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Retention Strategies to Ensure Financial Sustainability in Community Colleges

Claudia Yvette Provost
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Claudia Yvette Provost

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Retention Strategies to Ensure Financial Sustainability in Community Colleges

by

Claudia Yvette Provost

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2009

BS, University of Phoenix, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

A rapid decline in student retention among community colleges reduces revenue and jeopardizes financial sustainability, meaning leaders of community colleges who lack strategies to retain students have lower revenue and financial sustainability. Grounded in the advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework, the purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies leaders of community colleges used to increase student retention and revenues for achieving financial sustainability. A purposeful sampling of five leaders from a community college in Louisiana who successfully used strategies to increase student retention participated in this study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and institutional retention records relating to student retention strategies and were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Three themes emerged on strategies to increase student retention: collaboration, student orientations, and intervention programs. A key recommendation is for community college leaders to create a retention task force that requires all new and returning students to complete a student orientation. The implication for positive social change from increased student retention and financial sustainability could result in a greater number of students graduating with higher wages and contributing to local community development.

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Dedication

I dedicate this accomplishment to my family! To my forever love, my handsome son, Marques Kyle Bogan! I love and miss you so much; my heart truly aches to not have you here with me. Thank you so much for watching over us and I know you are beaming with pride. You are truly the wind beneath my wings—My Forever Love!! To my beautiful daughter, Maiya, thank you for stepping up and always being there, whether I need you, or not. Also, thank you for blessing me with my beautiful granddaughter's, Aubrey (BestFriend) and Aurielle (ButterFly). I hope my educational journey has shown you that it is never too late to accomplish goals—I Love You All Very Much! Bernard, thank you for supporting me through whatever journey I embark upon. Your humble and compassionate spirit keeps me going - thank you and I love you, infinity!

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To my siblings, Stephanie, Tammie (my Venus), Edward, and Eric, you have loved and supported me, unconditionally—Thank you, know that I love you all so much, and remember, if one of us wins; all of us wins! To my nieces, nephews, and Godchildren, I am so blessed to be Nanny to all of you. My hope is that you see excellence within yourselves and find your respective niches to achieve your individual ideas of success! I love you each of you; infinity!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leaders of colleges and universities face a major challenge when it comes to retaining students. With decreased financial support from state and federal entities, students failing to persist can create a hardship on the financial sustainability of the institution. Retaining students is a national problem; however, for leaders of community colleges, which are 2-year institutions, retaining students from first to second year is vital (Sutton, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that leaders of a community college in Louisiana use to increase student retention and revenues for achieving financial sustainability.

Background of the Problem

Over the past three decades, state and local spending cuts have left public colleges with nearly 25% decline in funding per student (Webber, 2018). In 2017, Louisiana's higher education sector sustained almost 14 midyear and end-of-year budget cuts, and though the education sectors in other states improved from the 2008 recession, Louisiana's education system still struggled (Colvin, 2017). In particular, leaders within the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) had to realign eight campuses due to declining state funding for the 2-year institutions within the college's system (Ballard, 2017). Established in 1999, LCTCS received nearly 85% of its funding for technical schools and nearly 75% of its funding for community colleges from state government and other sources (Ballard, 2017). Since the substantial decrease in funding, students have become responsible for financing the colleges' bottom-line; however, with

the increase in cost for students, there has been a decline in enrollment, which adds to the financial deficits of the college system (Ballard, 2017).

Leaders of one community college in Louisiana received a directive from LCTCS to assess ways in which they could reduce costs (Pierce, 2018). To alleviate increasing student tuition rates, leaders decided to lessen costs by eliminating six underperforming programs, which also meant loss of employment (Pierce, 2018). Reduced funding is hindering Louisiana colleges' budgets and endangering the quality of education students receive. Providing a strong educated workforce is vital to the future of the Louisiana's economy, and to achieve this, the state's higher education system has to be one of good quality and one that is conducive to enrolling and retaining students.

Problem Statement

Leaders in higher education are devoting an increased amount of time to improving student retention (Borgen & Borgen, 2016). In 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in fall 2016, 36% of undergraduate students dropped out of school, which decreased revenue and affected financial sustainability. The general business problem was that some academic leaders are experiencing a rapid decline in student retention, which results in a decrease in revenue. The specific business problem was some leaders of community colleges lack strategies to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in

Louisiana for achieving financial sustainability. The participant sample included a dean of students, directors of student success, and student success advisors who have developed and implemented strategies that have helped to retain students and increase revenues. Identifying and exploring strategies to improve student retention may contribute to increasing graduation rates. Increasing the number of citizens who earn college degrees may increase the tax base for communities' growth that can benefit citizens.

Nature of the Study

Conducting a research study requires the use of a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method methodology. Using the qualitative method, researchers may collect contextual data that provides answers to a research question (Franco, 2016). The focus of quantitative research is to measure a problem by producing numerical data and converting the data into operational statistics. The collected data are structured, quantified, and used to test a hypothesis about variables' relationships or groups' differences (Barczak, 2015). Because of the study's purpose, I did not need to test a hypothesis or collect numeral data, therefore, I did not use a quantitative method or mixed method, which involves quantitative methods.

Researchers can use a qualitative case study design to understand complex issues and extend experiences or enhance previous research (Sykes et al., 2018). Additionally, researchers use qualitative case studies to focus on comprehensive contextual exploration of a limited number of events or conditions. Using the multiple case design, researchers select several cases for acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon

than a single case. I selected a qualitative, single case study design to explore a single case that focused on a specific phenomenon within a real-life context and over a specific amount of time (Yin, 2018). I chose a qualitative single case study to classify and outline the perceptions and strategies of various groups to form a structured outline for developing findings and conclusions for a single case of interest (Quick & Hall, 2015).

