecting the Genre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. X indicates that a script was used at least once within a genre.

As indicated by table 3.6, only one script was used to organize narratives in all three genres. Three scripts organized narratives in only two genres and two scripts organized narratives in only one genre. Students’ diverse use of scripts demonstrated that while there were similarities in script use across genres, diverse genres could be used to communicate distinct messages about community college based on the audience-purpose opportunities afforded by the genres. The next sections details the scripts students used to organize narratives and explains why they were located in particular genres.

Communicating Experiences Script. Students used the communicating experiences scripts to organize 128 of 312 or 41.03% of all narratives. With this script, students organized their narratives around their college experiences and focused on the college-related events they
witnessed or participated in. Specifically, they wrote narratives about their experiences and/or how they felt in response. Students sometimes used this script to elaborate on what they learned from their experiences. However, the focal point in this script is always students’ actual lived or witnessed experiences, which were elaborated on further through their enactment of plot. Furthermore, while using the communicating experiences script, students could implicitly align with or criticize the community college system.

Students used the communicating experiences script across all genres. Furthermore, they used this script as a tool to perform the genre in a literal way. For instance, when students used the communicating experiences script in the Letters genre, they wrote letters to loved ones that elaborated on their college experiences, thus answering the genre prompt of “What would you like to tell them about your experiences in community college?” in a straight-forward manner. Nicki’s letter narrative offers an example. She wrote:

“Dear Mom, I now understand why you wanted for me to finish school before having children. Taking care of my children and going to school has to be the most difficult thing that I’ve ever been through. [Being] a full-time mom, employee, student has me drained on a regular basis. I have yet to count how many mental breakdowns I’ve had but I made it [un]til the end of the semester mom. I was strong mom, I didn’t break. My degree is going to mean so much more because I did it no matter what. Blood sweat and tears mom. Love, Nicki.”

In her Letter, Nicki centered her narrative on her experiences in the community college system and elaborated on her emotional reactions to those same experiences. In doing so, she answered the genre prompt in a direct manner. Similarly, other students who used the communicating experiences script in the Letters genre focused on college events they
experienced, as well as difficulties and conflicts they endured. Like Nicki, they also frequently elaborated on the emotions they experienced while attending community college.

Meanwhile, students who used the communicating experience script to organize their Best Experience narratives focused on their pleasant college experiences and related positive emotions. For instance, Ayesha wrote the following for her Best Experience narrative:

“My best experience in college was when I received an “A” as a mid-term grade for my psychology class. I was extremely excited because it was a favorable topic that I enjoy learning about. So to have seen my hard work pay off made me feel proud.”

Ayesha centered her narrative on her college experiences of academic success and her joy in response to that experience. She also responded directly to the Best Experience genre prompt – which asked students to “write a story about their best experience in college so far – by focusing on her “peak” college experience. Other students who used the communicating experiences script to organize their Best Experience narratives focused on joyful experiences, occasionally narrating resolution strategies to explain how they fought for those experiences. Furthermore, students’ use of the communicating experiences script in the Best Experience genre leads them to align with the community college institution. Nicki, for instance, concluded her narrative with an ending (“So to have seen my hard work pay off made me feel proud”) that demonstrated her understanding of community college as an institution that rewards hard-working students.

Students who organized their Worst Experience narratives with the communicating experiences script wrote narratives that paralleled Ayesha’s narrative. However, instead of focusing on joyful experiences and positive emotions, they focused on difficult experiences and
related negative emotions. They One example comes from Jamal’s Worst Experience narrative. He wrote:

“My worst experience in college was getting an incomplete in my sociology class. I was very upset at myself being that I enjoyed that class but I ended up missing my chance to turn in my final assignment due to the fact that I was ill. It didn’t turn out great because it messes up my transcript and I’m still trying to change my grade.”

In his narrative, Jamal responded directly to the Worst Experience genre prompt – “write a story about your worst experience in community college so far” – by focusing on his greatest experience of difficulty. Like Nicki, Jamal’s narrative focused on his experience and the emotional fallout of that experience. His narrative demonstrates how students using the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre dwelled on their college difficulties and conflicts. Furthermore, his narrative demonstrates how students could use the communicating experiences script to criticize community college. Jamal’s narrative, for instance, implicitly criticizes the inflexibility of the college institution (“I’m still trying to change my grade”) in response to his illness. Thus, the genres that students used the communicating experiences script in also demonstrated their affiliation with or alienation from the community college institution.

Analyzing College Partners Script. Students used the analyzing college partners script in 65 of 312 or 20.83% of total narratives. They used the script to organize narratives that centered around and expanded on their relationships with other students, instructors, and staff in community college. With this script, students focused on how their college partners influenced their experiences, goals, and outcomes. Furthermore, when students used this script, they demonstrated a keen understanding of how their college relationships affected them over time.
According to Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory, they were making sense of how various institutional actors influenced them throughout their college life.

Students used the analyzing college partners script in the Best and Worst Experience genres because they focused on their relationships with college partners in those genres. The Letters genre did not elicit use of the social sensitivity in college script because students focused on relationships with family and friends outside college in that genre. Khadija’s narratives, introduced earlier in the section on resolution strategies, offer an example of how students focused on different relationships across genres. While she centered her Letter narrative on her connection with her sister, she focused her Best and Worst Experience narratives on the helpful and hurtful experiences she had with college staff and professors. In doing so, she demonstrated how some students chose to focus on institutional actors who helped them in the Best Experience genre and on institutional actors who hindered them in the Worst Experience genre. In the former, she focused on connections and in the latter, on conflicts.

Noah offered another example of the use of analyzing college partners scripts across the Best and Worst Experience genres in his narratives. In the Best Experience narrative, he wrote:

“*My best experience would have been when I was accepted by a group of my colleagues. I was invited by one classmate to accompany him to the cafeteria where he would introduce me to his friends. By the end of the day my number of associates increased exponentially.*”

Noah used the analyzing college partners script to demonstrate his understanding of the importance of forming relationships with his fellow students. He also demonstrated how he made use of the public space and social opportunities of the community college system. Meanwhile, his use of the analyzing college partners script in the Worst Experience genre allowed him to focus on conflicts with college partners and criticize the college institution. He wrote:
“The application process was grueling. The admissions office kept neglecting and forgetting about me. I almost had to force my way in here. Other than that my experiences were exceptional.”

Noah’s use of analyzing college partners scripts demonstrates his understanding of the double-edged nature of college relationships sword. Students like Khadija and Noah focused how institutional actors could both help and hinder them and showed as much through their enactment of plot and script. They demonstrated an interpretation of college relationships was connected to better academic performance over time. (See chapter 5 for more information).

**Reaching for Family and Friends Script.** Students used the reaching for friends and family script to communicate with a specific partner outside college – usually a family member but sometimes a close friend – in 45 of 312 or 14.42% of narratives. Furthermore, when students used this script, they addressed their partner with a message tailored toward them. Students either narrated to “sell” certain goals and experiences to their partner or to express love and gratitude for their partner’s support. Either way, use of the reaching for friends and family script demonstrated students’ understanding of how their relationships outside college could influence their experiences and outcomes within college. Students only used the reaching for family and friends script in the Letters genre, largely because students only addressed relationships outside college in that genre.

Fredrick’s Letter narrative serves as an example of how students could use the reaching for friends and family script to give advice to their partners. In doing so, they could shape the activities and goals of partners outside college with their college experiences. He wrote:

“Dear Lewis (my brother): stop slacking in high school because college is no joke. There are no make-ups here; once you fail - you fail. Missing class is something you don’t want to do
here because you miss loads of information, causing you to fail. Professors are direct and won’t hold your hand through your assignments, you have to go out of your way to learn the information. This means you have to put down the x-box controller and get to studying. College isn’t for little kids."

Fredrick used the reaching family and friends script as a tool to connect with his brother. He narrated with the implicit assumption that his relationship with his brother allowed him to understand his brother’s goals and activities. Following that, Fredrick’s use of the script allowed him to give advice that might lead his brother to better academic outcomes. Like Fredrick, students who used the reaching family and friend scripts often addressed their audience in an attempt to persuade them toward certain goals, activities and outcomes.

Sometimes students used the reaching for friends and family script to express love and gratitude toward their out-of-college partner. In doing so, they demonstrated their understanding of how social support outside of community college enabled performance within it. One example comes from Tamara’s Letter narrative. She wrote:

“Dear Grandma: Thank you for always being a positive force in my life. You always encouraged me to get ahead in life. How you educated me yourself and now I hope to show you that I will achieve my degree and take care of you. So far, my experience in community college has been fair. It’s had moments that were challenging, but I manage to work it. I especially like how the staff and instructors have been helpful. Wish me luck!”

Tamara used script as a tool to interpret her past and connect her family relationships to her ongoing experiences in college. She tied support from her grandmother (“you always encouraged me to get ahead of life”) to her academic goals (“I will achieve my degree”) and desired outcomes (“and take care of you”). Many students who used the reaching for family and
friends script also tied their achievement of goals to the support of partners outside the community college system.

**College Changed Me Script.** Students used the college changed me script to interpret how the community college system changed them for the better in 37 of 312 or 11.86% of narratives. Use of this script demonstrated students’ understanding of how community college impacted their development – not only academically but emotionally, mentally, and socially. Students used the college changed me script in the Letter and Best Experience genres because only those genres elicited information on students’ positive development in the community college system. One example comes from Tyrone’s letter. He wrote:

“Wendell, my annoying and always think he’s right brother. You said how by me going to community college will make me a slower person in life. How you are so wrong. I think this by far was the best decision I ever made. Yes I could of went to John Jay or even Southern, but the money I am able to save here and then transfer credits, well, it just doesn’t get better than that. I also get a chance to see and feel how its like to be in a college environment, the late night studying, the early morning lectures, and even the wide variety of food that I can get at the cafeteria. All of this I can use to survive in the real world, hard work, dedication, and a full stomach is all everyone needs to be successful in life. Also being part of the basketball team for this school, showed me how teamwork can make the dream work. You will never be good at something unless you spend long hours perfecting your craft. This also can be connected with school, everything I do I strive to be the best at, and all my teachers and people that I have encountered at X community college has been helping me along the way.”

Tyrone used the college changed me script as a tool to convince his brother that his decision to attend community college was the correct one. Tyrone’s narrative highlights how he
developed due to his experiences in the college system. Additionally, Tyrone used the script to connect his various goals (growing as a person, learning about college in general) to his relationships (particularly with the basketball team and professors) as he demonstrated his growth and progress. Many students who used the college changed me script also connected their goals to nurturing relationships with college partners. Another example comes from Ron’s Best Experience narrative. He wrote:

“My best experience so far is oral presentations I had to give over the time. I’ve been attending and getting all the progress accomplished from quiet shy boy to confident young man.”

Like Tyrone, Ron used the college changed me script to organize his narrative around his personal growth. Although he did not dwell directly on the impact of relationship partners (such as the professors who assigned him oral presentations), he still centered his narrative on his development. In doing so, he emphasized that taking part in the community college system allowed him to grow his identity. Students who used the college changed me script showed a similar understanding of community college as a system which allowed them to change for the better. In doing so, they aligned with goals and ideals of the community college institution.

**Solving Problems Script.** Students used the solving problems script to demonstrate their competency in resolving college difficulties in 19 of 312 or 6.09% of narratives. They used the script as a tool to demonstrate their savvy in navigating around and through obstacles to achieve goals. Students who used this script narrated plots that were optimistic insofar as they centered on resolvable difficulties that students overcame. This script appeared only within the Worst Experience genre because students only focused overwhelmingly on resolvable difficulties within the genre. One example comes from Paul, who narrated the following:
“When I was given my first research paper, I had no idea how I can write 7 pages including resources. But then I figure that the topic wasn’t hard and that I thought about solutions to the situation before.”

Paul’s narrative focused on how he solved an academic difficulty through his actions. His narrative demonstrated his interpretation of community college as a system that could present him with great challenges. However, like other students who used the solving problems script, he also made sense of his capacity to resolve the difficulties and conflicts he encountered. In doing so, he emphasized his sense of self-efficacy within the community college system.

**Countering Genre Script.** Students used the countering genre script to reject or push back against the assumptions of the Best Experience and Worst Experience genre in 18 of 312 or 5.77% of narratives. In doing so, they revealed their sense of affiliation with or alienation from the community college system. When students used the countering genre script in the Best Experience genre, they expressed lack of good college experiences and criticized the opportunities available within it. Meanwhile, when students used the countering genre script in the Worst Experience genre, they expressed optimism about the possibility of negative college experiences and aligned with the affordances of the community college system. Students did not use the countering genre script in the Letters narrative, likely because it would be difficult to counter the idea of writing a letter. These differences demonstrate how diverse genres afford students different opportunities to interpret the community college system.

One example of the countering genre script in the Best Experience genre comes from Tom, who was introduced at the start of the chapter. He wrote:

“I feel like I have not yet experienced that great moment in college. I’m pretty much just making it day by day. So that I can keep myself and grades on point on top.”
As is characteristic for use of this script, Tom denied having a “great moment” to report. Instead, he characterized community college as an institution he could endure only by focusing on his goals (“grades on point on top”). In general, when students used the countering genre script in the Best Experience genre, they denied having any great or positive experiences in community college. Instead, they focused more on reaching goals (“So that I can keep myself and grades on point of top”) or pushed back against the expectations of the genre prompt (“I feel I have not yet experienced that great moment in college”). Many students used the countering genre script to declare that there was nothing positive about their particular college institution or community colleges in general.

Students who used the countering genre script in the Worst Experience narrative demonstrated more alignment with and positivity regarding the community college system. These students denied that they experienced serious difficulties that blocked their goals in community college. One example of the use of this script comes from Maria. She narrated:

“For all my three years here at X Community College, I’ll have to say that I haven’t experience anything that I can call a worst experience. This will be my last semester here and I appreciate all hardships as a student.”

Maria used the countering genre script to deny experiencing difficulties that fulfilled the “worst experience” genre prompt, as was typical for users of this script. Generally, students using the countering genre script in the Worst Experience genre reported only positive experiences in community college. They demonstrated far more positivity about the community college system than students who used the countering genre script in the Best Experience genre.

**Summary of Scripts.** Students organized their narratives using several scripts that demonstrated their differing interpretations of the community college system. Additionally,
differences in script use across genres revealed that students used genres as tools to communicate to different audiences in differing ways and for differing purposes. For instance, in the Letters genre, students used the reaching for family and friends script to focus on how relationship partners outside college could influence their goals and outcomes within college. However, when students focused on relationships in the Best and Worst Experience narratives, they used the analyzing college partners script to demonstrate their understanding of how institutional actors (such as college staff and instructors) and other students could affect college life. Thus, students’ use of different scripts across genres demonstrated differences in their complex meaning-making processes across genres.

Additionally, differences in how students used scripts within each genre revealed that there was no “characteristic” way for students to narrate and interpret the community college system. Rather, differing students came to varied understandings of community college with their use of scripts. For instance, within the Worst Experience genre, some students used the communicating experiences script to expand on their most unpleasant experiences in community college. Others used the analyzing college partners script to focus on how institutional actors could harm their academic progress. Still others used the solving problems script to demonstrate their competence in dealing with college difficulties and conflicts. A small minority used the countering genre script to align with the college institution and deny having had any unpleasant experiences. Thus, even within genres, there were stark differences in how different students made sense of and aligned with their goals and relationship partners within the community college system. These differences will be explored further in the next chapter, which looks at how academically successful and unsuccessful students used scripts across genres.

Summary and Implications
Students used genres as cultural tools to express complex and critical interpretations of the community college system, including their goals, relationships and experiences within the system. While narrating with diverse genres, students had the means to express the complexity of their orientations to their lives within community college because each genre afforded a different set of social relationships and purposes. The Letters genre gave students the chance to directly interact with a specific partner and demonstrate their narrating and problem-solving skills to said partners. Thus, within their letters, students often focused on issues of relationships, solved difficulties and conflicts with resolution strategies (especially connecting strategies), and organized with scripts that demonstrated the importance of their relationships.

Meanwhile, the Best Experience genre invited students to connect with the community college system. Within that genre, students often focused on their college relationships and goals in order to align with and express gratitude toward the college institution. In contrast, the Worst Experience genre freed those same students from implicit expectations that they were required to praise the community college institution. Thus, students often (though not always) elaborated on difficult college experiences and used the genre to criticize and demonstrate alienation toward the college institution. These patterns reveal that community college students used genres as tools to address the complexities of community college. These findings echo those within Daiute and Krensike’s (2016) earlier study on the narratives of community college students.

Furthermore, different students narrated plots and scripts within genres that reflected on their development and interpretations of community college in diverse ways. Some students (like Luisa, introduced at the start of the chapter) consistently narrated in ways that demonstrated more affiliation with the community college system. Other students (like Tom, also introduced at the start of the chapter) consistently narrated in ways that demonstrated more alienation from
college goals, partners and the overall system. There was no “characteristic” way in which students narrated within or across the different genres. Rather, students used diverse genres to interpret their goals, relationships and experiences in the college system in diverse ways – ways that could be linked to academic outcomes over time.

