

Student Experiences Utilizing the Tennessee Reconnect Scholarship: A Narrative Analysis

What is the TN Reconnect?

A last-dollar scholarship to attend a two-year college, technical institution, or associated degree granting institution tuition-free.

Who does the TN Reconnect fund?

Tennessee residents over the age of 25 who do not currently possess a degree can apply for the grant.

Why does TN want adults to get a postsecondary degree?

The TN Reconnect Program is a part of the larger *Drive to 55* initiative, which challenged Tennessee to get 55% of Tennesseans a college degree or certificate by 2025.

Purpose of Study

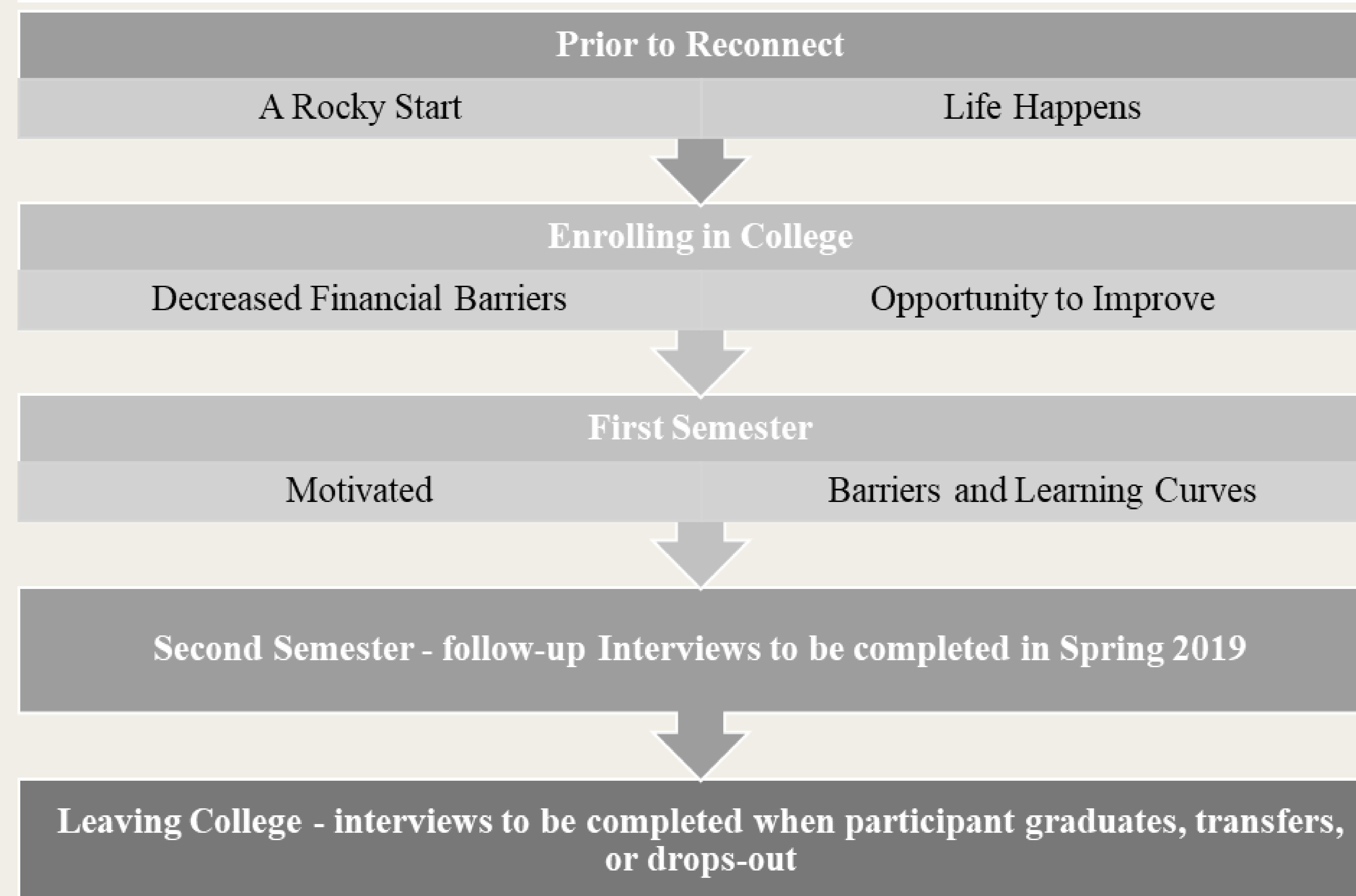
To understand the experiences of students who participated in the Tennessee Reconnect Program.

Research Questions

1. How do TN Reconnect students describe their experiences with the program?
2. What opportunities, challenges, and barriers exist for TN Reconnect students?
3. What are best practices and scalable changes for the TN Reconnect program?

Understanding How Students Reconnect: Participant Descriptive Data (n=20)

Race/Ethnicity	65% White/Caucasian
	30% Black/African American
	5% Other
Average Age	40
Average Semester Credit Hours	8.5
Average Years Since Last Attended College	10.5
Current Employment Status	50% Employed Full-Time
	25% Employed Part-Time
	25% Unemployed
Current Marital Status	25% Single/Never Married
	50% Married
	25% Divorced/Separated
Current Dependents	70% Are Primary Caregiver for Child/Other Dependent



Method

- Chronological Narrative Analysis
- 4 TN Community Colleges
- 20 Participants
- Constant Comparative Coding

Themes

Prior to Reconnect

1. A Rocky Start
2. Life Happens

Enrolling in College

1. Decreased Financial Barriers
2. Opportunity to Improve

First Semester

1. Motivated
2. Barriers and Learning Curves

Discussion & Implications

1. Develop orientation or bridge programs more accessible and relevant to adult Reconnect students
2. Assess and improve advising models for adult students at community colleges
3. Expand Reconnect Scholarship funding to a first-dollar scholarship program to allow further financial support
4. Create proactive student success initiatives to support students who may be experiencing a “rocky start”