In contrast, researchers use the ethnographic design when studying the characteristics of a culture and specific aspects of participants' lives (Sykes et al., 2018), which was not appropriate to the focus of my study. Additionally, the phenomenological design was not appropriate because researchers use phenomenology to identify occurrences, focus on meanings of individuals' experiences, and provide comprehensive reports of the communal characteristics to understand the structure of the experiences (Sykes et al., 2018). Further, I did not use the narrative research design because it is a spoken or written transcript from one or more individuals' personal stories that gives a version of an event or series of events that are chronologically linked, which was not the focus of my study (Sykes et al., 2018).

Research Question

What strategies do community college leaders use to retain students to increase community college revenue to achieve financial sustainability?

Interview Questions

1. What are your most effective student retention strategies at your college?

2. What administrative departments are responsible for developing and implementing student retention programs and initiatives at your community college?

3. What types of data do you use to identify students who are at risk of not persisting?

4. At what stages of the student life cycle do you collect the data?

5. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the retention strategies?

6. What were the key challenges to implementing your organizations strategies for improved retention?

7. How did you address each of the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies for improved retention?

8. What additional strategies are important to sustaining revenue through retaining students?

<div align="center">**Conceptual Framework**</div>

The advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework started evolving in the 1980s and 1990s and enabled researchers to view subjects more closely (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Traditionally, some of the advocacy and participatory scholars built their studies on the works of Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, and Freire (Neuman, 2000), Fay (1987), Heron and Reason (1997), and Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998). Typically applied for increasing the understanding of a significant problem, the advocacy and participatory worldview is pragmatic and collaborative because it is an investigation completed with others rather than on others or to others.

The advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework was applicable to this study because there was a current and relevant agenda that needed improvements for a specific issue. In this framework, participants had a voice that combined theoretical viewpoints with philosophical deductions (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), which created images of the issues that students faced and the needed changes. Additionally, because participatory action is recursive (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), leaders' focus can remain on effecting change and improvements to retention policies and procedures.

Operational Definitions

First-time student: A student who has no prior postsecondary experience attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level (NCES, 2018).

First-year student: A student who has completed less than the equivalent of 1 full year of undergraduate work (NCES, 2018).

Full-time student: A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits in an undergraduate degree course (NCES, 2018).

Retention rates: The number of students who continue at the same school the next semester or year (NCES, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas and beliefs that researchers presume are factual, yet scientific evidence needed to substantiate validity is nonexistent (Marshall & Rossman, 2016); therefore, researchers use assumptions as a basis to conduct a study. This study had two assumptions. One was that the participants would be cooperative participants and

be truthful in providing comprehensive feedback during the interview process. Another assumption was that participants would allocate adequate time to take part in the interview process, offer responses, and allow feedback to potential follow-up questions.

Limitations

Limitations are prospective weaknesses in a study that are outside of the researcher's control that can restrict the scope of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Despite locating numerous studies on retention, limitations related to this study involved data collection and the lack of previous studies on retention that were specific to LCTCS. The conclusions on effective student retention strategies subsequent from this study could be exaggerated by the personal practices and bias of the study participants, as the study participants were responsible for developing and implementing programs to retain students and monitoring retention numbers within the college.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors and conditions that the researcher controls that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Delimitations of this study included the research question, industry type, and the applicability to other geographical locations. Additional delimitations were the participants and research method (Tillman et al., 2011).

Significance of the Study

Since the Great Depression, of 2008, state and federal funding for public colleges has significantly decreased (Sav, 2016). As college leaders are responsible for making decisions to financially sustain the institution, implementing strategies to retain students

may help increase college revenues and contribute to achieve and maintain institutions'
financial sustainability.

Contribution to Business Practice

Allocating funds to recruit new students is important; however, retaining current students is cost-efficient (Hillman, 2012). Increasing college students can offset costs due to decreased state and federal funding (Hafer et al., 2018). Retaining students, particularly first-year students, means maintaining a source of revenue that mitigates the cost of recruiting new students (Gale & Parker, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

Identifying effective strategies to improve college student retention may contribute to increasing student success and graduation rates. Citizens who possess a college degree may become change agents who contribute to the growth of communities. Retaining students may also be beneficial to communities' economies because graduates may enter the workforce with increased skill sets, which promotes wage increases (Carruth & Carruth, 2013). Additionally, workers with additional knowledge and skill sets may add value to the local workforces, help to develop strong community values for increasing economic benefits for graduates' families.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to investigate strategies that are effective in retaining students in Louisiana's community college system. Identifying effective retention strategies may aid college leaders in providing adequate tools and services to their students and contribute to increasing college revenue and improving

financial sustainability. The overarching research question is "What strategies do community college leaders use to retain students to increase community college revenue to achieve financial sustainability?" The purpose of this literature review was to gather scholarly information and data to build a strong foundation for the topic of the study. Scholars conducting research examine the literature to categorize key physiognomies and tenets of the phenomenon relating to the study (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Higher education is a means for opportunity and economic progress and is a system for generating and providing skilled laborers to satisfy the demands of the workforce (Lumina Foundation, 2011). The education system in the United States allows the nation to have a competitive and aggressive position in the global economic market (Curran, 2009). The development of a progressive educational system is the tool that has given the nation significant advantages over other nations (Curran, 2009). Even so, there are local, state, and federal governments that enforce specific laws, limitations, and guidelines on colleges and universities.