**Issues at High Point across Genres.** Students focused on different issues at high points across genres. Often, students focused on nurturing relationships with family and friends outside college in the Letters genre, while they focused on helpful relationships with institutional actors and others students in the Best Experience genre. Meanwhile, they often focused on difficult college experiences at the high points of their Worst Experience narratives. However, 27% of high points in the Worst Experience genre focused on relationships, often with institutional actors (college staff and instructors) as adversarial partners. This pattern demonstrates that students often understood relationships as pivotal to their progress in community college.

**Resolution Strategies across Genres.** Students’ use of resolution strategies differed across genre, demonstrating that how students displayed their skill at building complex narratives and solving difficulties partially reflected their imagined audience. Students narrated more resolution strategies in the Letter genre (267 total) compared to the Best Experience (31 total) and Worst Experience (39 total) genres. Students deliberately showcased their narrating and problem solving skills in their Letters to demonstrate their capabilities, give reassurance, and/or serve as mentors to their partners. Meanwhile, they likely narrated fewer resolution strategies in the Best and Worst Experience genres because they lacked a familiar audience to demonstrate their problem-solving prowess to. Thus, the audience that students addressed their narratives to influenced their use of resolution strategies. This again demonstrates the importance of giving people the chance to write within diverse genres that address varied audiences.
Connecting Strategies. Connecting strategies were the most common resolution strategies used across all narratives, though who students connected with changed from genre to genre. In the Letters genre, students were often connected to family and friends. However, in the Best and Worst Experience genres, students narrowed in on support from college partners. These differences reveal the complexity with which students narrated the impact of relationships on their college experiences. Students used different genres to come to different understandings of how various relationships shaped their development and influenced their progress in community college. They used the Letters genre to take a more “global” view of how their relationships outside the community college system could shape their progress within it, and vice versa. Meanwhile, students used the Best and Worst Experience genres to focus more on on-campus relationships that helped them overcome difficulties and conflicts that blocked their goals.

Scripts across Genres. Students used scripts as cultural tools to communicate different messages regarding community college to different audiences. Students’ differing patterns of script use across genres also demonstrated differences in how they used genres to interpret the community college system. For instance, when student used the communicating experiences script in the Best Experience genre, they made sense of their positive and even joyful experiences in community college. However, when they used the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre, they focused on their difficult experiences and negative emotions in community college. There was variability across genres (as students used different scripts across genres explore different facets of college) and within genres (as students either fulfilled or defied the “expectations” of the genre through their use of scripts).

Relationship-Centered Scripts. Students often, though not always, used relationship-centered scripts to organize their understanding of the community college system. For instance,
they used the analyzing college partners script in the Best and Worst Experience genres to express how college partners could both help and hinder their progress in community college. Students like Luisa used the analyzing college partners script in the Best Experience genre to elaborate on the social support they received from college partners. However, when students use the same script in the Worst Experience genre, they investigated the corrosive results of conflicts with those same partners. The next two chapters will discuss further links between the analyzing college partners script and academic performance.

Furthermore, students used the reaching for family and friends script to demonstrate their understanding of how their partners outside of college impacted their growth and experiences within college. In using that script, students often went beyond examining how their partners impacted them to examining how they influenced the goals and outcomes of their partners. Additionally, they often wrote their narratives in light of how they wished to be viewed (as a role model, success story, or cautionary tale) by their audience. Students’ use of script to organize narratives depended greatly on their audience and goals for interaction.

**Goal-Centered Scripts.** The remaining four scripts demonstrated different ways in which students engaged with their goals in college. The most common script, the communicating experiences script, allowed students to share their perspectives on success and failure within the community college system. When students used the communicating experiences script in the Best Experience genre, they often focused on their achievement of implicit or explicit goals. Ayesha used the communicating experiences script to revel in the joy she felt after doing well in her psychology class. However, when students used the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre, they often focused on their failure to achieve implicit or explicit goals. Jamal used the communicating experiences script to critically evaluate his academic failure.
Thus, students’ use of the communicating experiences script across the Best and Worst Experience genre often revealed their understanding of college success and failure. It also demonstrated their implicit alignment with or criticism of the community college system.

Students’ use of the college changed me and solving problems scripts also demonstrated their understanding of goal-directed success in community college. When students used the college changed me script in the Letters and Best Experience genres, they aligned with the community college system in recognition of how the system helped them reach implicit developmental goals. Furthermore, when they used the solving problems script in the Worst Experience genre, they demonstrated their competency and resiliency in the face of college difficulty. Though students rarely posited explicit goals in narratives organized with the college changed me and solving problems scripts, they used these scripts to demonstrate how they navigated toward goals.

The next two result chapters will expand on these findings to explore how students’ use of plot, script, and genres to organize narratives and interpret the community college system relate to and predict their academic outcomes.
Chapter 4: How More and Less Academically Successful Students Narrate Community College

This chapter answers the second research question: how do students who are more and less academically successful use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences in and integrate into the community college system? This chapter compares plot and script analyses results for students who have a higher-than-average and lower-than-average GPAs within the present sample to consider whether and how those different groups of students made sense of their college lives.

Hypotheses. I hypothesized that more academically successful students would narrate differently across genres compared to less successful students. High achieving students were expected to link their relationships with important partners to their goals and demonstrate greater integration into the college institution. They would narrate about their college experiences in ways that demonstrate greater affiliation to the community college institution. Specifically, they would narrate more relationship issues at plot high points and make greater use of relationship-related scripts such as analyzing college partners and reaching for family and friends. I also expected that they would narrate more resolution strategies, especially connecting strategies, across all genres. This would demonstrate their ability to find affordances in the community college system, elicit social support from college partners, and narrate in ways that reflect the writing and problem-solving skills taught by the college institution.

Meanwhile, I expected that less successful students would narrate in ways that demonstrate greater alienation from the community college system, partly because they would find fewer opportunities and affordances. They would also demonstrate greater alienation from college partners. They would narrate fewer relationship issues at high point issues and be less
likely to use relationship-related scripts such as analyzing college partners and reaching for family and friends. They would also be less likely to use the college changed me script, as they would have less cause to reflect on how community college helped them develop. I also expected them to narrate fewer resolution strategies, especially connecting strategies, across all genres. Their lesser use of resolution strategies would demonstrate their inability to find affordances in college, elicit support from college partners, and narrate complex plots that reflect the lessons of community college.

Major Results: More and Less Successful Students Narrate Differently

Academically successful students with higher year-end GPA narrated differently across genres compared to less successful students with lower year-end GPA. Compared to less successful students, more successful students wrote more words in the Letters genre, centered narratives more often on relationship issues in the Best and Worst Experience genres, narrated more resolution strategies in total and in the Letters and Best Experiences genres, narrated more connecting over acting by self strategies across all genres, and organized narratives more often with the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts. Meanwhile, less successful students wrote fewer words in the Letters genre, centered narratives left often on relationship issues in the Letters genre, narrated fewer resolution strategies in total and in general, narrated more acting by self over connecting strategies, and organized narratives more often with the communicating experiences script. In summary, successful students narrated in ways that suggested they were more attuned to and received greater support from college partners, found more opportunities and affordances in the college system, and wrote more complex narratives that reflected the lessons of the college institution.
Tyrone and Kayla offer compelling examples of the differences between more and less successful students. Tyrone was an academically successful student with a year-end GPA of 3.43. Compared to most other students in community college, Tyrone excelled in his classes. His ability to navigate the community college system to reach his academic goals was conveyed through his narratives. For instance, in the Letters genre, Tyrone wrote:

“Wendell, my annoying and always think he’s right brother. You said how by me going to community college will make me a slower person in life. How you are so wrong, I think this by far was the best decision I ever made. Yes I could of went to John Jay or even Southern, but the money I am able to save here and then transfer credits, well it just doesn’t get better than that. I also get a chance to see and feel how it’s like to be in a college environment, the late night studying, the early morning lectures, and even the wide variety of food, that I can get at the cafeteria. All of this I can use to survive in the real world, hard work, dedication, and a full stomach is all everyone needs to be successful in life. Also being a part of the basketball team for this school, showed me how team work can make the dream work. You will never be good at something unless you practice long hours and perfecting your craft. This also can be connected with school, everything I do I strive to be the best at it, and all of my teachers and people that I have encountered at X Community College has been helping me along the way.”

Tyrone’s use of various resolution strategies (especially connecting strategies) and the reaching for family and friends script demonstrated his optimistic perspective on community college. Within his narrative, Tyrone demonstrated his ability to navigate effectively through the college institution to reach his goals and develop his skills. Furthermore, while sharing his experiences with his brother, Tyrone aligned with his college institution and demonstrated his ability to develop nurturing relationships with college partners. His Best and Worst Experience
narratives are explored later in the chapter and also demonstrate his understanding of best practices within the community college system.

This is in stark contrast to the Letter narrative of Kayla, a student who had a year-end GPA of 0. She dropped out of community college within her first semester of enrolling and her Letters narrative gives ample explanation for the event. She wrote:

“Dear Maddox (son), I promise to never touch your college account so that I know you’ll go to a better college than I did. X Community College isn’t for everyone. Some professors you could not get a hold and when you do they brush off your concerns. Sincerely, Mom.”

Unlike Tyrone, Kayla did not narrate to demonstrate her alignment with the college institution or understanding of best practices within it. Rather, she narrated to warn her son against attending her community college because she herself could not find social support or opportunities for development within it. Her narrative showcased her inability to find the social support or affordances that Tyrone used to navigate community college. That inability likely contributed to Kayla dropping out after only one semester. Her Best and Worst Experience narratives are reviewed later in the chapter and also demonstrate her inability to carve a space for herself in community college.

In summary, successful students like Tyrone narrated in ways that suggested that they affiliated more with the college institution, found more opportunities in the community college system, better understood how their partners affected their outcomes, and created more complex narratives that reflected the lessons of higher education. Unsuccessful students like Kayla narrated in ways that suggested their disinterest in or inability to navigate the community college system, find support from college partners, and narrate in college-appropriate ways. Academic
success was related to the ways in which students used narratives as cultural tools to mediate their relationship with the college institution and navigate the college system.

**Methodology.** As presented in Chapter 2 (methodology), I created two groups of students to investigate differences in how more and less successful students narrated college experiences. Based on the year-end GPA ($M = 2.65, SD = .92$), I placed 58 students in the more successful group as they had higher-than-average GPA. Meanwhile, I placed 45 students in the less successful group as they had lower-than-average GPA. I then coded individual participants as being either more or less successful in Atlas.ti so that their narrative data could be compared. Below are the differences in how more and less successful students narrated to make sense of their experiences in community college.

**Comparing Narrative Length: More Successful Students Narrate Longer Letters**

Before I began comparing more and less successful students’ use of plot elements or scripts within narratives, I analyzed the number of words each student group wrote across genres and in total. I discovered that in the Letters genre, more successful students wrote an average of 101.76 words ($SD = 41.96$) while less successful students wrote an average of 82.38 words ($SD = 44.30$). In the Best Experience genre, more students wrote an average of 45.24 words ($SD = 23.39$) while less successful students wrote an average of 40.04 words ($SD = 19.99$). In the Worst Experience genre, more students wrote an average of 43.83 words ($SD = 23.89$) while less successful students wrote an average of 41.71 words ($SD = 25.29$). Finally, more successful students wrote an average of 190.83 ($SD = 64.41$) in total while less successful students wrote an average of 164.13 words ($SD = 69.79$) in total. On average, more successful students wrote longer narratives within each genre and in total compared to less successful students.
I also ran a series of independent samples t-tests to discover if more successful students wrote significantly longer narratives in each genre and in total, compared to less successful students. There were no significant differences in how many words more and less students wrote in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. However, more successful students wrote significantly more words in the Letters genre than did less successful students, $t(101) = -2.269, p < .05$. Furthermore, more successful students wrote significantly more words in total than did less successful students, $t(101) = -2.011, p < .05$. These findings indicate that more successful students used the Letters genre for more extended and detailed engagement with the community college and home activity meaning systems, compared to less successful students. More successful students’ lengthier letter narratives may demonstrate their greater understanding of how the college and home systems interact to influence their college lives.

I was also curious as to the differences in plot structure that might relate to differences in total word count between more and less successful students. To compare not only how much but how the two student groups wrote, I began a new analysis in Atlas.ti. I used the Codes – Primary Documents Table tool under the Analysis tab to compare students’ use of plot elements. As stated in chapter 2 (methodology), each narrative was coded with one high point, which served as the focal or turning point of the narrative. Narratives could also be coded as containing initiating actions (which begin the story), complicating actions (which add suspense to the story and introduce conflicts and difficulties), resolution strategies (which solve conflicts and problems and tie up loose ends), and endings (which bring a definite resolution to the story). I hypothesized that more and less successful students might differ in how they ordered plot within their narratives, thus explaining differences in word count.
I discovered that in total, more and less successful students were similar in their use of plot elements outside of resolution strategies. More successful students narrated an average of 3.66 resolution strategies while less successful students narrated an average of 2.84 resolution strategies. (The full implications of more and less successful students’ differing use of resolution strategy will be explored further in this chapter). These differences were large in comparison to the smaller differences in more and less successful students’ use of other plot elements.

For instance, successful students used a total of 159 initiating actions across the three genres. On average, each student used 2.74 initiating actions. Similarly, less successful students used 131 initiating actions across the genres. On average, each student used 2.91 initiating actions. Thus, there was only a difference of only 0.17 initiating actions used per person between more and less successful students.

In addition, successful students used 287 complicating actions across genres. On average, they used 4.94 complicating actions per student. Less successful students used 224 complicating actions across all genres. On average, they used 4.97 complicating actions per student. Thus, there was only a difference of 0.03 complicating actions used per person between more and less successful students.

Finally, more successful students used 54 endings across all genres. On average, they narrated 0.93 endings per student. Less successful students narrated 35 endings across all genres. On average, they narrated 0.77 endings per student. Thus, there was only a difference of 0.16 endings used per person between more and less successful students.

In summary, even if the less successful students wrote shorter narratives in general, the plot analyses indicated that they used full plot structures comparable to those of more successful students. Less successful students were almost as likely as more successful students to include
initiating actions, complicating actions, and endings within their narratives. However, less successful students narrated fewer resolution strategies than more successful students, which would likely account for their diminished word count in comparison. These findings suggest that less successful students write with fewer words because they utilize fewer resolution strategies within their total narratives. The implications of less successful students’ lesser use of resolution strategies is explored further in the chapter.

**Comparing High Points: Students Narrate Similar Tensions**

More and less successful students narrated similar issues at narrative high points across genres. I used chi-square analyses to see if there were differences in how more and less successful students narrated issues at high points and found no significant differences in the tensions students placed at the center of their narratives.

More and less successful students centered their narratives on similar issues, with minor variations across genre. See table 4.1 for the frequency and percentages of high point issues across genres for more and less successful students. There were a few differences between the student groups. For instance, compared to less successful students, successful students narrated more relationship issues in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres. Furthermore, they narrated more college experience and developing issues in the Letters genre. Meanwhile, compared to more successful students, less successful students narrated more relationship issues in the Letters genre and more college experience issues in the Best Experience and Worst Experience genres.
Table 4.1: Issues at High Points for More and Less Academically Successful Students across Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues at High Points</th>
<th>Less Success (% Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% Total)</th>
<th>Less Success (% Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% Total)</th>
<th>Less Success (% Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Best Experience</td>
<td>Worst Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>22 (48.89%)</td>
<td>22 (37.93%)</td>
<td>18 (40%)</td>
<td>30 (51.72%)</td>
<td>11 (24.44%)</td>
<td>17 (29.31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Experience</td>
<td>8 (17.78%)</td>
<td>14 (24.14%)</td>
<td>10 (22.22%)</td>
<td>9 (15.52%)</td>
<td>27 (60%)</td>
<td>25 (43.10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>10 (22.22%)</td>
<td>11 (18.97%)</td>
<td>10 (22.22%)</td>
<td>11 (18.97%)</td>
<td>6 (13.33%)</td>
<td>14 (24.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>5 (11.11%)</td>
<td>11 (18.97%)</td>
<td>7 (15.56%)</td>
<td>8 (13.79%)</td>
<td>1 (2.22%)</td>
<td>2 (3.45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, a chi-square test of independence between students’ success status (more and less successful) and use of high point issues (college experience, developing, emotions, and relationships) across genres found no significant differences. In other words, there were no statistically significant differences in the issues that more or less successful students placed at the climax or turning point of their narratives.

Later plot and script analysis revealed that more successful students were more likely to use connecting resolution strategies and to use the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts across genres. Thus, more successful students focused more on the impact of college partners in the Best and Worst Experience genre and were more sensitive to how they had changed due to the community college system. However, the tensions that more and less successful students centered their narratives around were quite similar. Students differed more in their use of resolution strategies to solve difficulties and conflict and in the scripts they organized narratives with.

Comparing Resolution Strategies: Connecting versus Acting by Self
Compared to unsuccessful students, successful students narrated more resolution strategies and connecting strategies in particular, in total and across all genres. I used chi-square analyses to discover differences in how often and what type of resolution strategies more and less successful students narrated across genres. I discovered that more successful students were more likely to narrate resolution strategies than less successful students across all narratives. More successful students also relied more on connecting strategies while less successful students relied more on acting by self strategies.

