Candidate: Ashley J. Wildman
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Title: The Lived Experiences of Conditionally Admitted College Students
Committee: Dr. Patrick Munley, Chair
Dr. Glinda Rawls
Dr. Randy Ott
Time/Place: Wednesday, July 6, 2016
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
3120 Sangren Hall

College students vary in their preparedness for higher education. While low high school grades and standardized test scores are associated with poor college performance, many colleges and universities admit at least a few academically underprepared students in order to maintain a certain student body size, meet goals for ethnic or socioeconomic diversity, or recruit students with certain artistic or athletic skills (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2009; Mapes, 2011; Parisi 2012; Zwick, 2007). In order to help academically underprepared students such as these, some institutions admit students who do not meet regular admissions standards “conditionally” and offer them specialized programs to provide additional support (Adebayo, 2008; Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1997; Eaton, 2006; Heaney & Fisher, 2011; Johnson, 2000-2001; Laden, Matranga, & Peltier, 1999; Legutko, 2006; Mapes, 2011; Mattson, 2007; Palmer & Davis, 2012; Stewart & Heaney, 2013; Ting, 1997; White & Sedlacek, 1986). This population has been the focus of a significant amount of research into their rates of retention and graduation as well as their academic success in terms of college GPA. This literature is primarily quantitative in nature; however, little has been learned from this research beyond what explains retention and graduation for most students does not necessarily apply to those who are conditionally admitted (Adebayo, 2008; Copeland, 1991; Heaney & Fisher, 2011; House, 1995; Houston, 1980; Laden et al., 1999; Ting, 1997; White & Sedlacek, 1986). There is a need to understand
the phenomenon of conditional admission beyond the numbers and through the experiences of the students themselves who have participated.

The goal of the current study was to better understand the experiences of conditionally admitted students through a phenomenological qualitative approach in order to inform and advise those who work with these students. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with students who have completed a conditional admission program and continued in school were the basis for this study. The major findings include: (a) most of the participants had experienced some sort of academic failure and were able to recover, (b) while in college the students had worked hard and become adults, (c) most participants had experienced stigma and confusion early in the conditional admission program, and (d) many participants gained a sense of confidence as a result of the conditional admission program. Discussion of the findings includes comparisons to existing research, implications for counselors and student affairs professionals, limitations, and suggestions for further research.