

# College Persistence Research Plan

## Sara Miller and Kelsey Greathouse

This document describes the research plan and script that will be used **to investigate how resource constrained post-traditional students persist through post-secondary education in moments of struggle or hardship.**

We are defining post-traditional students as those who fit at least one of the following criteria: first generation of your family attending post-secondary school, working full-time, are parent/guardian/main provider for a child, comes from a low-income family, went to a Title 1 or Title 9 secondary school. We are defining young adults as those between the ages of 18-24 year old.

## Goals

The goals of this research are:

1. To build empathy with our target audience, so we can better understand pivot points in a post secondary career and how they evolve into more serious threats to persistence
2. To identify what triggers a moment of struggle or hardship
3. To identify what coping mechanisms are used in those moments of struggle and hardship and where or how those coping mechanisms are learned

## Roles for Research Stage

Research Participants (both)

Reach out and Coordinating Research Participants (Sara)

Data Organization (keeping folder up to date and clearly labeled) (Kelsey)

Presentation Lead (making sure the wall is ready to go for Sunday reviews) (Sara)

Project Management (setting and updating deadlines) (Kelsey)

## Research methodology

This research leverages methods called *contextual inquiry* and *participatory design*. These are methods of design research that focus on behavior rather than opinions. We will plan research around these principles:

- Go to the participants' houses, dorms, offices, or other places that they are familiar with, rather than bringing them into an office
- Conduct an interview prompted by artifacts or behavior, rather than simply following a question/answer script
- Develop a series of activities that participants can use to communicate their wants, needs, and desires in a creative way instead of simply in a verbal manner

This is a qualitative form of research that doesn't depend on a randomly selected group of participants. Instead, we will select participants based on specific (but simple) criteria, attempting to gather depth of data about a small sample rather than breadth about a large sample. This research is rigorous but does not depend on (or strive to recruit) a random selection. Our research focus is on developing empathy and understanding, not making predictions about how a small group translates to a larger group.

## Participants

Research will be conducted around the central Texas geographic area. In an attempt to understand these supports, we will conduct research with students enrolled at a variety of post-secondary educational institutions that may be on the verge of dropping out.

Quantity of Participants	School	
Currently Enrolled	Name	Type
4	University of Texas - Austin	Four-year university (Public)
3	Huston-Tillotson University	Four-year university (Private)
6	Austin Community College	Community college
6	<i>Various</i>	Online university

### Screener

1. Are you or have you ever been enrolled in a post-secondary educational program?  
**If no, stop**
2. Are you working over 30 hours a week?  
**If no, question 3**
3. Are you a parent/guardian or the main provider for a child?  
**If no, question 4**
4. Are you the first person in your family to pursue a post secondary education?  
**If no, question 5**
5. Did you receive free or reduced lunch during high school?  
**If no, stop**
6. **Phone Call Follow-Up:** Do you think college is the best route for you? Is there another path/option that you think is better?

**Required materials participants must have to show during research session:**

Digital photo album of "A Day in the Life". Emailed prior, if possible.

**Script / Research Protocol –**

**Script 1 - Currently Enrolled Student**

**1. Introduction**

Thanks for taking the time to work with us today. We are researchers doing a study on college completion. This meeting should take 1-2 hours. Before we get started, I have a brief consent form that I would like you to review and sign. This describes that we will be audio recording the session for our own notes and recollection, and, with your permission, taking pictures. Your name, face, and any other identifying information will be removed so you will be completely anonymous

*[sign]*

Let me explain how our session today will work. First, we're going to ask you some brief questions about yourself and your experiences in school. Next, we'll work through several exercises and worksheets about your experiences in school.

**2. Introductory questions**

- a. Are you originally from Austin?
- b. What school do you go to?
- c. What do you like to do for fun?

**3. Walkthrough: Photos of Your Daily Life**

When we scheduled this appointment, we asked you to take photos of moments that occurred in your daily life. Please show me those photos.

There are two groups of photos here: good moments and less-than-good moments. Can you show us which photos are in which group?

*Probe with:* Tell me about this photo. How did that make you feel?

**4. Exercise: Timeline Activity**

*Give students a sheet on paper with a line on it and a smiley face in the top left corner and a frowning face in the bottom left corner. Let students know this is a timeline. The start of the timeline is when they first considered going to school after high school. The end of the timeline is when they are in their future career and happy.*

*Ask students to mark where they are now.*

*Next, ask students to choose a moment between the start of the timeline and now that they want to write on a sticky note. Let them know that they can place it higher (closer to the happy face) or lower (closer to the frowny face) on the timeline.*

Why did you place that one where you did?  
Tell me more about that.

*Ask students to create sticky notes for moments they may imagine will happen in the future and place them higher or lower on the timeline as well.*

*Then ask student to grab "Who Cards" and place them on the :) to :( spectrum in relation to a specific event. Ask them to name the "who" on each card.*

Who is this? Why do you place her here? Tell me more about that.

## **6. Completion**

Thank you for your participation today; it was great hearing from you about your experiences and we learned a lot. Here is your compensation for the study. Please sign this form stating that you received compensation from us.

Thank you!

## **Materials to prepare**

The following materials are required:

- Consent forms
- Compensation received form

The following tools are required:

- Audio recorder / batteries
- Pens