In 1999, colleges in Louisiana received nearly 85% of its funding for technical schools and nearly 75% of its funding for community colleges from state government and other sources (Ballard, 2017). Between 2012 and 2014, the United States' full-time college enrollment rates declined significantly; however, Louisiana's rates dropped much faster than the nation's by going from roughly 181,600 to about 168,000 (NCES, 2017). Between 2005 and 2016, student tuition for the state's colleges and universities increased 74%, which was three times the inflation rate (NCES, 2017). Due to budget cuts, Louisiana colleges and universities receive about $3,000 per student, which puts the state

50th in the nation when it comes to funding higher education (Colvin, 2017). Leaders in the higher education sector have an obligation to acknowledge and address students' departure from college before they obtain a degree (Shapiro et al., 2012). As a result, leaders within LCTCS are working to identify effective strategies to increase declining retention rates as a means of improving college revenue and contributing to financial sustainability.

Search Strategy

My search strategy for this research included a review of articles from scholarly, multidisciplinary sources, such as journals, books, dissertations, and other relevant data from the Walden University Library. The specific databases that I used are EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and SAGE Publications. The search criteria will include words used in higher education vernacular, such as *retention*, *community college*, *student success*, *retention theories*, *first-time student*, *first-year student*, *full-time student*, and *retention rates*. The literature review contains 86 references, of which 81 (95.35%) are peer-reviewed and 70 (81.40%) are published within the past 5 years.

Organization of the Literature Review

The literature review will (a) introduce this study in the framework of significant declines in student retention and effective strategies to retain students to achieve a financially sustainable, (b) demonstrate the requisite for the research, and (c) augment the foundation of the study on present research. The literature review is made up of several themes and subthemes. The next section includes the conceptual framework, themes and phenomena, and comparing and contrasting theories.

Advocacy and Participatory Worldview Theory

The advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework was developed in the 1980s, where participants acted as active contributors to the study, which made it a shared experience (Rahi, 2017). The advocacy and participatory worldview is an exploration that is action-driven and constructed by participants and the observer (Peterson & Gencel, 2013).The advocacy and participatory worldview is a result of people who felt that the post-positivist models included fundamental laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals in society or issues of social justice that needed addressing (Rahi, 2017). It starts by addressing a specific issue that is important and current in society and allows the researcher to construct a picture of an issue, the people, and the necessary changes (Peterson and Gencel, 2013). This form of inquiry focuses on helping people free themselves from constraints found in the media, language, work procedures, and in the relationships of power in educational settings (Rahi, 2017).

College Student Retention Models

Researchers continue to try to understand more accurately the reasons associated with the persistence and attrition rates of students in higher education. Researchers have been studying college student retention for over four decades, producing a substantial number of studies (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). The need to know exactly why students are choosing to remain in college or leave has never been greater (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Various researchers have studied a wide range of variables, including demographics, aspirations, motivation, personality, values, and institutional characteristics (Hamman, 2018). Among the numerous theories and models available to explain college persistence,

Tinto's integration model (1975) and Bean's attrition model (1980) provide the most comprehensive frameworks on departure decisions (French, 2017).

Tinto's Student Integration Model

Vincent Tinto developed Tinto's student integration model in 1975 that unequivocally linked academic and social systems of higher education institutions to leaders who designed the systems and college student retention over various periods (Tinto, 2006, 2007). Tinto's model is the most widely used retention model (Braxton, 2019), and it incorporates interactions between students and members of the institutions throughout the first year of college (Tinto, 2006, 2007). Tinto's student integration model contends that common reasons for low retention numbers are school policy, administration, faculty, curriculum, financial obligations, and social and emotional issues (Tinto, 2001). Tinto (1993) suggested integrating into the institution, both scholastically and socially, adds value to students persisting effectively to graduation. Researchers have used Tinto's work to strengthen the importance of student engagement during the first year of college when trying to increase student retention (Tinto, 2006, 2007). Focusing on the first year of college and student and faculty engagement outside the classroom, researchers have introduced programs such as freshman orientation, freshman seminars, and various extracurricular programs (Roksa & Whitley, 2017).

Tinto's (1975) integration model provided the foundation for the critical areas of alignment for this study. Tinto's model of integration is applicable to this study because Tinto asserted that first-year college students lack college readiness and are unprepared for the college experience (Tinto, 1999). First-year college students possess traits that

influence their level of commitment to college (i.e., high school achievement,

socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity; Tinto, 1993).

Astin's Theory of Involvement

Similar to Tinto's theory, Astin's theory of involvement refers to the amount of

physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience

(Astin, 1999). Developed in 1984, the fundamental conceptions of Astin's theory are

student inputs, which include demographics, backgrounds, and experiences; student

environments, which would explain student experiences while in college; and student

effects, including, types, intelligence, viewpoints, principles, and beliefs that occur after

college graduation (Astin, 1999). Astin (1999) suggested five basic postulates in his

theory: involvement means the investment of physical and psychological energy in

different objects that range in the degree of their specificity; involvement occurs along a

continuum, with different students investing different amounts of energy in various

objects at various times; involvement includes quantitative and qualitative components;

the volume of knowledge and personal growth is relative to the extent of participation;

and the efficacy of any scholastic system is relative to the aptitude of that policy or

practice to enhance participation (Astin, 1999). Astin maintained that the final two

postulates are helpful for designing more effective educational programs for students.