Successful students like Tyrone (introduced at the start of the chapter) narrated more resolution strategies in general and connecting strategies in particular compared to less successful students like Kayla. These findings could signal successful students’ sensitivity toward the impact of their relationship partners, as well as their ability to elicit support from partners inside and outside of college. Meanwhile, less successful students demonstrated a lesser ability to elicit social support from important partners and a greater sense of alienation from the college institution.

**Total Resolution Strategies.** I compared how more and less successful students narrated resolution strategies across all narratives with a comparison of plot analysis results. Table 4.2 lists the frequency and percentages of resolution strategy use across all narratives for more and less successful students.
Table 4.2: Total Use of Resolution Strategies for More and Less Academically Successful Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Strategy Type</th>
<th>Less Successful (% of Total)</th>
<th>More Successful (% of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>48 (37.5%)</td>
<td>102 (48.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Reframing</td>
<td>40 (31.25%)</td>
<td>68 (32.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>27 (21.09%)</td>
<td>16 (7.55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical</td>
<td>13 (10.16%)</td>
<td>26 (12.26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Strategies</td>
<td>128 (100%)</td>
<td>212 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies Per Student</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square.</td>
<td>13.946</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ p < .01 \]

On average, successful students narrated 3.66 resolution strategies per student. Less successful students narrated an average of 2.84 resolution strategies per student. Thus, successful students like Tyrone generally narrated more resolution strategies compared to less successful students like Kayla. In doing so, successful students demonstrated their ability to narrate complex plots that utilize the problem-solving skills taught by community colleges in first-year seminars and other courses.

Furthermore, more and less successful students used different types of resolution strategies to resolve conflicts in their narratives. I conducted a chi-square test of independence and found a significant association between students’ success status (more or less successful) and use of resolution strategies (connecting, psychological reframing, acting by self, and being practical), \( \chi^2(3) = 13.946, p < .01 \). The association was small (Cohen, 1988), Cramer’s V = .203. More successful used more connecting strategies and less acting by self strategies than expected.
Less successful students used more acting by self strategies and fewer connecting strategies than expected. In other words, more successful students like Tyrone narrated more reliance on social support while less successful students like Kayla relied on themselves to deal with difficulties.

Successful students like Tyrone used more connecting strategies to demonstrate how they used social support to resolve potential difficulties and conflicts. As an example, in his Letters narrative, Tyrone connected with his fellow students (“being a part of the basketball team for this school showed me how team work can make the dream work”) and college instructors (“and all the teachers… have been helping me along the way”). Through their use of connecting strategies, successful students demonstrated their awareness of the impact of college partners and their ability to elicit social support from said partners. This finding echoed Carrasquillo’s (2014) research, which investigated how high-achieving community students used supportive college instructors and staff as important mentors in the community college system. Students may rely on support from college partners to achieve college success and reach their goals.

Meanwhile, less successful students like Kayla relied more on acting by self strategies to solve difficulties on their own. This might be related to their inability to garner effective social support in community college. For instance, Kayla noted how she was rejected by potential partners (“some professors you could not get a hold and when you do they brush off your concerns”) when she sought their help. Her inability to elicit support from her instructors might have lead to her attempting to solve college difficulties on her own, which in turn might be connected to her poor academic performance. Previous qualitative research on community college students often emphasized the importance of garnering and using social support (Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2014). Students who cannot manage as much might try to solve difficulties on their own but flounder through their lack of experience with the college system.
Strategies across Genres. I compared how more and less successful students narrated resolution strategies across genres with a comparison of plot analysis results. Table 4.3 lists the frequency and percentages of resolution strategy use across genres for more and less successful students. On average, more successful students narrated more resolution strategies in the Letters and Best Experience genres. However, on average, less successful students narrated slightly more resolution strategies in the Worst Experience genre. Furthermore, more and less successful students narrated different types of resolution strategies across genres. As in the total analysis, more successful students narrated more connecting strategies across all genres while less successful students narrated more acting by self strategies across all genres. More successful students like Tyrone narrated more on soliciting the support of social partners while less successful students like Kayla often focused on resolving difficulties without outside help.

Table 4.3: Resolution Strategies for More and Less Successful Academically Students across Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Strategy Type</th>
<th>Less Success (% of Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% of Total)</th>
<th>Less Success (% of Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% of Total)</th>
<th>Less Success (% of Total)</th>
<th>More Success (% of Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Best Experience</td>
<td>Worst Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>41 (41%)</td>
<td>83 (48.82%)</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td>13 (61.90%)</td>
<td>2 (11.11%)</td>
<td>6 (28.57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Reframing</td>
<td>34 (34%)</td>
<td>54 (31.76%)</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
<td>7 (33.33%)</td>
<td>3 (16.67%)</td>
<td>7 (33.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>13 (13%)</td>
<td>8 (4.71%)</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>1 (4.76%)</td>
<td>12 (66.67%)</td>
<td>7 (33.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical</td>
<td>12 (12%)</td>
<td>25 (14.71%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (5.55%)</td>
<td>1 (4.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Strategies</td>
<td>100 (100%)</td>
<td>170 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (100%)</td>
<td>21 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>21 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies Per Student</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies in the Letters Genre. More successful students generated 170 resolution strategies in the Letters genre, writing an average of 2.93 strategies per narrative. Meanwhile, less successful students generated 100 resolution strategies in the Letters genre, producing an average of 2.22 strategies per narrative. Therefore, on average, high GPA students narrated .71 more resolution strategies per Letters narrative compared to low GPA students. Furthermore, more successful students narrated more connecting strategies while less successful students narrated more acting by self strategies. These differences can be seen in the Letters narratives of Tyrone and Kayla, given Tyrone’s prolific use of resolution strategies and Kayla’s lack thereof.

Strategies in the Best Experience Genre. More successful students generated 21 resolution strategies in the Best Experiences genre, writing an average of .36 strategies per narrative. Less successful students narrated 10 resolution strategies in the genre, writing an average of 0.22 strategies per narrative. On average, more successful students narrated .14 more resolution strategies per Best Experience narrative compared to less successful students. Additionally, more successful students narrated more connecting strategies while less successful students narrated more acting by self strategies. These differences can be seen in Tyrone and Kayla’s Best Experience narratives. Tyrone wrote the following. His resolution strategies are underlined.

“My best experience in college is when me and my friend Turner decided to make a study group. This study group consisted of bright students that were doing very well in their classes. I considered myself an average student, so by being around them, I wanted to be better. They were able to show me good study habits, and a few tips on being successful in college. In little to no time I started to see an increase in my GPA.”
In his narrative, Tyrone used connecting strategies to demonstrate his ability to target, elicit and use the guidance of his student peers to reach his goals. Meanwhile, Kayla wrote the following Best Experience narrative:

“I do not have a good or best college experience yet!”

Her lack of resolution strategies demonstrates her alienation from the community college system as well as her inability to narrate in college-appropriate ways. Furthermore, her enactment of plot might relate to and predict her low GPA at the end of the school year. (The next results chapter revisits this assumption).

**Strategies in the Worst Experience Genre.** The Worst Experience genre stood out as the only genre in which less successful students wrote more resolution strategies than successful students. More successful students generated 21 resolution strategies in the Worst Experiences genre, writing an average of .36 strategies per narrative. Less successful students narrated 18 resolution strategies in the genre, writing an average of 0.40 strategies per narrative. Thus, less successful students narrated .04 more resolution strategies per Worst Experience narrative compared to more successful students.

In writing comparatively more resolution strategies in the Worst Experience genre than in the Best Experience genre, less successful students might have been signaling their attempts to resolve their acute college difficulties. However, their continued reliance on acting by self strategies over connecting strategies might have foiled their attempts at achieving academic success. For instance, Kayla wrote the following narrative in the Worst Experience genre. Note that her narrative’s resolution strategy is highlighted.

“Being in PSY 11 has been the most challenging experience in college because it’s like a foreign language. I am study[ing] more to get through this.”
In her narrative, Kayla used a acting by self strategy to resolve the main tension of her plot – her difficulty in understanding her PSY 11 (introduction to psychology) course. However, given her end-of-the-year GPA, she did not succeed in her goal of doing well in the course. This might be connected to her inability to garner support from her instructors, as detailed in her Letters narrative. Like Kayla, other academically unsuccessful students may also attempt to resolve difficulties through acting by self strategies. However, they might fail due to their lack of social support and inexperience in dealing with difficulties in the community college system. (Tyrone’s Worst Experience narrative is discussed in the section on scripts, as it is more relevant there).

**Summary of Resolution Strategy Use.** In summary, more and less successful students used resolution strategies differently across genres to solve difficulties and conflicts. In total, more successful students narrated significantly more resolution strategies compared to less successful students. Furthermore, across all genres, successful students used more connecting resolution strategies, relying on social support from others to resolve conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose plot ends. However, less successful students narrated more acting by self strategies to cope with college difficulties on their own.

When more successful students like Tyrone narrate connecting strategies, they demonstrate their ability to locate and elicit support offered by important college partners. However, less successful students may use acting by self strategies because they are unable to elicit support from others. Students like Kayla may feel isolated from potential partners in the community college system and thus, might rely on themselves to solve their difficulties. However, their inexperience in and inability to receive support from college partners might lead
them to worse academic outcomes over time. Thus, being alienated from potential partners in the community college system may signal academic distress in the present or future.

**Comparing Scripts: Differing Levels of Social Sensitivity**

More successful students were more likely to use the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts, while less successful students were more likely to use the communicating experiences script. Furthermore, these differences appeared across all genres. Thus, successful students like Tyrone generally narrated in ways that demonstrated greater awareness of how their college partners and the community college system impacted their life. Less successful students like Kyla were more likely to directly answer genre prompts and were less likely to reflect on the impact of college partners or on their personal development. More and less successful students used scripts in ways that demonstrated differences in how they interpreted their relationships, development, and experiences within the college system.

**Differences in Total Scripts.** I compared how more and less successful students used scripts within all narratives through a juxtaposition of script analysis results. Table 4.4 lists the frequency and percentages of script use within all narratives for more and less successful students.
Table 4.4: Differences in Total Scripts for More and Less Academically Successful Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripts</th>
<th>Less Successful</th>
<th>More Successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Experiences</td>
<td>67 (49.63%)</td>
<td>60 (34.48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing College Partners</td>
<td>19 (14.07%)</td>
<td>44 (25.29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching for Family and Friends</td>
<td>21 (15.56%)</td>
<td>24 (13.79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Changed Me</td>
<td>11 (8.15%)</td>
<td>26 (14.94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving Problems</td>
<td>8 (5.93%)</td>
<td>11 (6.32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejecting Genre</td>
<td>9 (6.67%)</td>
<td>9 (5.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Use of Scripts for GPA Group</strong></td>
<td>135 (100%)</td>
<td>174 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square.</td>
<td>12.335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both more and less successful students were most likely to use the communicating experiences script to organize narratives. However, successful students like Tyrone narrated more often with the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts than less successful students like Kayla. For instance, Tyrone used analyzing college partners scripts in both his Best Experience and Worst Experience genres to highlight the impact of diverse college partners (including other students and the basketball coach). Meanwhile, Kayla focused more on her college experiences, such as having difficulty with her psychology class.

To discover further differences, I conducted a chi-square test of independence between students’ success status (more or less successful) and scripts (communicating experiences, analyzing college partners, reaching for family and friends, college changed me, solving problems, or rejecting genre). For the following analysis, more than 80% of all the expected cell
frequencies were 5 or greater. I found a significant association between students’ success status and script use, $\chi^2(5) = 12.335, p = .030$. The association was small (Cohen, 1988), Cramer’s $V = .200$. More successful students were more likely to use the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts and less likely to use the communicating experiences scripts than expected. Less successful students were more likely to use the communicating experiences script and less likely to use the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts than expected.

In summary, more academically successful students used scripts differently than less successful students. More successful students like Tyrone were more likely to use scripts to emphasize the importance of college partners, demonstrating greater social sensitivity in the college system. They were also more focused on how community college shaped their development over time, showing more alignment with the college system. Less successful students like Kayla were more likely to use scripts that directly answered genre prompts. They demonstrated less social sensitivity regarding college partners and less reflection on how community college changed them. In doing so, less successful students may demonstrate less critical analysis on the meaning or impact of the college system. Instead, their narratives often demonstrate a straight-forward understanding of community college as a system in which they go through experiences. This perspective may not dive “beneath the surface” of genre prompts to delve into the complexities and developmental possibilities of the college institution.

**Differences in Scripts across Genres.** I compared how more and less successful students used scripts across genres with a juxtaposition of script analysis results. Table 4.5 lists the frequency and percentages of script use across genres for more and less successful students.
### Table 4.5: Differences in Scripts across Genres for More and Less Academically Successful Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripts</th>
<th>Less Successful</th>
<th>More Successful</th>
<th>Less Successful</th>
<th>More Successful</th>
<th>Less Successful</th>
<th>More Successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(% of Total)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
<td><strong>Letters</strong></td>
<td><strong>Best Experience</strong></td>
<td><strong>Worst Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Experiences</td>
<td>21 (46.67%)</td>
<td>20 (34.48%)</td>
<td>24 (53.33%)</td>
<td>17 (29.31%)</td>
<td>22 (48.89%)</td>
<td>23 (39.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing College Partners</td>
<td>10 (22.22%)</td>
<td>26 (44.83%)</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
<td>18 (31.03%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching for Family and Friends</td>
<td>21 (46.67%)</td>
<td>24 (41.38%)</td>
<td>3 (6.67%)</td>
<td>14 (24.14%)</td>
<td>8 (17.78%)</td>
<td>12 (20.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Changed Me</td>
<td>3 (6.67%)</td>
<td>14 (24.14%)</td>
<td>8 (17.78%)</td>
<td>12 (20.69%)</td>
<td>8 (17.78%)</td>
<td>11 (18.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving Problems</td>
<td>3 (6.34%)</td>
<td>3 (5.17%)</td>
<td>6 (13.33%)</td>
<td>6 (10.34%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countering Genre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Scripts</strong></td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>58 (100%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Less successful students were most likely to use the communicating experiences script to organize narratives across all genres, demonstrating their experience-centered response to each genre prompt. Successful students most often used the relationship-sensitive scripts of reaching for friends and family and analyzing college partners in the Letters and Best Experience genres. Furthermore, though more successful students also were most likely to organize their Worst Experience genre with the communicating experiences script, they were more likely than less successful students to use the analyzing college partners script in that genre. For instance, Tyrone wrote the following Worst Experience narrative:

“**My worst experience in college would be when I first joined the basketball team. The**
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coach saw potential in me so he decided to work me until I break in to [become] the type of
basket ball player he envisioned me to be. At one time I was willing to quit the team, but he said
if I do so I won’t ever be allowed to play for this school ever again. So for the love of the sport I
sucked it up and [I] did what he asked for.”

Tyrone used the analyzing college partners script to expand on an important conflict with
his basketball coach. His use of the analyzing college partners script in both the Best and Worst
Experience genres revealed his attunement to relationships within the community college system.
Unlike many less successful students, successful students like Tyrone focused on both the
benefits and risks of relationships in the community college system. These findings align with
Carrasquillo’s (2014) work on high-achieving community college students’ reliance on support
from college partners. Thus, successful students’ reliance on their college partners may
contribute to or even predict their academic success over time.

Finally, more successful students also were more likely to use the college changed me
scripts in both the Letters and Best Experience genres. Neither Tyrone nor Kayla used the
college changed me script to organize their narratives. However, Toni was an academically
successful student who had a year-end GPA of 3.62. She wrote a letter using the college changed
me script to demonstrate her development within the community college system. She wrote:

“Dear CQ: I know college has not been something you have wanted to consider but
maybe my experiences can inspire you a bit. Although many people believe the goal of a degree
is “specific skills and knowledge” (405 Berger), I believe that college allows us students to grow
personally and intellectually. I have become much more aware of myself, my limits, strengths /
weaknesses, and my place in society as a young Hispanic woman who wants to just be happy (my
inspiration in life). Yes, I learn history of many subjects and how this impacts our world today
but all this inspires me to be the difference from today’s generation that will better the future. At X Community College diversity is valued and encouraged to be respected. Coming in contact and interaction with so many people of different cultures and religions is not something everyone that attends college experiences. My growth throughout my college experience has allowed me the opportunity to want to be more and know more and I would love for you to experience what it is like."

In using the college changed me script, Toni reflected on how the college institution and the relationships she formed within it shaped her development as “a young Hispanic woman who wants to just be happy.” Furthermore, like other students who used this script, Toni demonstrated a close alignment with its goals and opportunities of the community college system. This close alignment with community college may be related to her year-end academic success.

Summary of Script Analysis. The pattern of script use established within total narratives applied to students’ use of scripts across genres. More successful students like Tyrone and Toni often used relationship- and development-centered scripts that demonstrated a greater understanding of how college partners and the community college institution impacted their goals, outcomes, and development. Less successful students like Kayla often used scripts that focused on their successful or difficult experiences in community college. They usually answered genre prompts in a way that did not expand on their complex relationships or development within the community college system.