Bean's Student Attrition Model

Building on works of his predecessors, Tinto (1975) and Astin (1977), in 1980,

Bean introduced his student attrition model. Arguing that student motivations for

departing college are comparable to employees leaving because of dissatisfaction with

their career or employer, Bean criticized Tinto for not making the correlation (Bean, 1980). Taking into account apparent variances, such as student and employee pay and benefits, Bean replaced independent variables from the academic experience, such as grade point average (GPA), student development, and career applicability (Bean, 1980). After revising the model, Bean included four influential variables into his theory: background, organizational, environmental, and attitudinal and outcome. The four institutional dynamics are primary influencers of student persistence, and by altering the variables, his model can apply to nearly any industry (Bean & Eaton, 2001).

Bean followed with a conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition, which explains attrition patterns of nontraditional students, older, part-time, and commuting students by building on process models of organizational turnover and attitude-behavior interactions (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Bean's 1990 model extended his previous model by combining Astin's model of student involvement to include student background, integration, and the environment as influencers on students not persisting. Moreover, Bean and Eaton (2001) made efforts to amend Tinto's (1975, 1993) model to explicate the psychosomatic developments essential to the model. However, Bean and Eaton's model did not take into account how cultural experiences might influence retaining students of color, particularly those attending predominately White institutions. But distinct cultural experiences affect the paradigms that are considered vital to the retention process for students of color (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

Student Populations

Leaders in higher education have battled retention rates for nearly 50 years, and despite improved attention, leaders are still striving to identify and address barriers that prevent students from persisting and being successful (Jobe et al., 2016). Nearly half of all community college students leave before obtaining their intended goals (Akin & Park, 2015). Though some first-year college students identify ways to manage and persist, other students struggle to transition beyond the first year (Trautwein & Bosse, 2016). Student persistence is vital to the retention and the success of college students (Xu et al., 2018). Students persisting from their first year is essential because of student vulnerability at the beginning of college (Hope, 2018). Various studies focus on first-year students and the characteristics that influence academic performance and persistence (Astin, 1999). Researchers have hypothesized that retaining first-year college students and academic progression are issues with higher education (Jobe et al., 2016; Tinto, 1999).

First-generation college students (FGCS) accounted for a third of the population of college students (NCES, 2018), and they have unique barriers to retention. Although FGCS consist of identities such as low-income and minorities, they are defined as incoming college freshmen students whose parents did not attend college (Gibbons et al., 2016). FGCS face the risk of not persisting because many are academically under-prepared, having established families, and being a full-time worker and student (Bell & Santamaria, 2018; Pratt et al., 2017). Though the attributes may differ, many FGCS lack the awareness of how postsecondary education works, which may prevent them from

visiting college campuses before registering, soliciting assistance from faculty, and

recognizing collegiate policies and procedures (Costello et al., 2018).

Additionally, many students do not wish to continue their education post high

school; however, they do so because, in many fields, it is a requirement of the workforce

(Hughes & Gibbons, 2016). But America's K-12 education system has inequalities and

gaps between urban and suburban public schools, and higher education is deemed

unbiased and fair (Hughes & Gibbons, 2016). With individual states attempting to control

educational costs, leaders of open-access institutions are not forthcoming regarding the

disparities in options available to students who may be underprepared for college

(Harrison, 2018). Community colleges are committed to being open-access institutions

that permit millions of students, who, despite graduating from high school, are not

academically prepared for college (Perin, 2018).

First-Year College Students

First-year college students have their individual problems, and entering college

for the first time can present added issues for the freshmen. For decades, leaders of

colleges and universities have increased their attention and efforts on retaining first-year

students (Sutton, 2018), and researchers have investigated barriers and strategies to help

improve retention struggles. For example, Trautwein and Bosse (2016) learned that there

is an assortment of individual, structural, contextual, and shared constraints that students

deemed necessary to their transition to higher education. Their quantitative analysis

linked individual and institutional requirements as being most significant, with the single-

case inquiry showing that students experience an assortment of challenges within their

first-year that links the critical requirements. Additionally, Trolian (2019) found the significance between various pre-college career outlooks and student involvement and success during their first year, and students' career path could positively impact engagement and success during the first year of college. Additionally, based on the findings, leaders in higher education are tasked with identifying programs to connect students and their career choices. Williams et al. (2018) also showed a significant impact of cognitive variables influencing the retention rate of first-time college students. Both high school and first-year college GPAs, ACT and SAT scores, and academic majors are significant predictors of first-year student retention. There was also a positive significance of gender, age, residence, and financial status retaining first-year students. Lastly, there was a positive significance between high school and first-year GPAs, ACT and SAT scores, academic major, gender, age, residence status and financial status, which represented over a significant portion of retention variance in retention among first-year college students (Williams et al., 2018).

First-Generation College Students

Postsecondary education is a gateway to FGCS, students whose parents did not attend a post-secondary institution, seeking a successful career and improved circumstances. Though many students experience anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties, FGCS experience additional problems that can hinder their educational goals (Horowitz, 2017; Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). Many FGCS choose to matriculate into a community college to earn a 2-year degree before transitioning to a 4-year university, with a fraction of the students obtaining their intended goal (Costello et al., 2018).

Researchers such as Pratt et al. (2017), Gibbons et al. (2019), and Demetriou et al. (2017) have conducted studies focusing on contributing factors of successes and obstacles of FGCS in higher education. Pratt et al. (2017) explored the association between previously reported trends in retaining FGCS with current students. With a large percentage of FGCS originating from disparate backgrounds, the results of the quantitative study showed issues with finances to be consistent with previous research. Students who fall in this category tend to seek employment, which disrupts their academic studies. Having a sense of belonging, aptitude, and security are key components to the emotional well-being and academic trajectory of students (Ryan & Deci, 2016), but students worried about finances spend less time engaging in their studies and collegial activities.

Gibbons et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative investigation regarding FGCS and how they acclimate to the collegiate environment. The results showed that students struggled with multitasking, meeting deadlines, ineffective study skills, and maintaining the academic rigors of college. Students also acknowledged feeling detached from their families and the difficulties of sharing their college experiences with their non-collegial family. Thus, both Pratt et al. (2017) and Gibbons et al. (2019) suggested how essential self-care and a sense of belonging is to FGCS.

Finally, Demetriou et al. (2017) explored FGCS who achieved success throughout their educational journey. The results of the study showed that FGCS who embrace student engagement and learning proficiency activities are more likely to be successful in their educational trajectory. Participants branded mentoring and building relationships as

critical elements of student success. Based on the three studies, FGCS can benefit from financial assistance, interactive living-learning communities, mentoring, and co-curricular activities, such as America's College Promise (White House, 2015).

In a qualitative study, Gibbons et al. (2019) explored theoretical obstacles and provisions associated with FGCS and their acclimation to college. The authors collected data from 15 FCGS at an institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The authors contacted participants via email and conducted focus groups to allow students to articulate how they adjusted to college and to share their perception of what they deemed essential to helping them prepare for college. The result of the study showed themes of barriers and supports, which detailed a multidimensional comprehension of how students get acclimated to college and shed light on the significance of being fully prepared for college. Participants expressed issues with multitasking, meeting deadlines, ineffective study skills, and complexities with academic rigor. Participants also acknowledged not having a sense of belonging and feelings of being detached from their families. Participants struggled with finding a median between remaining in school and going home; they expressed difficulty in expounding on their new-found college life to their families who lacked familiarity with college life. Also noted was how vital self-care is to adjusting to college; students characterized how realizing their unique identities aided their decisions regarding self-care, college, and future career paths. In general, participants acknowledged that getting acclimated to college was a complicated process.

Researchers studied the obstacles that first-generation and low-income students face when entering college; yet, there is little research regarding the successes of FGCS. Demetriou et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study where they explored FGCS who achieved success in their college experiences. The authors built the study on the synthesis of the psychosomatic, sociological, and scholastic perspectives used in Bronfenbrenner bio- ecological systems theory. The authors gathered data using 100 student cases, provided by the office of institutional research at an institution in the southeast United States. The authors used unidentifiable interview transcripts and categorical data, i.e., admissions and financial aid applications, and university records, to explore the participants' curricular and co-curricular practices. The authors gathered transcripts by conducting 45 to 60-minute interviews, which included 31 structured interview questions.

The results of the study showed that FGCS, who want to be successful in college, should actively engage in his or her setting. The study participants remained consistent in their pursuit of activities to enhance their learning proficiencies, affiliations, and student engagement. The study participants identified mentoring, by developing relationships by working cohesively on activities, to be essential to the successful student experience. Lastly, the results show that FCGS wants to be challenged by collaborating and building relationships that offer support when overcoming challenges.

Underprepared Students

Students who lack adequate preparation for college are more likely to display low self-efficacy and be unsuccessful than prepared students (Kena et al., 2016). Underprepared students have substantially low GPAs, SAT, and ACT scores and are

more likely to discontinue their college journey before completing their degree programs (Kena et al., 2016). Although Melzer and Grant (2016) explored differences in personality characteristics and academic requirements among prepared and underprepared first-year college students, Courtney Akins, with the Center for Community College Student Engagement, conducted a report on student perceived college readiness (Sutton, 2016). Melzer and Grant learned that establishing career goals lacked significance with students; therefore, they would not seek assistance to establish a career path. The results of the report showed that despite a significant number of students deeming themselves prepared for college, a large portion of those students has to take one or more developmental courses. Cholewa et al., (2017) examined the inclusion of the Counselors Providing Resources, Integration, Skill Development, and Psychosocial Support (CRISP) program with an established Oasis program. The results of the study showed that students, when participating in the Oasis and CRISP programs, achieved higher GPAs than students who did not participate in the CRISP program.

In a quantitative study by Melzer and Grant (2016), the authors explored variances in personality characteristics and observed academic necessities among prepared and underprepared first-year college students to develop instructional strategies for students who lack preparation. Participants for the study, consisting of 109 first-time freshman students, from a small university in Connecticut, received the American College Testing Program's College Student Needs Assessment Survey (CSNAS) and the Interpersonal Style Inventory (ISI; Youniss & Lorr, 1972) to gather data. The authors used a Mann-Whitney U test to weigh the answers and learned that career goals lacked

importance to students; therefore, students refrained from seeking assistance relating to future career goals. There was marginal significance involving students reaching out for counseling or advice; however, students realized the need for assistance to enhance their math abilities.

Cholewa et al., (2017) conducted a quantitative study to examine the inclusion of the CRISP program, which is a psychotherapy model focused on improving retention and success efforts of underprepared students to an existing Oasis program, which services students underprepared for college. Data for the study came from students' academic records and counselors' recorded logs. The authors examined the connection between student's engaging in CRISP counseling and the students' retention and success outcomes. Study participants consisted of 2 cohorts, 149 full-time and 5 part-time first-year students and 116 full-time and 3 part-time students enrolled in Oasis at a mid-size institution in the northeast. Variables for the study consisted of individual counseling, student demographics, pre-college academic performance, cumulative GPA, student retention, and university-wide retention.