Summary and Implications

The current chapter answers the second research question: how do students who are more and less academically successful use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences in and integrate into the community college system? Successful students used narrative genres to
affiliate more with the college institution, reveal more opportunities and affordances, demonstrate their use of social support structures, and create complex narratives that reflect the lessons of higher education. Meanwhile, less successful students narrated in ways that reflected more alienation and disappointment in the college system, as well as a lesser ability to take advantage of the opportunities and support structures of the community college system. Even in Fall 2014, students’ ability to use elements of plot and script to make sense of their college lives was related to their academic success over time.

Differences in Narrative Length. More and less successful students wrote narratives of similar length in the Best and Worst Experience genres. However, more successful students wrote longer narratives in the Letters genre and in general, compared to less successful students. This difference was shaped by differences in students’ use of resolution strategies, as more successful students wrote far more resolution strategies than less successful students. (Meanwhile, more and less successful students constructed narratives with a comparable number of other plot elements, including initiating actions, complicating actions, high points, and endings). More successful students’ lengthier letter narratives may demonstrate their greater understanding of how the college and home systems interact to influence their college lives.

Differences in Issues at High Points. More and less successful students narrated similar issues at narrative high points across genres. However, more and less successful students differed in their use of resolution strategies to solve plot difficulties and in their use of scripts to achieve certain goals with their narratives.

Differences in Resolution Strategies. More and less successful students used resolution strategies differently to solve difficulties and conflicts and tie up loose plot ends. In general, more successful students narrated more resolution strategies than less successful students.
Furthermore, across all genres, successful students used more connecting resolution strategies, relying on social support from others to resolve conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose plot ends. Less successful students narrated more acting by self strategies to cope with college difficulties on their own.

Successful students might achieve academic success partly with their ability to elicit and use support from helpful partners. Successful Tyrone, for instance, narrated connecting strategies that demonstrated his skill in working with other college students and instructors to achieve his academic goals. These findings are in accord with Carrasquillo’s (2014) study on high-achieving students in community college. Her qualitative study suggested that successful students relied on social support from other students, instructors, and staff to overcome obstacles in the community college system (Carrasquillo, 2014). This study offers empirical evidence that successful students privileged social support more than less successful students, validating the hypothesis that social support is related to academic success in community college.

Furthermore, compared to successful students, less successful students like Kayla relied more on acting by self strategies where they solved difficulties without the support of partners. In using acting by self strategies, less successful students might signal a weakness in their social support structures that leads to poor outcomes over time. Being alienated from potential partners in the community college system may signal or even cause future academic distress.

**Differences in Scripts.** When organizing narratives, successful students were more likely to use the analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts, while less successful students were more likely to use the communicating experiences script. These differences appeared across all genres and demonstrate differences in how more and less successful students made sense of the community college system.
Analyzing College Partners Scripts. Across the Best and Worst Experience genres, successful students like Tyrone often organized narratives with the analyzing college partners script. In conjunction with their use of connecting resolution strategies, students’ use of the analyzing college partners script demonstrated their understanding of relationships in the community college system. Successful students focused more on how their college partners might help and hinder their academic progress, as compared to less successful students. Their social sensitivity toward college partners might be one of the keys to their success.

Additionally, when successful students used the analyzing college partners script, they demonstrated that they could solve difficulties in ways taught by the college institution. For instance, freshman seminars in the community college surveyed in this study advise students to form peer study groups. Thus, Tyrone’s use of the analyzing college partners script in the Best Experience narrative demonstrated his use of the problem-solving tools taught by his community college institution. His ability to make use of college-taught strategies may relate to, predict, or even cause his year-end academic success.

College Changed Me Scripts. Successful students were more likely to organize narratives in the Letters and Best Experience genres with the college changed me script, compared to less successful students. When successful students like Toni used the college changed me script, they demonstrated their affiliation with the community college system and their awareness of how participating in the system can change them for the better. Perhaps successful students were more likely to use this script than unsuccessful students because they were more closely affiliated with the college institution. Alternately, more successful students might have used the college changed me script in the Fall 2014 semester because they had
already begun to benefit from their college experiences. Thus, successful students’ use of the college changed me script may relate to or predict their year-end academic success.

Meanwhile, though unsuccessful students used the college changed me script often in the Best Experience genre, they used the script less frequently in the Letters genre. They were less likely to note changes to their identity or abilities while writing to important partners, perhaps signaling less confidence in their development. This lack of confidence might partially explain their lower levels of academic success at the end of the school year.

When students used narratives as cultural tools to make sense of their experiences in community college, their use of resolution strategies and scripts related to their academic performance over time. The next chapter investigates how well students’ use of narrative genres, including their use of the plot elements and script, relates to and predicts their GPA over time.
Chapter 5: Narrating the Future: Students’ Narratives Relate to and Predict Success

This chapter answers the last research question: How do students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) relate to and predict their academic success over time? More specific questions include: How do students’ use of diverse genres to interpret relationships with their goals and important partners (including the community college institution) relate to or predict their academic success over time? Does the complexity with which students narrate in different genres –especially in regards to their use of resolution strategies to “tie up the loose ends” – relate to or predict their year-end GPA? This chapter uses plot and script analyses data within correlation and regression analyses to consider how students’ meaning-making processes are connected to year-end academic performance. In doing so, this study connects students’ subjective understanding of community college to their institutionally measured performance within the community college system. This chapter builds upon previous work done on students’ use of genres to explore the complexity of the community college system (see chapter 3) and on the differences in how more and less academically successful students used genres (see chapter 4).

Hypotheses. I hypothesized that that students’ academic performance (as measured by year-end GPA) would relate positively to their total use of relationship and developing issues within narrative high points across multiple genres. I expected that as students narrated more often with a focus on building relationships within and making sense of their development in the community college system, their GPA would rise. I also hypothesized that students’ year-end GPA would relate positively to their ability to create complex narratives that include more resolution strategies. As students became increasingly academically successful, they would craft complex narratives that used more resolution strategies to “tie up” loose ends in the narrative,
including the resolving of conflicts and difficulties introduced. I tested these hypotheses with Pearson’s correlations that compare students’ year-end GPA to narrative data.

Furthermore, I predicted that the narrative features that students used to enact meaning (including their use of high point issues, resolution strategies, and scripts) would predict their academic performance. I hypothesized that student’s use of connecting and acting by self resolution strategies and relationship, development, and experience-centered scripts (i.e. the communicating experiences, analyzing college partners and college changed me scripts) would predict GPA after Spring 2015. I did so in part because more and less successful students narrated resolution strategies and scripts differently across genre. Furthermore, students’ enactment of plot demonstrates their interpretations of and affiliation with the community college system, as well as their ability to elicit support from the potential partners within it. Thus, how students narrated across genres should predict their year-end GPA.

**Major Results: Students’ Narratives Relate to and Predict Year-End GPA**

Students’ enactment of meaning-making with plot elements and scripts was connected to their academic success over time. As students centered their narratives more often on issues of college experience at high points across genres, their year-end GPA generally went down. As students narrated more often with connecting strategies in both the Letter genre and in total, and with resolution strategies in total, their year-end GPA generally rose. Thus, a focus on experiences was related to lower GPA and attempts to solve difficulties and conflicts in college-appropriate ways was related to higher GPA.

Additionally, students’ use of the high point issue of college experience and the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA. In other words, when students focused on their experiences of difficulty in the Worst Experience
genre, their GPA generally lowered over the school year. Meanwhile, students’ use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts in the Worst Experience genre, as well as connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre, predicted greater GPA over time. When students used their narratives to interpret conflicts with college partners or resolve difficulties in college appropriate ways, their GPA generally increased. Thus, students’ use of plot and script elements to interpret the community college system predicted their academic success over time. These results applied primarily to students’ meaning-making processes within the Worst Experience genre, demonstrating the importance of including a genre that allows students to criticize or even condemn the community college system.

**Students’ Narratives Relate to GPA**

Students’ enactment of meaning-making with plot elements and scripts was connected to their academic performance over time. I used correlation matrixes to investigate how students’ year-end GPA was related to their total use of different high point issues across genres\(^4\) and to their use of resolution strategies within and across genres. Table 5.1 presents all relevant information on correlations conducted between issues at high points, resolution strategies, and year-end GPA.

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\(^4\) As explained further in chapter 2, a student’s total use of high point issues across genres was calculated by adding up how often a student focused on a particular high point issue across all narratives. For instance, Kayla (the unsuccessful student introduced in chapter 4) focused on issues of college experience at the high points of her Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience narratives. She would be assigned a score of 3 in her High Point College Experience Total and scores of 0 to all other High Point Issue Totals. These and similar numbers would be entered into SPSS and collectively used to calculate the correlation matrix investigating how students’ year-end GPA was related to their total use of different high point issues across genre.
As students centered their narratives more often on issues of college experience at high points, their year-end GPA fell. As students narrated more often with connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre and in total narratives, and as they narrated more resolution strategies in total, their year-end GPA rose.

**Issues at High Points and GPA.** As students narrated more often about the high point issue of college experience across genres, their year-end GPA generally fell. I discovered this finding with a correlation matrix that compared students’ year-end GPA data to narrative data
regarding their use of high point issues across genre. (Chapter 2 contains more information on how narrative data was used in quantitative analyses). I ran a Pearson’s product-moment correlation and found that year-end GPA was negatively associated with total use of the high point issue of college experience across the three genres, \( r(102) = -0.217, p = 0.027 \). In other words, as students centered their narratives more on actual experiences in the community college system across all of their narratives, their GPA fell.

**Resolution Strategy Use and GPA.** As students narrated more often with connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre and in total, and as they narrated more resolution strategies overall, their year-end GPA rose. I discovered this finding with a Pearson’s product-moment correlation. Year-end GPA was positively associated with use of connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre \( (r(102) = 0.322, p = 0.001) \), with total use of connecting resolution strategies across all genres \( (r(102) = 0.307, p = 0.002) \), and with total use of resolution strategies across all genres, \( r(102) = 0.199, p = 0.020 \). However, year-end GPA was not associated with any other resolution strategies other than connecting. Thus, as students narrated more resolution strategies, particularly connecting strategies, to resolve conflicts and difficulties and tie up loose plot threads, their GPA generally rose. Connecting strategies were also unique insofar as they were the only resolution strategies that related to year-end GPA.

**Predicting Outcomes with Narrative Data**

How students enacted meaning making with and across genres predicted their academic success over time. Specifically, students’ cumulative use of the high point issue of college experience across genres and use of the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA. Students’ use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts in the Worst Experience genre predicted higher year-end GPA.
Only scripts from the Worst Experience genre predicted year-end GPA, demonstrating the unique predictive power of students’ meaning-making processes with the genre.

I discovered these findings by conducting a series of standard multiple regression models (numbered from 0 to 32) to predict year-end GPA from some combination of background control variables (including students’ age, gender, GPA and credits in the Fall 2014 semester, etc.), relationship support variables (including support from college partners), goal importance variables (including importance of goals such as gaining an Associate’s degree) and narrative variables (including total and genre-specific use of high point issues, resolution strategies and scripts). I ran these regression models to investigate whether the features of students’ narratives could predict their GPA over time. The background, relationship support, and goal importance variables were controls to isolate the unique predictive power of the narrative variables. Detailed information on this process is available in chapter 2.

All regressions were compared to regression model 0. In model 0, a multiple regression was run to predict year-end GPA from the control (i.e. background) variables. The model significantly predicts GPA, $F(13, 84) = 8.610, p < .001$. Only GPA in Fall significantly predicts year-end GPA, $B = .530 \ [.410, .650], p < .001$. $R^2$ for the overall model is 57.1%, meaning that background variables alone explain 57.1% of variation in year-end GPA.

The most consistent predictor of year-end GPA was GPA in Fall 2014, which predicted some variation in year-end GPA in each regression model. This was no surprise, given that there was a strong positive relationship ($r(102) = .719, p < .001$) between students’ GPA in Fall 2014 and year-end GPA. Overall, most students did not greatly change in their GPA from the beginning to the end of the academic year. Much of the variation in year-end GPA was explained by Fall 2014 GPA, leaving the rest of the variables in regression models to explain whatever
variation was left over. If Fall 2014 GPA was excluded from regression models, more variation in year-end GPA would be explained by students’ use of narrative elements. However, excluding Fall 2014 GPA lowered the $R^2$ of regression models, lowering the amount of variation in year-end GPA explained by the models. Thus, Fall 2014 GPA was included in all regression models.

The regressions revealed that students’ use of plot elements and scripts to enact meaning predicted year-end success. When students narrated more often with more high point issues of college experience and with the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre, they received a lower year-end GPA. When students narrated with more connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre and with the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts in the Worst Experience genre, they received a higher year-end GPA. Thus, certain features of students’ narratives in Fall 2014 predicted their academic performance over the year. More details are below.

**High Point Issues of College Experience Predicts Lower GPA**

I ran several regression models to predict students’ year-end GPA with their use of high point issues within genres and in total. Students’ use of the high point issue of college experience in the Worst Experience genre and in total predicted lower year-end GPA in several models. Table E.1 (located in appendix E) presents all significant regression findings for students’ use of genre-specific high point issues. Table E.2 (also located in appendix E) presents all significant regression findings for students’ use of cumulative high point issues across total narratives.

All of the following regression models predicted GPA using some combination of control, goal, relationship, and use of high point issue variables. All were significant at the $p < .001$ level. The best fitting model using data on high point issues was Model 6, which predicted GPA using control, relationship, goal, and all genre-specific high point issue variables. The
model predicted GPA, \( F(31, 65) = 4.116, p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .532 \ [.392, .672] \), \( p < .001 \). Use of the high point issue of college experience in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA, \( B = -.477 \ [-.865, -.090], p = .016 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was .663, meaning the model explained 66.3% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 1 predicted GPA using control variables and use of the high point issue of college experience in all narrative genres (Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience). The model predicted GPA, \( F(16, 81) = 7.722, p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .527 \ [.405, .649], p < .001 \). Use of the high point issue of college experience in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower GPA, \( B = -.323 \ [-.585, -.062], p = .016 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was .604, meaning the model explained 60.4% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 5 predicted GPA using control variables and use of the high point issue variables for all genres. The model predicted GPA, \( F(22, 75) = 5.537, p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .525 \ [.399, .651], p < .001 \). Use of the high point issue of College Experience in the Worst Experience genre also predicted lower year-end GPA, \( B = -.374 \ [-.724, -.025], p = .036 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was .619, meaning the model explained 61.9% of variation in year-end GPA.\(^5\)

Model 7 predicted GPA using control variables and total use of the high point issue of college experience across all genres. The model predicted GPA, \( F(14, 81) = 8.648, p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .510 \ [.390, .629], p < .001 \). Students’ attendance in remedial reading classes also predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .421 \ [.017, .826], p = .041 \). Finally, total use of the high point of college experience predicted lower GPA, \( B = -.172 \ [-.333, -.011], p \)

\(^5\) Note that in Model 5 and 11, the variables representing students’ use of the high point issue of Emotion were excluded. One high point issue variable had to be excluded for each genre due to collinearity. The second chapter has more information on the reason and process for doing so.
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\[ R^2 = 0.037. \] For the overall model was 0.593, meaning the model explained 59.3% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 11 predicted GPA using control variables and total use of high point issues across all genres. The model predicted GPA, \( F(16, 81) = 7.396, p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = 0.509 [0.389, 0.630], p < .001 \). Attendance in remedial reading classes also predicted GPA, \( B = 0.420, [0.010, 0.830], p = 0.045 \). Total use of the high point issue of College Experience marginally predicted GPA, \( B = -0.190 [-0.402, 0.025], p = 0.082 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was 0.594, meaning the model explained 59.4% of variation in year-end GPA.

**Summary of College Experience Issues as Predictors.** Students’ use of the high point issue of college experience in the Worst Experience genre and in total over all narratives predicted lower year-end GPA in several regression models. Students’ use of the high point issues of relationships, emotions or developing did not predict year-end GPA. Thus, when students centered their narratives on their lived college experiences in Fall 2014, they generally received a lower GPA after Spring 2015. A narrative focus on actual experiences within the community college system predicts worse academic performance over time. However, a narrative focus on any other issues did not predict greater or worse academic performance.

**Connecting Resolution Strategies Predict Higher GPA**

I ran several regression models to predict students’ year-end GPA with their use of resolution strategies within specific genres and in total. Students’ use of connecting strategies in the Letters genre marginally predicted year-end GPA. Table E.4 (located in appendix E) presents all significant regression findings for students’ use of resolution strategies across all genres.

All regression models in this section predicted GPA using some combination of control, goal, relationship, and use of resolution strategy variables. All were significant at the \( p < 0.001 \)
level. The best fitting model using resolution strategies was Model 18, which predicted GPA using control, relationship, goal, and resolution strategy use in all genres. The model predicted GPA, F(33, 63) = 3.241, \( p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .535 \ [ .380, .689] \), \( p < .001 \). Students’ use of connecting strategies in the Letters genre marginally predicted higher year-end GPA, \( B = .118 \ [ -.019, .256] \), \( p = .090 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was .629, meaning the model explained 62.9% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 17 predicted GPA using control variables and resolution strategy use in all genres. The model predicted GPA, F(24, 73) = 4.567, \( p < .001 \). GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, \( B = .540 \ [ .400, .680] \), \( p < .001 \). Use of connecting strategies in the Letters genre marginally predicted GPA, \( B = .108 \ [ -.017, .233] \), \( p = .089 \). \( R^2 \) for the overall model was .600, meaning the model explained 60.0% of variation in year-end GPA.

**Summary of Connecting Strategies as Predictors.** Students’ use of the connecting strategies in the Letters genre marginally predicted higher year-end GPA in two regression models. Thus, when students narrated with connecting strategies to demonstrate their resilience or offer advice to relationship partners in their letters, they generally received a higher GPA after Spring 2015. However, students’ use of other resolution strategies to solve difficulties or tie up loose plot ends did not predict their year-end academic success.

**Worst Experience Scripts as Predictors**

I ran several regression models to predict students’ year-end GPA with their use of scripts within specific genres. The only significant results came from regression models using scripts within the Worst Experience genre. Students’ use of the communicating experiences script predicted lower GPA, while use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts predicted higher GPA. Scripts use in the Letter or Best Experience genres did not predict year-
end GPA. Table E.4 (located in appendix E) presents all significant regression findings for students’ use of script in the Worst Experience genre. Table E.5 (also located in appendix E) presents all significant regression findings for students’ use of scripts across all genres.

All regression models predicted GPA using some combination of control, goal, relationship, and use of script variables. All were significant at the $p < .001$ level. The best fitting model using scripts was model 31, which predicted GPA using control, relationship, goal, and Worst Experience script variables. The model predicted GPA, $F(25, 71) = 5.005, p < .001$. GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, $B = .522 \ [.392, .652], p < .001$. Use of the analyzing college partners script ($B = .475 \ [-.034, .984], p = .067$) and the solving problems script ($B = .473 \ [-.072, 1.018], p = .088$) marginally predicted GPA. $R^2$ for the overall model is .638, meaning the model explains 63.8% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 26 predicted GPA using control variables and use of the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre. The model predicted GPA, $F(14, 83) = 8.514, p < .001$. GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, $B = .525 \ [.407, .643], p < .001$. Use of the communicating experiences script marginally predicts GPA, $B = -.250 \ [-.509, .009], p = .058$. $R^2$ for the overall model was .589, meaning the model explained 58.9% of variation in year-end GPA.

Model 28 predicted GPA using control variables and use of the solving problems script in the Worst Experience genre. The model predicted GPA, $F(14, 83) = 8.537, p < .001$. GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, $B = .523 \ [.405, .642], p < .001$. Use of the solving problems script marginally predicted GPA, $B = .329 \ [-.005, .664], p = .058$. $R^2$ for the overall model was .590, meaning the model explained 59.0% of variation in year-end GPA.
Model 30 predicted GPA using control variables and use of all scripts in the Worst Experience genre. The model predicted GPA, $F(16, 81) = 7.927, p < .001$. GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, $B = .537 [ .419, .655 ], p < .001$. Use of the solving problems script predicted year-end GPA, $B = .514 [ .009, 1.019 ], p = .046$. Use of the analyzing college partners script also marginally higher year-end GPA, $B = .402 [ -.070, .874 ], p = .094$. $R^2$ for the overall model was .610, meaning the model explained 61.0% of variation in year-end GPA.\(^6\)

Model 33 predicted GPA using control and all script variables across all genres. The model predicted GPA, $F(21, 76) = 5.539, p < .001$. GPA in Fall 2014 predicted year-end GPA, $B = .536 [ .409, .664 ], p < .001$. Use of the solving problems script marginally predicts year-end GPA, $B = .509 [ -.012, 1.031 ], p = .056$. $R^2$ for the overall model was .619, meaning the model explained 61.9% of variation in year-end GPA.

**Summary of Scripts as Predictors.** In summary, only students’ use of scripts in the Worst Experience genre predicted their year-end GPA. Students’ use of scripts in other genres did not predict GPA. Furthermore, the types of scripts students used to organize narratives in the Worst Experience genre mattered. Students’ use of the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower GPA over time. Meanwhile, students’ use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts predicted higher GPA over time.

**Summary and Implications**

The current chapter answers the third research question: How do students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) relate to and

\(^6\) Note that in Models 30 to 33, the variables representing students’ use of the countering the genre script in the Worst Experiences genre was excluded. One script variable per genre had to be excluded since the regression model would not accept all four script variables in a genre at once. Chapter 2 contains more information on this process.
predict their academic success over time? Students’ enactment of meaning-making with plot elements and scripts was related to their academic success. As students focused their narratives more often on issues of college experience at high points, their year-end GPA generally went down. As students narrated more often with connecting strategies in both the Letter genre and in total, and with resolution strategies in total, their year-end GPA generally rose. Thus, a focus on experiences was related to lower GPA and attempts to solve difficulties and conflicts in college-appropriate ways was related to higher GPA.

Furthermore, students’ interpretations of the community college system also predicted their institutionally measured performance within it. Students’ use of the high point issue of college experience and the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA. In other words, when students centered their Worst Experience narratives on irresolvable college difficulties, their GPA generally lowered over the school year. Meanwhile, students’ use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts in the Worst Experience genre, as well as connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre, predicted greater GPA over time. When students used their narratives to understand conflicts with college partners or resolve difficulties in college appropriate ways, their GPA generally increased. Thus, students’ subjective understanding of community college related to their institutionally measured performance within community college.

**College Experience Issues at High Points.** As students narrated more college experience issues at high points across genres, their GPA lowered. Perhaps when students centered their narratives on issues of college experience, they were less able to interpret why their experiences occurred or what their experiences taught them. By focusing on “what events occurred” instead of “why those events occurred” or “what I learned from those events,” students...
may be demonstrating a lesser ability to analyze their college experiences and learn how to navigate the community college system with them. This lack of analytical ability might be connected to their lower GPA.

**College Experience Issues in the Worst Experience Genre.** Students’ use of college experience issues at the high point of their Worst Experience narrative predicted lower year-end GPA. When students centered their Worst Experience narratives on college experiences, they did not use the genre to better understand their experiences. Instead of using the genre to understand why their college experience happened or derive meaning from it, they used the genre to recount and relive difficult experiences. These students were not using the Worst Experience genre as a meaning-making or problem-solving tool, as demonstrated by the college institution in freshman orientation courses. Their inability to use the Worst Experience genre in ways that are emphasized by the college institution might explain some of their academic difficulties. If they could not narrate within the Worst Experience genre in a college-appropriate way, they might have also faltered in their use of other tools used within the community college system.

**Total Resolution Strategies.** Students’ use of resolution strategies to resolve difficulties and tie up loose plot threads was related to their year-end GPA. As students narrated more resolution strategies in total, their year-end GPA rose. Students who narrated with more resolution strategies demonstrated greater skill at building complex narratives and utilizing the problem-solving and relationship-building strategies taught by the college institution. Their narrating skills demonstrated their ability to understand and use cultural tools that were available within the college system. Thus, their advanced narrating skills reflected their understanding of the college system and should be related to their academic success within it.
**Connecting Strategies.** As students narrated more connecting resolution strategies, their GPA rose. Connecting strategies were unique insofar as they were the only specific type of resolution strategies that related to year-end GPA. Perhaps students who narrated more connections to relationship partners had better social skills and greater social support from partners inside and outside of community college. These socially adept students might use their narratives to explore their nurturing relationships, which in turn related to better year-end performance. This is in accord with Francois (2014) and Deil-Amen’s (2011) research on how students need the support of institutional actors (i.e. college instructors and staff), family and friends to overcame difficulties in the community college system.

**Connecting Strategies in Letters.** Additionally, students’ use of the connecting strategies in the Letters genre predicted year-end GPA. When students narrated with connecting strategies to demonstrate their resilience to or offer advice to relationship partners in their letters, they received a higher GPA after Spring 2015. Students’ use of other resolution strategies did not predict their year-end academic success. Furthermore, students’ use of connecting strategies in other genres or in total did not predict their year-end success. It was only students’ use of connecting strategies to communicate certain goals (such as their goal of succeeding in or having their partners succeed in community college) to audience members (close family and friends) that predicted higher year-end GPA. Their relationship to their audience and use of connecting strategies to interact with their audience mattered to year-end academic success. These results applied demonstrate the importance of allowing students to narrate on their college lives to an audience that expands beyond the community college system.

Perhaps high-achieving students were more likely to give advice to their family and friends about navigating the community college system, which meant they both used many
connecting strategies in their letters and excelled in the system over time. Alternately, perhaps students who connected their lives outside college to their performance within college had more motivation to excel in community college. Therefore, students who used connecting strategies in their letters to express close relationships outside community college worked harder within it.

**Scripts in the Worst Experience Genre.** Only students’ use of scripts in the Worst Experience genre predicted their year-end GPA. Students’ use of scripts in other genres did not predict GPA. When students narrated with the Worst Experience genre, they narrated understandings of the community college system that were unique in forecasting academic success. Perhaps when students interpreted and expanded on their perceived worst experiences, they demonstrated different forms of resiliency in response to their greatest college difficulties. In turn, these different forms of resiliency might predict or even explain fluctuations in GPA. These results demonstrate the importance of including a narrative genre that allows students to explore, criticize or even condemn problems encountered within the community college system, thus revealing their response to said problems.

**Communicating Experiences Script.** The types of scripts students used to organize narratives in the Worst Experience genre mattered. Students’ use of the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower GPA over time. When students used the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre, they focused on college difficulties that they could not resolve and that often continued to hurt their college performance. Thus, student’s use of this script demonstrated their lack of resilience in the community college system, as well as their inability to navigate effectively within it. In turn, these factors might predict and partially explain lower year-end GPA.
Examining College Partners Script. Students’ use of the analyzing college partners script in the Worst Experience genre predicted higher GPA over time. When students used the script in the Worst Experience genre, they demonstrated an awareness of how conflicts with college partners shaped their outcomes. Students could also use this social awareness to elicit support from college partners. Therefore, when students used the analyzing college partners script, they demonstrated a level of social sensitivity toward handling college partners that predicted and might even explain academic success over time.

Solving Problems Script. Finally, students’ use of the solving problems script in the Worst Experience genre predicted higher GPA over time. Students who used the solving problems script created complex narratives that reflected the problem-solving lessons of the community college system. Their narrating skill may in turn be linked to their adaptation to community college and predicted their better academic performance within it. In other words, students who used the script were more adept at narrating and navigating the community college system and demonstrated as much in their Worst Experience narratives. If they were less skilled, they would be unlikely to use the solving problems script and demonstrate their abilities to overcome obstacles in the path to their goals.
Chapter 6: Discussion

In the community college activity meaning system, a student’s academic performance is influenced by the interplay between their relationships, goals and meaning-making processes. The present study aimed to better understand how students in community college interpreted their college lives, including their relationships and goals, with the use of diverse narrative genres. The study also probed differences in how more and less academically successful students used diverse genres to interpret their relationships, goals, and experiences within community college. Finally, the study investigated how students’ meaning making processes, as enacted with their use of plot elements and scripts across genres, were associated with their academic performance (i.e. GPA) over time. Findings were generated through qualitative plot and script analyses, which explores how people engage in meaning-making processes across various sociocultural contexts (Daiute, 2010; 2014), and a series of quantitative analyses which included chi-square tests of independence, Pearson’s correlations, and standard multiple regressions. The current study bypassed the qualitative/quantitative research binary to demonstrate that students’ ability to interpret the complex realities of community college related to and predicted their academic performance. Students’ subjective understanding of the community college system was connected to their institutionally measured performance within the system.

The following discussion includes a summary of the findings, implications for researchers on connecting students’ meaning-making processes to their academic performance, implications for future research directions, implications for community college institutions on helping and tracking students, and a survey of the limitations of the research.

Summary of Major Findings
The following findings demonstrate how students interpret their experiences, relationships and goals within the community college system with the use of diverse narrative genres. Students used genres as cultural tools to make meaning of their development and experiences within the college system. In turn, their meaning-making processes were related to and predictive of year-end academic performance.

**Research Question 1: How do students in community college interpret their experiences, especially relationship and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres?** Students in community college used diverse narrative genres to interpret and navigate their experiences, relationships, and goals within the community college system in various ways. Different genres elicited different forms of meaning making aimed at achieving different goals and directed toward different imagined audiences. Students frequently used the Letters genre to relate to their family and friends, connecting their goals and activities within community college to the goals and activities of their partners outside of community college. Meanwhile, they often used the Best Experience genre to align with partners (such as other students, professors, and staff) inside the community college system and with the goals of the community college institution. Finally, students frequently used the Worst Experience genre to criticize or even condemn the community college institution for frustrating their goals. Thus, diverse genres elicited different forms of meaning-making from students based on their varied audiences and purposes.

The findings for students’ use of the Best and Worst Experience genres are in line with Daiute and Kreniske’s (2016) research on community college students. The findings for students’ use of the Letters genre, however, are novel and highlight how partners outside of the community college system can shape students’ progress within the system. Furthermore, when
students narrated with the Letters genre, they performed their understanding of community college to an intimate audience they often wanted to impress. In performing their understanding of college, they posited themselves as mentors, allies, or even supplicants to their audience, highlighting the importance of intimate audiences to students’ meaning-making processes.

Finally, differences appeared in how students interpreted their experiences within and across genres. Some students consistently narrated with plot elements and scripts that united them closely with their goals and partners in community college, even within the Worst Experience genres. However, other students narrated with plot elements and scripts that demonstrated greater alienation and estrangement from goals and partners in community college, even within the Letters and Best Experience genres. Different students used the diverse narrative genres to express varied interpretations of the community college system – and these differences in interpretation were tied to later differences in academic success.

Research Question 2: How do students who are more and less academically successful use diverse narrative genres to interpret their experiences in and integrate into the community college system? Academically successful students with higher year-end GPA narrated differently across all genres compared to less successful students with lower year-end GPA. Differences in more and less successful students’ use of genres demonstrated differences in how the two groups interpreted and navigated the community college system.

Compared to less successful students, more successful students narrated more resolution strategies in the Letters and Best Experiences genres and in total, narrated more connecting strategies than acting by self strategies, narrated more often with the college changed me script in the Letters and Best Experience genres, and narrated more often with the analyzing college partners scripts in the Best and Worst Experience genres. Meanwhile, less successful students
narrated fewer resolution strategies in total, narrated more acting by self strategies than connecting strategies, and narrated more often with the communicating experiences script across all genres.

More successful students narrated in ways that suggested that they affiliated more with the goals of the community college institution, found more opportunities and affordances in the community college system, and showed a greater understanding of how college partners could both help and hinder their college progress. Furthermore, more successful students created more complex narratives that reflected the problem-solving lessons of the community college system. Academic success was related to the ways in which students used diverse narrative genres as cultural tools to reflect on the college institution in college-appropriate ways.

Why did successful students display different patterns of meaning-making across genres, compared to less successful students? Perhaps more successful students came into community college with a greater understanding of how their college goals and relationships functioned and influenced their performance within the college system. Alternately, more successful students may have better learned the college institution’s lessons on interpreting and navigating the difficulties of college, demonstrating that better understanding within the structure of their narratives. Thus, students’ ability to write and reflect on community college in ways that were reinforced by the college institution related to their year-end academic performance.

Furthermore, differences between the narratives of more and less successful students demonstrated differences in students’ interpretation of college relationships. Through their greater use of connecting resolution strategies and the analyzing college partners script, successful students demonstrated their awareness of the impact of college partners and their ability to elicit social support from said partners. This finding echoed Carrasquillo’s (2014)
research, which investigated how high-achieving community students used support from college instructors and staff to overcome college obstacles. More successful students focused more on and perhaps elicited more support from college partners as they progressed toward their goals in the college system. Less successful students focused less on support from college partners, perhaps because they were less able to elicit and receive support. Their inability to receive social support within the community college system might partially explain their lower year-end GPA.

**Research Question 3: How do students’ interpretations of community college (as enacted within and across diverse narrative genres) relate to and predict their academic success over time?** Students’ enactment of meaning-making with plot elements and scripts was connected to their academic success over time. As students organized their narratives more often around issues of college experience at high points, their year-end GPA generally went down. As students narrated more often with connecting strategies in total and in the Letters genre, and with resolution strategies in general, their year-end GPA rose. A focus on experiences was related to lower GPA and attempts to solve difficulties and conflicts in college-appropriate ways was related to higher GPA.

Additionally, students’ use of the high point issue of college experience and the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre predicted lower year-end GPA. Meanwhile, students’ use of the analyzing college partners and solving problems scripts in the Worst Experience genre, as well as connecting resolution strategies in the Letters genre, predicted greater GPA over time. When students used their narratives to interpret conflicts with college partners or resolve difficulties in college appropriate ways, their GPA increased. Students’ use of plot and script elements within the Worst Experience genre to interpret the community college system thus predicted their year-end academic performance.
Students’ use of genre was also important, given that only scripts used in the Worst Experience genre predicted year-end GPA. Students used the Worst Experience genre to interpret experiences of difficulty and adversity in community college. While interpreting college difficulties, students demonstrated different forms of resiliency and different ways of overcoming obstacles. In turn, these different forms of resiliency and different ways of overcoming obstacles could be linked to students’ ability to achieve their goals and thus predict their academic success in the long run. That these results applied to students’ meaning-making processes within the Worst Experience genre demonstrates the importance of including a genre that allows students to criticize or even condemn the community college system, thus revealing their resilience within that same system.