The results of the study showed that Oasis students who joined CRISP counseling achieved higher GPAs than students who did not join CRISP counseling. The results also showed students who joined CRISP counseling persisted in their second year more often than students who did not join CRISP counseling. Based on the results of the study, CRISP counseling is a cost-effective tool used to address increasing concerns of retention. Cholewa et al. (2017), asserts that employing CRISP creates opportunities to grow student support services, improve counselor interactions with underprepared

populations, and individual counseling, through CRISP, can positively influence underprepared students.

In 2016, Courtney Akins of the Center for Community College Student Engagement conducted and released a national report, *Expectations Meet Reality: The Underprepared Student and Community Colleges* (Sutton, 2016). Data for the report consisted of more than 70,000 community college students completing a survey on students perceived college readiness. The results of the survey showed that students are not as prepared for college as they think. Key findings showed that 86 percent of students matriculating into community college consider themselves sufficiently ready for the rigor of community college; however, 68 percent of them enrolled in one or more remedial courses. Among the respondents, 87 percent took a college entrance exam, of which 66 percent received a month to prepare for the exam. Of the students who took advantage of placement exam resources provided by the community college, 96 percent identified the resources as beneficial. Based on the results of the report, Adkins pushed to refine standards and placement assessments and suggested community colleges allow additional preparation time for students taking placement tests.

Academic and Student Affairs Services

Student retention and persistence are relevant to the success of colleges and universities. Developing effective strategies to retain students to completion is the responsibility of the people who have constant and face-to-face contact with students (Floyd, 2018). The Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs professionals are pivotal to students and their educational success. Advising and instructing students, creating

programs, and organizing tools to offer support and encouragement are fundamental to the duties of the Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs (Walker, 2018). To increase effectiveness within the shifting educational market and governmental setting, academic and student affairs specialists must quantify and articulate the outcomes of student retention and completion (Floyd, 2018; McCarthy, 2018).

First-year seminar (FYS), an introductory class offered to first-year students is designed to aid students with adapting to the collegiate environment, cultivating effective study strategies, and acquiring methods to complete assignments effectively and efficiently (Jaijairam, 2016). Studies have shown that a large percentage of first-year students indicated that the FYS course was beneficial to acquiring more information about the institution, selecting courses relative to their chosen programs, realizing study resources, and collaborating on team projects (Jaijairam, 2016; Tharp, 2017).

First-Year Seminar

Over 60 percent of two and four-year colleges and universities offer First-Year Experience programs for freshman students (Alamuddin & Bender, 2018). Permzadian & Credé (2016) explored the successes of FYS and learned that FYS are most effective when delivered as extended orientation seminars, when facilitated by faculty or staff, and as a stand-alone course. Jaijairam (2016), on the other hand, investigated the impact FYS has on student retention. The results showed improvement among a large percentage of academic performances, critical thinking, and analysis skills, and improved proficiency with problem-solving, participation, and communicating with faculty. The author also learned that students, who participated in FYS, transitioned to the next semester at an

18% higher rate than expected. In a quantitative analysis, Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) explored FYS programs at community colleges in California. The results of the study showed that FYS programs are vital to students' success; however, students struggled with barriers within the institution.

In a quantitative study, Permzadian & Credé (2016) explored the success of FYSs based on measures of first-year grades and the one-year retention rate. Built on the stress inoculation theory and the met-expectations theory, the authors retrieved data from ERIC, Education Full Text, PsycINFO, and Dissertation Abstracts databases. The searches yielded 682 sources, which the authors examined to determine if they contained data to use in the review. The meta-analytic results showed that on average FYSs have a small effect on first-year grades, and the effectiveness of FYSs is substantially moderated by FYS characteristics, i.e., type of seminar, institutional characteristics, i.e., 2-year or 4-year institution, and study characteristics, i.e., study design. Based on the results, FYSs are most effective as extended orientation seminars rather than an academic or a hybrid seminar, when taught by faculty or administrative staff and not by students, and when delivered as a stand-alone course rather than linked to a learning community.

Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) examined first-year experience programs at community colleges in California. Using qualitative analysis, the authors used the critical race theory and ecological theory to gain insight on diverse student experiences with access, support, and long-term success within community colleges. Building on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the critical race theory in education, the authors collected data from the Pathways to Postsecondary Success Study, a five-year, mixed-

method project that studied postsecondary paths of low-income community college students. Study participants consisted of 110 low-income students from three community colleges in southern California. Using semistructured interviews, the authors examined participants' involvements in the first-year experience program. Study results showed first-year experience programs are essential to students' successes; however, barriers within the institutions still exist. Participants emphasized the importance of proximal practices and expressed appreciation for the positive influence of peers, advisors, and faculty, which produced a holistic foundation for the students. Participants viewed enrolling in first-year experience as a means of promoting success with peers, faculty, and coursework.

Jaijairam (2016) explored the advantages of FYS and the impact the course has on retaining students. The authors collected data for the quantitative study, via survey, from 570 FYS, and 27 FYS peer mentors from a community college in the northeast region of the United States. To improve the success of first-year students at the college, leaders established a first-year program and an FYS. Study results showed participants having positive experiences as a result of the first-year program and FYS. The survey showed greater than 85% of the participants completing FYS improved their academic performance, communication with faculty, participants showed improvement in solving academic issues, participation, and critical thinking and analysis. Additionally, participants had more confidence, which increased in-class participation, research skills, and the class aided in having a greater understanding of achieving college success.

Lastly, the results showed that students who completed FYS transitioned to the next semester at a rate that was 18% higher than expected.

Advising and Faculty Involvement

Advising students in higher education is vital; yet, advising is a constant and perplexing undertaking (Zhang et al., 2017). Institutional leaders are striving to improve retention numbers to maintain financial sustainability; thereby, increasing the importance of advising efforts. Whereas Hatch and Garcia (2017) used quantitative methods to explore advising methods and how they impacted freshmen students, Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016) used the qualitative single-case study methodology to examine the relationship between intrusive academic advising and community college student success, and Soria, Laumer, Morrow, and Marttinen (2017) used quantitative methods to investigate the effects of strengths- based academic advising on freshman students. Hatch and Garcia (2017) learned the correlation between engagement and persistence is dependent on individual goals, that students respond to advising efforts in varying ways, and becoming involved in academic and student engagement support systems are vital to retaining students throughout the student life-cycle.

In a quantitative study, Hatch and Garcia (2017), explored various types of advising methods and their effectiveness on new community college freshmen. The study focuses on the first three weeks of school as it relates to freshman persistence. The purpose of the survey is to retrieve data on student behaviors and institutional practices that influence students by concentrating on the earliest weeks of college, which can be significant in establishing a foundation for success. Selecting random participants from

reading, writing, and math developmental courses and from first college-level English and math courses, data for the study was obtained from 13 community colleges using the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE). Using multinomial logistic regression to test the relationship of new student persistence in the first three weeks of college, relative to advising activities, the results show that advising activities are significant to community college freshmen and their early thoughts of persisting. The authors learned that (1) the significance between engagement and persistence is mainly contingent on distinct goals; (2) advising efforts may have varying impacts for individual students; and (3) academic and social support systems are important to persistence in both early and long-term persistence.

Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016) used the qualitative single-case study methodology to explore the relationship between intrusive academic advising and community college student success. The authors sought to identify what students deemed beneficial from the intrusive advising experience, areas of improvement within the intrusive advising experience, and how intrusive advising contributes to academic success. Data for the single-case study came from 12 students participating in an intrusive advising program at a community college in Texas. The results of the study showed that students all agreed that intrusive advising was beneficial during their first semester; explicitly, encouraging them to create degree plans, which forced them to create long-term goals. The results also showed that students developed an increase in confidence when degree planning and seeking additional assistance.

In a quantitative study, built on Astin's (1993) input-environment-output model, Soria, Laumer, Morrow, and Marttinen (2017) explored the effects of strengths-based academic advising on freshman students. The authors used students' pre-college characteristics, experiences, and demographics for inputs, proficiencies within higher education for the environment, and outcomes of interest for the outputs. The authors suggest inputs could influence environmental experiences and outcomes, which is why researchers consider inputs when orchestrating statistical models. Data was collected from 1228 first-year students who did and did not participate in the strengths-based advising programs. The results showed that students who participated in strengths-based conversations had higher rates of retention and graduation, levels of engagement, and academic self-efficacy than students opting not to participate. Academic Advisors from 21 focus groups found that strengths methods expedited advising connections, which ultimately was support to students' engagement, retention, and graduation, improved participants' self-awareness and buoyancy, and improved advisors' personal and professional development, which influences students' success.

Student Support Services

The transition from high school to college, or integrating college into an already established lifestyle, can be difficult. Students transitioning to colleges and universities are embarking on a new culture, which encompasses an unfamiliar set of standards, behaviors, and formalities; basically, a different environment (Boettcher et al., 2019). Leaders within higher education are active in identifying ways to provide support throughout the student life-cycle, and even more so, the first year in college (Vuckovic et

al., 2019). According to Vuckovic et al. (2019), an essential time for faculty and staff to connect with students to help them establish learning proficiencies and assume accountability of their college experience is during the first year. Services such as peer mentoring, freshman learning communities, and student engagement offer opportunities to help students to acclimate and thrive during their first-year experience (Frischmann and Moor, 2017).

Peer Mentoring

Yomtov et al. (2017) postulated college and university peer mentoring positively influence students' sense of belonging and commitment, which can potentially increase the chances of retaining students. Researchers, such as Holt and Fifer (2018), Lane (2018), Han et al. (2017), and Yomtov et al. (2017) explored the effects of peer mentoring on retaining students in higher education. Although Holt and Fifer (2018) used a large-scale, quantitative, multilevel modeling to provide an overview of peer mentoring literature specific to its impact on stress and adjustment in the first year of college and retention outcomes in higher education, Lane (2018) used an integrative literature review, which allows researchers to review, critique, and synthesize literature to aid in generating new frameworks and perspectives. Han, Farruggia, and Moss (2017) used quantitative methods to investigate if non-cognitive influences, such as academic self-efficacy, motivation, and sense of belonging, predict college students' academic performance and retention, and Yomtov et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effectiveness of a peer-mentoring program within a college or university.

Holt and Fifer (2018) theorized addressing all impacts of the mentor-mentee relationship is impractical; however, the study showed a positive correlation between mentors with active attachment styles and the ability to adjust to various mentoring behaviors. Lane (2018) used the integrative literature because it allows researchers to review, critique, and synthesize literature in an integrated way that generates new frameworks and perspectives on a topic. Seven articles fit the criteria for the study, and an analysis of the seven articles revealed that peer mentoring is of great benefit to addressing the issues that cause students to drop out in the first year of college. Han et al. (2017) used cluster analysis to distinguish the profiles of 1,400 students relative to first-year college students' academic mindsets, sense of belonging, motivation, performance, and first-to-second-year retention. Yomtov et al. (2017) theorized on a college or university campus, peer mentors can support first-year students by establishing trust, showing compassion, and serving as a leader and supporter of their mentees. The authors used a pretest-posttest, quasi-experimental design to evaluate fifty-two sections of a university peer-mentoring program, UNIV 100 (an entry-level course that is designed to offer first-year college students assistance with being acclimated to the collegiate atmosphere and prepares them for the student life cycle).