Implications for Researchers

The current study’s findings illuminate how students interpret their college experiences, including their relationship-and goal-related experiences, with the use of diverse narrative genres. Furthermore, this study used a mixed-methods technique that utilized narrative data in a series of quantitative analyses to demonstrate that students’ meaning-making processes (as enacted within diverse genres) relate to and predict their year-end academic performance. This study conducted the first systematic analysis of how students’ interpretations of community college connect to their academic performance. Finally, this study expanded on past research in community college by demonstrating that students’ interpretation of college relationships and goals relates to their academic performance over time.

Main Contributions to the Field. The current study adds to the field in two important ways. First, this study demonstrates that community college students express different forms of meaning-making regarding the college system when they use diverse expressive genres that
afford diverse audience-purpose opportunities. Second, it offers empirical evidence that students’ meaning-making processes connect to and perhaps explain their academic performance in community college. In doing so, it expands on braids together two disparate lines of research – the qualitative line and the quantitative line -- on students’ perspectives and their institutionally measured performance over time.

First, this study demonstrates the importance of a research design that utilizes diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities for community college students. Previous scholars have used qualitative research methods, such as written narratives and interviews, to explore how community college students navigate and interpret the college institution (Carrasquillo, 2014; Daiute & Kreniske, 2016; Deil-Amen, 2011; Francois, 2012). For instance, Carrasquillo’s (2014) work with high-achieving students discovered that students often reported that their relationships with college instructors and staff helped them overcome academic, financial and organization obstacles. Meanwhile, Daiute and Kreniske (2016) discovered that students harbored diverse perspectives on community college and could both align with and criticize the college institution in various ways. However, no studies apart from Daiute and Kreniske’s (2016) one allowed students to use diverse expressive genres to address different audiences with varied purposes on their college lives. Thus, there is a need to understand students’ complex interpretations of community college through their use of diverse express genres that allow differing author-purpose-audience opportunities.

By allowing students to express complex and even contradictory interpretations of community college with the Letters, Best Experience, and Worst Experience genres, this study reflected the full complexity of students’ college lives. Furthermore, the flexibility with which students used diverse narrative genres to address varying aspects of community college indicated
the complexity of their relationship with the college institution. This complexity has often been portrayed in overly simplistic terms in public media and previous research.

Furthermore, this study offers empirical evidence that students’ meaning-making processes connect to and perhaps explain their academic performance in community college. Past quantitative studies have used survey measures and institutional data to investigate how students’ abilities or experiences in community college affect their later academic success (21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 2012; Brock, 2010; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). These studies focused on risk factors, such as coming from lower-income backgrounds or being less academically prepared, that explained students’ low rates of completion and institutional transference over time. However, up until the current study, no research study empirically investigated how students’ subjective interpretations of the community college system affected their institutional performance within the system.

This study contributes to the field by expanding on and braiding together the two strands of research on community college students. By developing a research design that utilized diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities for students, this study demonstrates the complexity of students’ interpretations of the community college system. By conducting a rigorous qualitative analysis with two forms of narrative inquiry (plot and script analyses) and using the resulting narrative data in a series of quantitative analyses, this study connects students’ subjective interpretations of community college to their institutional performance within community college. The study’s findings demonstrate that students’ ability to interpret the complex realities of the community college institution relates to and predicts their academic success over time. Furthermore, students’ interpretations of their relationships and goals within the community college system helped to explain their academic performance over time.
Interpreting Relationships in Community College. In their narratives, students posited their relationships with partners inside and outside college as motivators and facilitators of their goals, activities and performance. Students’ use of connecting resolution strategies and the analyzing college partners script demonstrates how students interpret the impact of varied partners on outcomes over time. Furthermore, their use of connecting strategies and the analyzing college partners script was related to and predicted year-end GPA. Thus, how students made meaning of their relationships affected their performance in community college. These findings are in accord with Deil-Amen’s (2011) theory of socio-academic integration, which posited that community college students need to experience both academic and social integration with college partners to navigate the college institution and achieve academic success. Furthermore, these findings align with other qualitative research that found that community college students often attributed their academic success (or failure) to the quality of their relationships with college partners (Carrasquillo, 2014; Francois, 2012).

Connecting Resolution Strategies. Students’ use of connecting resolution strategies to resolve problems and deal with goal-related obstacles demonstrated the importance of relationships. In general, successful students were more likely than unsuccessful students to narrate connecting strategies across all genres. In doing so, successful students emphasized their understanding of the importance of relationships and perhaps demonstrated their greater ability to use various partners as supports.

Meanwhile, across all genres and in total, less successful students were less likely to narrate connecting strategies and more likely to narrate acting by self strategies to resolve college difficulties. In doing so, less successful students might demonstrate their inability to elicit support from partners (such as professors and staff) within community college. Deil-Amen
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(2011) believed that professors and staff acted as institutional agents whose support was necessary to student success. Given their lack of connecting strategies within narratives, less successful students might also lack an understanding of when and how to reach out to these institutional agents to help solve their college difficulties. This in turn helps to explain their lack of academic success over time. Thus, understanding how to take advantage of social support structures in the community college system may be a key factor in student success.

Analyzing College Partners Script. Compared to less successful students, successful students demonstrated a greater understanding of the impact of both supportive and detrimental college partners. More successful students were more likely to use the analyzing college partners script in the Best Experience genre, demonstrating their ability to elicit and receive support from important college partners. This is again in line with Deil-Amen’s (2011) assumption that students need to use support from institutional actors to overcome academic, financial, and organizational problems in community college. Successful students were better able to take advantage of social support structures in the community college system, and this ability was related to their academic success over time.

Successful students were also more likely to use the analyzing college partners script to organize their Worst Experience narratives. Furthermore, use of the analyzing college partners script within the Worst Experience genre also predicted greater academic success over time. When students used the analyzing college partners script in the Worst Experience genre, they paid attention to how conflicts with college partners could hurt their goal attainment and academic outcomes. This social sensitivity might be linked to a better understanding of how to maintain relationships with partners in community college and how to handle conflicts that
emerge from those relationships. All of the social and meaning-making skills that relate to students’ use of the analyzing college partners script may contribute to student success over time.

In summary, students narrated plots and scripts that posit their relationship experiences as powerful motivators and influencers of their goals, progress, and eventual outcomes. This was best demonstrated by students’ use of connecting resolution strategies and use of the analyzing college partners script across the Best and Worst Experience genres. These meaning-making processes regarding relationships were connected to and predictive of year-end GPA. These findings extend the work of previous scholars by offering empirical evidence that students’ awareness of college relationships relates to their long-term academic performance.

**Interpreting Goals in Community College.** In their narratives, students often posited their college goals as implicit but powerful motivators that gave purpose to their college activities, following Leontev’s (1974) and Galperin’s (1992) views of goals as organizers of development. Though few students narrated explicit goals, their use of scripts demonstrated how they interpreted their implicit goals to succeed in the community college system. However, contrary to Porchea and colleagues’ (2010) research on factors predicting student success, it was not students’ identified goals that related or predicted their academic success over time. Rather, it was whether students saw themselves as being able to fulfill the often implicit goals they had within the community college system – or whether they saw themselves as blocked from achieving their goals.

**Achieving Development in Community College.** Students sometimes organized narratives with the college changed me script to demonstrate how the community college system affected their development over time. In doing so, students highlighted the importance of achieving personal and often implicit goals, such as the goal of developing their identity, abilities
and knowledge of the world. Successful students were more likely to narrate with the college changed me script in the Letters and the Best Experience genres and in total, compared to less successful students. In other words, academically successful students were more likely to interpret community college system as one which allowed them to reach personal goals over time. This is in accord with Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) theory of student departure, which assumed that students’ academic success was influenced by a subjective sense of conforming to the values and expectations of college. Thus, students’ meaning-making regarding their ability to achieve personal developmental goals in the community college system was linked to their academic performance over time.

**Goal-Related Scripts in the Worst Experience Genre.** Given that students in the Worst Experience genre usually narrated about their most difficult experiences in college, their resulting narratives were often connected to frustrated goals. Furthermore, their meaning-making on their frustrated goals predicted their year-end GPA. How students interpreted themselves as reaching (or not reaching) their goals within difficult circumstances predicted their academic performance over time.

The most common script used by students in the Worst Experience genre was the communicating experiences script, which students used to focus on difficulties that could not be ameliorated or solved. Use of this script predicted lower GPA over time, perhaps because students who used the script focused on difficulties that might permanently block their college goals. In other words, students who used this script often saw their goals as unfeasible or difficult to reach. Alternately, use of this script might predict lower GPA because students using it demonstrated their inability to learn and recover from their difficulties. When students used the communicating experiences script in the Worst Experience genre, they highlighted their inability
to navigate around obstacles and toward goals. This inability might partially explain their later lack of academic success.

In contrast, students’ use of the solving problems script showcased their ability to learn and recover from obstacles to their goals. Students using the solving problems script demonstrated a more optimistic interpretation of their difficulties as being surmountable rather than unsolvable. Furthermore, they demonstrated an understanding of how to navigate around obstacles in order to reach their goals, using diverse resolution strategies as they did so. This meaning-making and demonstration of problem-solving skills might explain why student’s use of the solving problems script predicted higher GPA over time.

Students narrated plots and scripts that posit their goals as implicit and powerful motivators that gave meaning and purpose to their activities in the community college system. This was best demonstrated by students’ use of scripts across all genres. Students’ meaning-making about goals and ability to deal with obstacles to goals was connected to and predictive of year-end GPA. The current study is first empirical study to demonstrate that community college students’ understanding of their goals as feasible or non-feasible predicted and perhaps explained their academic performance over time.

**Implications for Future Research**

Building on the findings from the current study, future research could further explore how different populations of students interpret college institutions through a greater variety of narrative genres and how their meaning-making processes relate to a greater variety of academic outcomes. Potential research questions and designs are suggested below.

First, how do different populations of students interpret their experiences in the community college system with the use of diverse genres? The students in the current study took
the study to fulfill the research requirement for Introduction to Psychology. Though their GPA was somewhat higher than the total population of students in the surveyed community college, they largely fell within the normal range of students. However, students enrolled in an Honors programs might display different interpretations of the college institution compared to students in general population, particularly in their understanding of college relationships. Similarly, students who are on academic probation might show different patterns of meaning-making and demonstrate greater alienation toward college partners than the students of the current study. Thus, expanding the scope of the research to very high and very low achieving students might demonstrate more variations in how students interpret the community college system.

Second, if students were to narrate with genres that differ from the ones of the current study, would they demonstrate different interpretations of college that also predict academic outcomes? Student participants in this study narrated in two genres that have not been examined so far. The first unexamined genre was the Terri genre, where students narrated on the experiences of a third-person student named Terri who had just entered into their college institution. The second unexamined genre was the newspaper genre, where students narrated a newspaper article for new students who needed advice in navigating the community college system. The meaning-making that students might enact toward an audience of peers and with a fictional third-person character might differ from the meaning-making they enacted while relating their own experiences. In the future, I plan to review the unexamined narratives in the Terri and Newspaper genres through plot and script analyses. This review will focus on understanding whether the two genres might demonstrate different ways of interpreting experiences in the community college system, compared to the Letters, Best Experiences, and
Worst Experiences genres. Furthermore, this review will investigate whether these new interpretations of community college might also predict year-end academic performance.

Third, how might students’ use of plot elements and scripts to enact meaning relate to academic outcomes beyond GPA (such as credits earned and retention) over longer periods of time? Given that students’ use of plot elements and script related to and predicted their year-end GPA, the same could be true of their credits earned or retention rate over time. Community college institutions might be especially interested in tracking how students’ meaning-making skills and interpretation of community college relates to their retention, given that almost half of freshman drop out within their first year of attending. Therefore, future research may investigate how features of students’ narratives relate not only to their year-end GPA but to GPA, credits earned and retention information over several years. Student narratives could be collected during a longer-term longitudinal study, allowing researchers to examine how changes in students’ enactment of meaning within diverse narrative genres relate to academic performance over time.

Finally, could the findings of this study apply to students in other educational institutions, such as 4-year colleges and universities? Researchers could adapt the methodology of this study to investigate how students use diverse narrative genres to interpret other educational activity meaning systems. One such study could focus on students who transfer from community colleges to 4-year institutions. These students sometimes struggle to make the transition from one institution of higher education to another (Fain, 2012). An extension of this study could explore how their interpretations of higher education change over time in response to the shifting demands and challenges of a new educational system, as well as how their changing interpretations relate to and predict long-term academic performance.

*Implications for Community College Institutions*
Educators and administrators in community college should utilize the findings of the present study to prepare students to navigate the community college system and to intervene with struggling students. Furthermore, by teaching students how to narrate in ways that promote their understanding of community college, institutions may promote greater student success over time.

To prepare incoming students for academic success, community college institutions frequently host student success orientations and seminars (Karp, Raufamn, Efthimiou & Ritze, 2015). These orientations and seminars often focus on teaching basic college “survival skills” (such as managing time and formulating career goals) and “academic skills” (such as note taking and studying for exams). The present study’s findings suggest that teaching students “meaning-making skills” within diverse genres of written narratives would also help them achieve academic success. If student success seminars teach students to interpret their particular college institution in ways that support their understanding of the college system, students might learn more of how to explore their academic goals, elicit social support from college partners, integrate into the college institution, navigate around difficulties and obstacles, and better understand themselves as powerful actors in the college system.

Furthermore, by allowing students to share their written narratives with one another, student success seminars could give students an important tool with which to interpret the diverse demands of community college and help them realize that the difficulties they face are often common ones. Writing can serve as more than a basic skill to be taught or an indication of achieved knowledge in higher education. Writing – especially as it used by students given diverse author-purpose-genre-audience opportunities – can serve as an integral component in students’ academic and personal development within the community college institution.
Finally, college institutions could use students’ written narratives to predict their academic performance over time and intervene as needed. Given the unique predictive power of students’ scripts within the Worst Experience genre, institutions could intervene early if students repeatedly use certain scripts (such as the communicating experiences script) that suggest their inability to navigate college and predict poor performance over time. Students who display less-than-optimal interpretations of the difficulties of community college could receive extra help from tutors and counselors. They could even be paired with a student-peer mentor who assists them in developing more useful interpretations of community college. These social interventions could mean the difference between low-performing students course-correcting early in their academic career and falling into a death-spiral that leads to dropping out of college.

**Limitations**

The current research study contained several limitations that may limit its generalizability to the total population of community college students and impede its ability to understand how students’ interpretation of community college might impact their academic performance.

First, only one community college institution was surveyed in this study. The institution used in this study was a Northeastern public community college. This particular community college institution contained relatively few Caucasian, Asian or Middle-Eastern students and thus, these students were under-represented in the participant sample. Instead, the sample was weighted toward Latino/Hispanic-American, African-American, and African-Caribbean-American participants, since these students were highly represented in the community college institution. Redoing this study at a different community college institution with a different demographic mix of students might offer different or more generalizable results.7

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7 The majority students in this study identified as being Latino-American (51.9%), African-American (21.2%) or Afro-Caribbean American (17.3%). A relative minority of students in this study identified as being either White
Second, the student participants’ GPA might not represent the average GPA of all community college students. The mean GPA of this participant sample was 2.80, which was higher than the average GPA of students on the community college institution that was surveyed. More academically successful and industrious students may have taken part in the study because it was open only to students who wanted to fulfill the research requirement for the Introduction to Psychology course. Less mindful students may not have taken part in the required research study for Introduction to Psychology at all, which left some of them out of this study sample.

In summary, future studies may wish to recruit more ethnically diverse samples of participants from a greater variety of community colleges and recruit more students from the general population. Nonetheless, while the results of the study are perhaps not generalizable to Asian-American (3.8%). The demographics of this sample population were both similar and dissimilar to the total population of community college students attending the public university system that the surveyed community college was located in. For instance, within the total population of community college students, 28% of students identified as Black, 40% as Hispanic, 15% as white, 16.5% as Asian American or Pacific Islander, and .4% as American Indian or Alaska native (CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2017). Therefore, the percentage of students identifying as Latino-American in this study’s sample population was fairly similar to that of the broader community college student population within the public university system. However, this study’s sample population over-represented students who identified as Black (i.e. either African-American or Afro-Caribbean American) and under-represented students who identified as either White or Asian American/Pacific Islander.

Still, though this study’s sample population differed in some ways from the overall population of community college students within the public university system I drew from, its results are in accord with qualitative research done with a more representative sample. For instance, Daiute and Kreniske’s (2016) study recruited community college students from several community colleges within the public university system I worked with. Their sample of 381 students (61% born in the United States and 39% born elsewhere) used the Best and Worst Experience genres in much the same way as did my students – that is, their students generally used the Best Experience genre to align with the community college institution and the Worst Experience genre to criticize the institution. Thus, this study’s sample of students interpreted the community college institution in much the same way as did a larger, more diverse sample of students. This supports my argument that this study’s findings can generalize to a more diverse population of community college students.

Additionally, other qualitative studies utilizing larger or more ethnically diverse samples of community college students have discovered results that were similar to those of my own study. (However, our results do diverge to some degree, as my work went further in uniting students’ interpretations of community college to institutional markers of academic performance. Meanwhile, the other studies largely concentrated on exploring students’ beliefs of community college). For instance, in Del-Amen’s (2011) study of 125 community college students, 37% of sampled students identified as Latino, 35% as African American, 19% as White, and 9% as other. Although her sample population contained more White and “other” identifying students than did this study’s sample population, she also discovered that community college students emphasized the role of social support from college partners as a factor related to student performance. Additionally, Howley, Chavis, and Kester’s (2013) research on students at a rural community college in North Carolina discovered that students at institutions located outside of urban environments also emphasize the importance of social support from college partners. Therefore, there is reason to believe this study’s findings can generalize to community college student populations that are not predominantly minority or located in urban environments.
all community college students, they indicate the complexity of students’ relationship with the college institution – a complexity that has often been simplified in public media and previous research studies.

**Summary**

This project represents one of the few empirical studies that allow students to interpret the community college system with diverse expressive genres and that tie specific features of students’ written narratives to their academic performance. In doing so, this study demonstrates that students’ written interpretations of community college relate to and predict their academic performance over time. These findings suggest that writing can serve as more than a basic skill to be taught or an indication of achieved knowledge in higher education. Writing can also serve as an integral tool to help students develop a better understanding of their lives within community college – especially if their writing occurs within diverse genres and in relation to varied audiences and purposes.
Appendix A: Demographics Survey

1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Transgendered identifying as male
   - Transgendered identifying as female

2. What is your age?  ___________ [Fill in]

3. Ethnicity: What ethnic background would you classify yourself as having? You may pick multiple backgrounds.
   - Caucasian
   - Latino/Hispanic-American
   - African American
   - Asian American
   - African-Caribbean-American
   - Middle-Eastern American

4. Besides America, what country/countries would you say you and your family come from?
   - _____________________________________________________________________________ (Write in answer, if any)

5. What language(s) do you speak at home?
   - _____________________________________________________________________________ (Write in answer)

6. How fluent are you in speaking/reading/writing English?
   - Very Fluent
   - Fluent
   - Somewhat Fluent
   - A little fluent
   - Not Fluent

7. What is your best estimate of the total income in your household last year? Consider income from all sources before taxes.
   - Less than $10,000
   - $10,000 to $14,999
   - $15,000 to $19,999
   - $20,000 to $24,999
   - $25,000 to $29,999
   - $30,000 to $34,999
   - $40,000 to $49,999
   - $50,000 to $59,999
   - $60,000 to $69,999
   - $70,000 to $79,999
   - $80,000 to $89,999
   - $90,000 to $99,999
8. How many people are supported by this income? (Select one)
   o 1  o 5
   o 2  o 6
   o 3  o 7
   o 4  o 8+

9. Do you have children that you are supporting? If so, how many? __________

   If yes, continue with answering questions below:
   9a. Are any children under 5 years old? If so, how many? __________
   9b. Are any children between 5 and 12 years old? If so, how many? __________
   9c. Are there any children between 13 and 18 years old? If so, how many? __________
   9d. Do you use on-campus childcare services?
      o Yes  o No
   9e. Do you pay for off-campus childcare services (either center-based or in-home)?
      o Yes  o No

10. With whom do you currently live? (Mark all that apply).
     o Parent(s)/Guardian(s)  o Spouse or Domestic Partner
     o Friends/Roommates  o Other Relatives
     o Child(ren)  o I live alone
     o Other Students  o

11. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, not employed, or retired?
    o Full-time  o Not Employed
    o Part-time  o Retired

12. What is your marital status? (You can pick more than 1 option)
    o Single/No Current Partner  o Separated/Divorced
    o Partnered but not Married  o Widowed
    o Married  o
13. Please Print Your FULL NAME here:

This will allow us to collect institutional data on your academic outcomes after the Spring 2015 Semester.
Appendix B: Community College Student Report (2005) Adapted Measure

1. Did you begin college at this college or elsewhere?
   - Started here
   - Started elsewhere

2. What semester of college is this for you?
   - 1st
   - 2nd
   - 3rd
   - 4th
   - Other: ___________ [Fill in]

3. Thinking about this current academic term, how would you characterize your enrollment at this college?
   - Full-time
   - Less than full-time

4. In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following:
   [On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very often, 2) Often, 3) Sometimes, 4) Never]
   a. asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
   b. made a class presentation
   c. prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
   d. worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
   e. come to class without completing readings or assignments
   f. worked with other students on projects during class
   g. worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
   h. tutored or taught or students (paid or voluntary)
   i. participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
   j. used the internet or instant messaging to work on an assignment
   k. used e-mail to communicate with an instructor
   l. discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
   m. talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor
   n. discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class
   o. received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance
   p. worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations
   q. worked with instructors on activities other than coursework
   r. discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (with fellow students, family members, co-workers, etc.)
   s. had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity other than your own
t. had serious conversations with students who differ from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
u. skipped class

5. During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very Little]
a. Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form
b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
c. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways
d. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods
e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
f. Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill

6. During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done at this college?
[On scale of 1 – 5, 1) None, 2) 1 to 4, 3) 5 to 10, 4) 11 to 20, 5) More than 20]
a. Number of assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings
b. Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment
c. Number of written papers or reports of any length

7. Mark the response that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college?
[On scale of 7 – 1, Extremely challenging to Extremely easy]

8. Which of the following have you done, are you doing, or do you plan to do while attending this college?
[On scale of 1 – 3, 1) I have done, 2) I plan to do, 3) I have not done nor plan to do]
a. internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
b. English as a second language course
c. Developmental/remedial reading course
d. Developmental/remedial writing course
e. Developmental/remedial math course
f. Study skills course
g. Honors course
h. College orientation program or course
i. Organized learning communities (linked courses/study groups lead by faculty or counselors)

9. How much does this college emphasize each of the following?
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very Little]
a. Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying
b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college
c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially
f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education
g. Using computers in academic work

10. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?
[On scale of 1 – 6, 1) None, 2) 1 - 5, 3) 6 - 10, 4) 11 - 20, 5) 21 – 30, 6) More than 30]
a. preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, doing homework, or other activities related to your program
b. working for pay
c. participating in college-sponsored activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)
d. providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)
e. commuting to and from classes

11. Mark the number that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at this college. Your relationship with:
[On scale of 1 – 7, 1) Unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation; 4) Neutral, neither like nor dislike, 7) Friendly, supportive, sense of belonging]
a. Other students
b. Instructors
c. Administrative Personnel and Offices

12. How much has YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THIS COLLEGE contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very much, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Some, 4) Very Little]
a. Acquiring a broad general education
b. Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills
c. Writing clearly and effectively
d. Speaking clearly and effectively
e. Thinking critically and analytically
f. Solving numerical problems
g. Using computing and information technology
h. Working effectively with others
i. Learning effectively on your own
j. Understanding yourself
k. Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
l. Developing a personal code of values and ethics
m. Contributing to the welfare of your community
n. Developing clearer career goals
o. Gaining information about career opportunities

13a. Please indicate how often you use the following services at your school.
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Often, 2) Sometimes, 3) Rarely/Never, 4) Don’t know/NA]
a. academic advising/planning
b. career counseling
c. job placement assistance
d. peer or other tutoring
e. skills lab (writing, math, etc.)
f. child care
g. financial aid planning
h. computer lab
i. student organizations
j. transfer credit assistance
k. services to students with disabilities

13b. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the following services at your school.
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very, 2) Somewhat, 3) Not at all, 4) Don’t know/NA]
a. academic advising/planning
b. career counseling
c. job placement assistance
d. peer or other tutoring
e. skills lab (writing, math, etc.)
f. child care
g. financial aid planning
h. computer lab
i. student organizations
j. transfer credit assistance
k. services to students with disabilities

13c. Please indicate how important the following services at your school are to you.
[On scale of 1 – 3, 1) Very, 2) Somewhat, 3) Not at all]
a. academic advising/planning
b. career counseling
c. job placement assistance
d. peer or other tutoring
e. skills lab (writing, math, etc.)
f. child care
g. financial aid planning
h. computer lab
i. student organizations
j. transfer credit assistance
k. services to students with disabilities

14. How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Very likely, 2) Likely, 3) Somewhat likely, 4) Not likely]
a. working full-time
b. caring for dependents
c. academically unprepared
d. lack of finances
e. transfer to a 4-year college or university
15. How supportive are your friends of your attending college?  
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Extremely, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Somewhat, 4) Not Very]

16. How supportive is your immediate family of your attending college?  
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Extremely, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Somewhat, 4) Not Very]

16b. How supportive is your romantic partner of your attending college?  
[On scale of 1 – 4, 1) Extremely, 2) Quite a bit, 3) Somewhat, 4) Not Very, 5) Not applicable]

17. Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending college. (Please respond to every item. Can pick 1 and 2 more than once.)  
[On scale of 1 – 3, 1) Primary Goal, 2) Secondary Goal, 3) Not a goal]
   a. complete a certificate program
   b. obtain an associate degree
   c. transfer to a 4-year college or university
   d. obtain or update job-related skills
   e. self-improvement/personal enjoyment
   f. change careers

18. Indicate which of the following are sources you use to pay your tuition at this college. (Please respond to every item.)  
[On scale of 1 – 3, 1) Major source, 2) Minor source, 3) Not a source]
   a. My own income/savings
   b. Parent or spouse/significant other’s income/savings
   c. Employer contributions
   d. Grants and scholarships
   e. Student loans (bank, etc.)
   f. Public assistance

19. Since high school, which of the following types of schools have you attended other than the one you are attending now? (Please mark all that apply)
   - Proprietary (private) school or training program
   - Public vocational-technical school
   - Another community or technical college
   - 4-year college or university
   - None

20. When do you plan to take classes at college again?
   - I will accomplish my goal(s) during this term and will not be returning
   - I have no current plan to return
   - Within the next 12 months
   - Uncertain
21. At this college, in what range is your overall college grade average?

- A
- to B+
- B
- to C+
- C
- or lower
- Do not have a GPA at this school
- Pass/fail classes only

22. When do you most frequently take classes?

- Day classes (morning or afternoon)
- Evening classes
- Weekend classes

23. How many total credit hours have you earned in college, not counting the courses you are currently taking this term?

- None
- 1 – 14 credits
- 15 – 29 credits
- 30 – 44 credits
- 45 – 60 credits
- Over 60 credits

24. At what other types of institutions are you taking classes this term? (Please mark all that apply)

- None
- High school
- Vocational/technical school
- Another community or technical college
- 4-year college/university
- Other _____________ [Please fill]

25. How many classes are you presently taking at OTHER institutions?

- None
- 1 class
- 2 classes
- 3 classes
26. Would you recommend this college to a friend or family member?
   - Yes
   - No

27. Are you an international student or foreign national?
   - Yes
   - No

28. What is your highest academic credential you have earned?
   - None
   - High school diploma or GED
   - Vocational/technical certificate
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s/doctoral/professional degree

29. What is the highest level of education obtained by your FATHER:
   - not a high school graduate
   - high school diploma or GED
   - some college, did not complete degree
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree/1st professional
   - Doctorate degree
   - Unknown

30. What is the highest level of education obtained by your MOTHER:
   - not a high school graduate
   - high school diploma or GED
   - some college, did not complete degree
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree/1st professional
   - Doctorate degree
   - unknown
Appendix C: Narrative Genre Prompts for Time 1

**Best Experiences in College:** Write a story about your best experience in college so far. What happened? Who was involved? How did it all turn out?

**Worst Experiences in College:** Write a story about your worst experience in college so far. What happened? Who was involved? How did it all turn out?

**Letter:** Please write a short letter to an important person in your life. This person can be your parent, your romantic partner, your sibling, your child, your friend, your professor, or your boss – anyone who is important to you. What would you like to tell them about your experiences in community college?

**Newspaper:** Imagine that you have completed your first year of community college and that you are going to write a short article for your college newspaper. This article will be read by freshman students at your community college. What advice would you give them for their first year? Feel free to give examples from your own experiences.

**Terri:** Terri is a student who started attending your college when you did. Write a story about Terri’s first year in college. What had he (or she) hoped? What happened? Who was involved (positively or negatively)? How did she (or he) think and feel about that year?
Appendix D: Selected Narratives

1. Luisa (Participant 33): Luisa was a 24-year old female student who identified as being Latina/Hispanic-American and spoke very fluent English. She identified herself as being a single parent with one child. She reported that she lived with her child and was employed full-time. At the time of the study, she was a full-time student in her third semester. Her year-end GPA was 3.88. In her narratives, she focused on her relationship experiences and connected them to her goals, college activities, and ultimate college outcomes.

   a. Letter: “Dear [Son]: First let me start by saying how much I love you. I know it may seem as if I don’t care or don’t have time for you, but you’re the driving force behind me continuing my education. I don’t want you to ever think that being uneducated and content with a “job” is okay. A career, a passion for something is all I could ever hope to teach you is important. You have inspired me beyond words could explain to better myself and you.”

   b. Best Experience: “My best experience in college so far was meeting new people in my classes that I now consider friends and keep in contact with.”

   c. Worst Experience: “My worst experience in college so far was sacrificing my personal time to attend classes instead of spending time with my son. My son feels neglected and sometimes he says I never have time for him. Because of that, I took on more classes to be able to graduate sooner.”

2. Tom (Participant 93): Tom was an 18-year old male student who identified as being Latino/Hispanic-American and spoke very fluent English. He identified himself as a
single childless person. He reporting living with his parents/family and being employed part-time. At the time of the study, he was a full-time student in his first semester. His year-end GPA was 1.54. In his narratives, Tom focused on his feelings of alienation from the community college system.

a. **Letter**: “Dear Ma, This college blows major beef. I do not want to spend another minute with these fugazy (fake, unhelpful) teachers anymore. There is some good ones but this college is not for me. I’m going to leave after this semester since my grades are up to par with the requirements for other colleges.”

b. **Best Experience**: “I did not have a best experience in college. I didn’t come here to enjoy myself. I came to learn, acquire credits, and leave.”

c. **Worst Experience**: “Every day I attend this college it’s the same thing, go to class, come out, go home. I have not had a worse experience other than just having to be here.”

3. **Mario** (Participant 34): Mario was a 19-year old male student who identified as being Latino/Hispanic-American and spoke very fluent English. He identified himself as a single childless person. He reporting living with his parents/family and not being employed. At the time of the study, he was a full-time student in his first semester. His year-end GPA was 2.48. His narratives are an archetypal example of how students focused on relationships with family and friends in the Letters genre, on relationships with college partners in the Best Experience genre, and on college experiences (often of difficulty) in the Worst Experience genre.
a. **Letter**: “Dear Christine: College is not as hard as you say it is. We are both in college, so we’re both pretty busy. Always listen to my advice! And you won’t slack at all!”

b. **Best Experience**: “I have had many great experiences in my first semester of college. One memorable moment would be during my FYS [Freshman Year Seminar] class. We had a guest speaker come in, he was I believe head of security at [community college]. He tells us very humorous stories about his work experience.”

c. **Worst Experience**: “Worst experience so far would have to be my 2 hour breaks during class time. I would have a class at 10 AM and the next one at 2 PM. I know there is a lot to do in 2 hours, but when you don’t have any work to do, its torture. This occurred during the beginning of the semester, I didn’t have any friends nor did I know my way around the campus. I did find the cafeteria so I would spend 2 hours in the cafeteria either sleeping or eating a BLT. I ended up making friends and spending these 2 hours with them.”

4. **Khadija** (Participant 104): Khadija was a 22-year old female student who identified as being African-Carribean-American and spoke very fluent English. She identified herself as being a single childless person. She reported that she lived with her parents/family and was employed part-time. At the time of the study, she was a part-time student in her third semester. Her year-end GPA was 3.06. In her narratives, she used various connecting and other resolution strategies to link her relationships to her goals, college activities, and ultimate college outcomes.
a. **Letter**: Dear [Sister]: I will recommend you to attend to X Community College because the staff are really helpful and the professors help you to work and achieve a good grade during the end of the semester. There are writing center, tutor for math, and professors have hours that you can see them if you need extra help with the assignments and etc. The students are wonderful and the school have library, and a lot of computer labs that you can go there and do your work. There is a group study that you can join if you have difficulties in one of your classes. I am glad I attend to this school and about to graduate in 2015.”

b. **Best Experience**: “My experience at this college have been good so far. I love the environment and the students. I made friends here and I learn new stuff every day. The only difficulties I face sometimes is the tap [financial aid] department and every day someone somewhere always delete my information in the system. But the counselors are helping out in choosing my classes and the professors are helping me learn new things every day.”

c. **Worst Experience**: “My worst experience in this college is when I wanted to rent a book from the library and they didn’t allow me to because I owe the school. For some reason, tap [financial aid] took forever to process and it took a while for it to clear all my bill. I came to the tap department to write me a note to give to the library staff but they said no. I ended up using the book in the library because I couldn’t take it home. I was real pissed.”

5. **Tyrone** (Participant 67): Tyrone was an 18-year old male student who identified as being African-Caribbean-American and spoke very fluent English. He identified himself as a
childless partnered person. He reporting living with his relatives besides his parents and was employed full-time. At the time of the study, he was a part-time student in his first semester. His year-end GPA was 3.43. He used relationship-centered scripts (especially the analyzing college partners script) and connecting strategies to demonstrate his understanding of the relational aspects of the community college system.

a. **Letter**: “Wendell, my annoying and always think he’s right brother. You said how by me going to community college will make me a slower person in life. How you are so wrong, I think this by far was the best decision I ever made. Yes I could of went to John Jay or even Southern, but the money I am able to save here and then transfer credits, well it just doesn’t get better than that. I also get a chance to see and feel how it’s like to be in a college environment, the late night studying, the early morning lectures, and even the wide variety of food, that I can get at the cafeteria. All of this I can use to survive in the real world, hard work, dedication, and a full stomach is all everyone needs to be successful in life. Also being a part of the basketball team for this school, showed me how team work can make the dream work. You will never be good at something unless you practice long hours and perfecting your craft. This also can be connected with school, everything I do I strive to be the best at it, and all of my teachers and people that I have encountered at Bronx Community College has been helping me along the way.”

b. **Best Experience**: “My best experience in college is when me and my friend Turner decided to make a study group. This study group consisted of bright students that were doing very well in their classes. I considered myself an average
student, so by being around them, I wanted to be better. They were able to show me good study habits, and a few tips on being successful in college. In little to no time I started to see an increase in my GPA.”

c. Worst Experience: “My worst experience in college would be when I first joined the basketball team. The coach saw potential in me so he decided to work me until I break in to [become] the type of basket ball player he envisioned me to be. At one time I was willing to quit the team, but he said if I do so I won’t ever be allowed to play for this school ever again. So for the love of the sport I sucked it up and [I] did what he asked for.”

6. Kayla (Participant 15): Kayla was a 22-year old female student who identified as being Latina/Hispanic-American and spoke very fluent English. She identified herself as being a single parent with two children. She reported that she lived with her children and was not employed. At the time of the study, she was a part-time student in her first semester. Her year-end GPA was 0.00, indicating she had dropped out in her first semester. In her narratives, she demonstrated her alienation from and lack of social support in the community college system.

a. Letter: “Dear Maddox (son), I promise to never touch your college account so that I know you’ll go to a better college than I did. X Community College isn’t for everyone. Some professors you could not get a hold and when you do they brush off your concerns. Sincerely, Mom.”

b. Best Experience: “I do not have a good or best college experience yet!”
c. **Worst Experience:** “Being in PSY 11 has been the most challenging experience in college because it’s like a foreign language. I am study[ing] more to get through this.”
## Appendix E: Regression Tables

### Table E.1: Regressions Predicting Year-End GPA Using High Point Issues Across Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 0: [Controls]</th>
<th>Model 1: [Controls] + [College Exp HPs]</th>
<th>Model 5: [Controls] + [All HPs]</th>
<th>Model 6: [Controls] + [Relationships + Goals] + [All HPs]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-.004 [-.983, .978]</td>
<td>.230 [-.782, 1.241]</td>
<td>-.036 [-1.142, 1.069]</td>
<td>-.016 [-1.911, 1.879]</td>
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<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.022 [-.005, .049]</td>
<td>.019 [-.008, .046]</td>
<td>.019 [-.009, .048]</td>
<td>.021 [-.015, .056]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.016 [-.021, .052]</td>
<td>.021 [-.015, .058]</td>
<td>.025 [-.013, .064]</td>
<td>.032 [-.010, .074]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>.125 [-.045, .296]</td>
<td>.120 [-.053, .293]</td>
<td>.117 [-.066, .301]</td>
<td>.140 [-.064, .343]</td>
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<tr>
<td># Children</td>
<td>-.069 [-.279, 1.141]</td>
<td>-.052 [-.261, .156]</td>
<td>-.039 [-.273, .195]</td>
<td>-.041 [-.302, .220]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>-.134 [-.634, .365]</td>
<td>-.111 [-.615, .393]</td>
<td>-.098 [-.643, .447]</td>
<td>-.001 [-.307, .449]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Reading</td>
<td>.397 [-.015, 809]†</td>
<td>.358 [-.056, .772]†</td>
<td>.361 [-.078, .800]†</td>
<td>.483 [-.039, 1.004]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Writing</td>
<td>-.282 [-.689, .125]</td>
<td>-.297 [-.700, .105]</td>
<td>-.354 [-.201, .501]</td>
<td>-.476 [-.946, .006]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Math</td>
<td>.138 [-.194, .469]</td>
<td>.100 [-.232, .432]</td>
<td>.150 [-.207, .100]</td>
<td>.095 [-.293, .483]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA Fall 2014</td>
<td>.530 [.410, .650]*</td>
<td>.527 [.405, .649]*</td>
<td>.525 [.399, .651]*</td>
<td>.532 [.392, .672]*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Credits Fall 2014</td>
<td>-.060 [-.201, .081]</td>
<td>-.056 [-.196, .085]</td>
<td>-.053 [-.207, .100]</td>
<td>-.076 [-.250, .097]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships at Home</td>
<td>.032 [-.030, .094]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships at School</td>
<td>-.007 [-.052, .038]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>.038 [-.152, .076]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>.074 [-.310, .161]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>.124 [-.134, .381]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>.093 [-.344, .157]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Skills</td>
<td>.025 [-.275, .226]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Change</td>
<td>.107 [-.061, .435]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High Point - Genre</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>College Exp HP</td>
<td>-.115 [-.434, .204]</td>
<td>-.150 [-.515, .214]</td>
<td>-.115 [-.577, .346]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Exp HP Best</td>
<td>.009 [-.339, .356]</td>
<td>.043 [-.400, .487]</td>
<td>.159 [-.318, .635]</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Exp HP Worst</td>
<td>-.323 [-.585, -.062]*</td>
<td>-.374 [-.724, -.025]*</td>
<td>-.477 [-.865, -.090]*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing HP Best</td>
<td>-.032 [-.462, .397]</td>
<td>-.054 [-.546, .438]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing HP Worst</td>
<td>-.035 [-.492, .422]</td>
<td>.042 [-.454, .539]</td>
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<td>Emotion HP Letters</td>
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<td>.583 [-.345, 1.511]</td>
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<td>Emotion HP Best</td>
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<td>Emotion HP Worst</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships HP</td>
<td>-.017 [-.420, .386]</td>
<td>-.005 [-.474, .464]</td>
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<td>Letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships HP Best</td>
<td>.096 [-.260, .453]</td>
<td>.163 [-.228, .554]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships HP</td>
<td>-.160 [-.556, .236]</td>
<td>-.198 [-.656, .259]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NARRATING THE FUTURE

R²  .571  .604  .619  .663
F  8.610***  7.722***  5.537***  4.116***

Note. † = marginally significant at p < .10 level. * = statistically significant at p < .05 level.
Note. HP stands for High Point Issues.

Table E.2: Regressions Predicting Year-End GPA Using Total High Point Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 7: [Controls] + [College Exp HP Total]</th>
<th>Model 11: [Controls] + [All HP Totals]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.211 [-.771, 1.193]</td>
<td>-.310 [-1.354, .734]</td>
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<td>Controls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.018 [-.009, .045]</td>
<td>.018 [-.009, .045]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.043 [-.231, .317]</td>
<td>.043 [-.237, .323]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.023 [-.013, .060]</td>
<td>.024 [-.013, .061]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>.108 [-.060, .276]</td>
<td>.110 [-.061, .281]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Children</td>
<td>-.043 [-.251, .164]</td>
<td>-.037 [-.253, .179]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>.062 [-.107, .232]</td>
<td>.061 [-.113, .235]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>-.064 [-.557, .430]</td>
<td>-.065 [-.589, .460]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>.055 [-.263, .374]</td>
<td>.050 [-.275, .375]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remedial Reading</td>
<td>.421 [.017, 826]*</td>
<td>.420 [.010, .830]*</td>
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<td>Remedial Writing</td>
<td>-.326 [-.727, .075]</td>
<td>-.321 [-.729, .087]</td>
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<td>Remedial Math</td>
<td>.076 [-.254, .405]</td>
<td>.076 [-.258, .410]</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.510 [.390, .629]</td>
<td>.509 [.389, .630]</td>
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<td>Total Credits Fall 2014</td>
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<td>-.042 [-.183, .100]</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Relationships at Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships at School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship w/ Rom. Partner</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
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<td>Associate</td>
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<td>Transfer</td>
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<td>Job Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Point - Total</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College Experience HP Total</td>
<td>-.172 [-.333, -.011]*</td>
<td>-.190 [-.406, .025] †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing HP Total</td>
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<td>-.023 [-.303, .257]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion HP Total</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships HP Total</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>8.649*</td>
<td>7.396*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. † = marginally significant at p < .10 level. * = statistically significant at p < .05 level.
Note. HP stands for High Point Issues. ESL stands for English as a Second Language class.
Table E.3: *Regressions Predicting Year-End GPA Using Resolution Strategies across Genre*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 17: [Controls] + [All RSs]</th>
<th>Model 18: [Controls] + [Relationships + Goals] + [All RSs]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>.309 [-1.401, .783]</td>
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<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.021 [-.009, .051]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.076 [-.227, .378]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.011 [-.030, .052]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>.143 [-.058, .344]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Children</td>
<td>-.076 [-.303, .151]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>.058 [-.140, .256]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>-.074 [-.611, .464]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>.072 [-.278, .422]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Reading</td>
<td>.404 [-.066, .874]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Writing</td>
<td>-.245 [-.709, .219]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Math</td>
<td>.128 [-.234, .491]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA Fall 2014</td>
<td>.540 [.400,.680]*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Credits Fall 2014</td>
<td>-.050 [-.205,.105])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships at Home</td>
<td>.009 [-.054, .073]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships at School</td>
<td>-.009 [-.053, .036]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship w/ Rom. Partner</td>
<td>-.053 [-.178, .071]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>-.065 [-.249, .119]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>-.124 [-.363, .114]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>.073 [-.224, .371]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Skills</td>
<td>-.064 [-.339, .211]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Improvement</td>
<td>-.080 [-.369, .210]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Change</td>
<td>.090 [-.169, .350]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution Strategies – Genre</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical RS Letters</td>
<td>-.005 [-.191, .181]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical RS Best</td>
<td>.003 [-.209, .203]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Practical RS Worst</td>
<td>-.030 [-.657, .597]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting RS Letters</td>
<td>.108 [-.017, .233]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting RS Best</td>
<td>-.074 [-.416, .269]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting RS Worst</td>
<td>-.030 [-.657, .597]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Reframing RS Letters</td>
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<td>Psychological Reframing RS Best</td>
<td>.077 [-.359, .512]†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Reframing RS Worst</td>
<td>.125 [-.700, .450]†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting by Self RS Letters</td>
<td>.191 [-.073, .455]†</td>
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<td>Acting by Self RS Best</td>
<td>-.026 [-.652, .600]†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting by Self RS Worst</td>
<td>-.076 [-.377, .225]†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.600</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>4.567*</td>
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</table>

Note. † = marginally significant at p < .10 level. * = statistically significant at p < .05 level.

Note. RS stands for Resolution Strategies. ESL stands for English as a Second Language class. Psych Reframing stands for Psychological Reframing.
### Table E.4: Regressions Predicting Year-End GPA, Using Scripts from Worst Experience Genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 26: [Controls] + [Unsolvable Problems Script Use]</th>
<th>Model 28: [Controls] + [Solving Problems Script Use]</th>
<th>Model 30: [Controls] + [4 Worst Scripts Variables]</th>
<th>Model 31: [Controls] + [Relationships + Goals] + [4 Worst Scripts Variables]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.148 [-.830, 1.127]</td>
<td>-0.230 [-1.223, .762]</td>
<td>-0.322 [-1.392, .748]</td>
<td>-0.291 [-2.094, 1.513]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.020 [-.006, .047]</td>
<td>0.029 [.001, .056]</td>
<td>0.028 [.000, .056]</td>
<td>0.031 [.004, .066]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.051 [-.224, .326]</td>
<td>0.013 [-.263, .290]</td>
<td>0.058 [-.219, .334]</td>
<td>0.061 [-.246, .369]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.017 [-.018, .053]</td>
<td>0.015 [-.020, .051]</td>
<td>0.016 [-.019, .051]</td>
<td>0.025 [-.014, .064]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>0.138 [-.031, .306]</td>
<td>0.112 [-.056, .280]</td>
<td>0.098 [-.073, .268]</td>
<td>0.108 [-.076, .293]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Children</td>
<td>-0.053 [-.261, .155]</td>
<td>-0.086 [-.293, .122]</td>
<td>-0.087 [-.295, .121]</td>
<td>-0.036 [-.274, .202]</td>
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<td>Employment status</td>
<td>0.025 [-.149, .155]</td>
<td>0.069 [-.102, .240]</td>
<td>0.028 [-.147, .204]</td>
<td>-0.013 [-.208, .181]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways</td>
<td>-0.068 [-.149, .199]</td>
<td>-0.056 [-.533, .442]</td>
<td>-0.125 [-.629, .378]</td>
<td>-0.099 [-.646, .447]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>0.020 [-.565, .428]</td>
<td>0.008 [-.314, .331]</td>
<td>-0.026 [-.294, .346]</td>
<td>-0.021 [-.373, .332]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Reading</td>
<td>0.390 [-.016, .796]†</td>
<td>0.405 [.000, .811]†</td>
<td>0.344 [.062, .749]†</td>
<td>0.373 [.109, .856]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Writing</td>
<td>-0.284 [-.684, .117]</td>
<td>-0.258 [-.659, .143]</td>
<td>-0.205 [-.608, .197]</td>
<td>-0.251 [-.692, .191]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remedial Math</td>
<td>0.142 [-.184, .468]</td>
<td>0.097 [-.232, .425]</td>
<td>0.033 [-.306, .371]</td>
<td>-0.042 [-.418, .333]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA Fall 2014</td>
<td>0.525 [.407, .643]*</td>
<td>0.523 [.405, .622]*</td>
<td>0.537 [.419, .655]*</td>
<td>0.522 [.392, .652]*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Credits Fall 2014</td>
<td>-0.073 [-.213, .066]</td>
<td>-0.053 [-.192, .086]</td>
<td>-0.057 [-.195, .082]</td>
<td>-0.076 [-.233, .081]</td>
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<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships at Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships at School</td>
<td>.004 [.039, .047]</td>
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<td>Relat w/ Rom. Partner</td>
<td>-0.053 [-.039, .047]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>-0.045 [-.212, .122]</td>
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<td>Associate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>.147 [-.102, .397]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Skills</td>
<td>-0.059 [-.299, .181]</td>
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<td>Self-Improvement</td>
<td>-0.089 [-.333, .156]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Change</td>
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<td>Communicating Experiences</td>
<td>-0.250 [-.509, .009]†</td>
<td>.121 [-.324, .566]</td>
<td>.131 [-.348, .611]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing College Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td>.402 [-.079, .874]†</td>
<td>.475 [-.034, .984]†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solving Problems</td>
<td>.329 [-.003, .664]†</td>
<td>.514 [.009, 1.019]†</td>
<td>.473 [-.072, 1.018]†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countering Genre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.638</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>8.514*</td>
<td>8.537*</td>
<td>7.927*</td>
<td>5.005*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. † = marginally significant at p < .10 level. * = statistically significant at p < .05 level.

Note. ESL stands for English as a Second Language class. Psych Reframing stands for Psychological Reframing. Relat w/ Rom Partner stands for Relationship with Romantic Partner.
Table E.5: *Regressions Predicting Year-End GPA Using Scripts from All Genres*

Model 32: [Controls] + [Scripts from All Genres]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>-.466</td>
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<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>[.001, .058]</td>
<td>†</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>[-.208, .387]</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>[-.277, .053]</td>
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<td>Semester</td>
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<td>[-.085, .291]</td>
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<tr>
<td># Children</td>
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<td>[.181, .210]</td>
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<td>Pathways</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
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<td>[-.357, .332]</td>
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<td>Remedial Reading</td>
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<td>Remedial Writing</td>
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<td>Remedial Math</td>
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<td>GPA Fall 2014</td>
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<td>[.409, .664]</td>
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<td>Relationships at School</td>
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<td>Relationship with Romantic Partner</td>
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<td><strong>Best Experience Genre Scripts</strong></td>
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<td>[-.012, 1.031]</td>
<td>†</td>
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R² = .619
F = 5.539*

Note. † = marginally significant at p < .10 level. * = statistically significant at p < .05 level.

Note. ESL stands for English as a Second Language class.
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