Overall, Holt and Fifer (2018) learned that the mentor-mentee relationship has a positive impact on first-year student retention. The authors determined it would be valuable for peer mentors to develop their attachment style and self-efficacy at the beginning of the mentoring period (Holt & Fifer, 2018). Lane (2018) used seven articles that fit the study criteria and learned that peer mentoring is of great benefit to addressing

the issues that cause students to drop out in the first year of college. According to Lane (2018), psychosocial influences, such as stress, appear to play a role in whether a student successfully integrates into college that critical first year and has a substantial impact on whether the student remains in college past the first year. The results of Han et al's. (2017) study showed a positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic performance and a positive correlation between a sense of belonging and retention. The results provide important intervention implications to improve college student success and support other studies that promote freshman peer mentoring programs. Lastly, Yomtov et al. (2017) concluded that first-year university-based peer-mentoring programs are effective because the programs allow students to feel more connected and integrated to the college or university; thus, improving retention numbers and increasing revenue.

Freshman Learning Communities

Retaining students is vital to institutional operations and reputational program quality (West & Williams, 2017). The first year of college is essential to students' academic performance and retention (Rossbach et al., 2018). To improve students' transition, academic performance, and increase retention efforts, leaders in colleges and universities implemented first-year programs, which includes freshman learning communities (Flores and Zhang, 2019). In freshman learning communities (FLCs), students are placed in cohorts of up to 30 students to encourage students to actively contribute to the learning environment (Frank et al., 2019). Tinto (1997) speculated that retention numbers would increase if learning communities were in place for student access. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recognized

FLCs as one of ten fundamental practices that produce positive results in an array of educational outcomes (Kern and Kingsbury, 2019).

Student Engagement

Retaining students continues to challenge leaders within the higher education sector, which also has implications for student retention (Tight, 2019). Fredin, Fuchsteiner, and Portz (2015) posited a fundamental element to collegiate success is student engagement, which is a concept that refers to social belonging and how immersed or enthralled students are with their studies, fellow students, and their educational environment. Though Patterson et al. (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental pilot study to test a social-belonging intervention to improve retention numbers, Bonet and Walters (2016) analyzed the effects of student engagement within learning communities, and Lei et al., (2018) conducted a study to debunk claims that student engagement does not have a positive influence on academic achievement and retention.

Patterson et al. (2017) theorized leaders in higher education and within the political realm have devoted decades to improve retention and graduation numbers. The authors suggest that persistence and retention are the results of a collection of adverse and individualized outcomes. Patterson et al. (2017) conducted a study to analyze a sample of 128 students and learned that students excelled and persisted at higher rates when actively involved in settings where they have to engage with other students. Bonet and Walters (2016) used quantitative analysis to explore the effects of 267 students enrolled in learning communities and regular sections of sociology and psychology. The outcome of the study demonstrated a significant influence on student engagement within learning

communities on student performance and persistence. Lei et al. (2018) used 69 independent studies, consisting of 196,473 participants, to conduct a quantitative meta-analysis to prove that student engagement has a positive impact on academic achievement. The results of the study showed a positive correlation between student engagement and academic achievement, a positive correlation between academic achievement and behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Transition

The higher education system in the US is unlike systems found in other countries and cultures. The US is unique in that it lacks a national system of higher education; its system is decentralized as college and universities are locally governed and governed within individual state systems (Hooge, 2016). According to Daniel and Watermann (2018), earning a college degree is a significant step in life that contributes to various life benefits, such as a successful career and financial security. Education in the 21st century can impact other aspects of life, such as enhancing the quality of life, health, and an increase in overall opportunities (Doyle & Skinner, 2017). Attend and finish college, find employment, purchase a home, get married, and raise a family. It may not be simplistic; however, it begins with a college education. Earning a college degree not only opens up opportunities in life, it socially and intellectually prepares you to enter the workforce, adult life, and promotes overall happiness and stability (Handel, 2018).

Louisiana's higher education system encompasses 66 colleges and universities, which includes 33 publics, 15 nonprofits, and 18 for-profit institutions (NCES, 2017). On a national level, Louisiana ranks 42nd in higher education, with 20.6% of full-time, two-

year college students graduating in three years or less (USNews, 2018). Student retention

and success have become critical discussions, not only in colleges and universities, but

also at the state and federal level, in policy circles, with employers, and among the

general public (Blekic et al., 2017). Higher education policy and politics in the United

States has been the subject of studies for several decades as researchers try to cognize,

explain, and extrapolate on the relationships between higher education institutions and

political institutions (Cooley, 2015). Once funded by states, public colleges and

universities received funding based on the number of enrollments, with the response

being significant increases in enrollments without regard for whether students would

persist to graduation (Sav, 2016).

State and the federal government entities once allocated generous funding for

higher education institutions; however, with time and changes to the economy, funding

has decreased considerably. Public colleges and universities have undergone declines in

state legislated funding support for over a decade (Sav, 2016). Concerns about increasing

costs of higher education within the United States have the public, students, and their

parents, along with policymakers arguing that college has become unaffordable (Thelin,

2015). Before the 2008 recession, Louisiana received nearly 85% of its funding for

technical schools and nearly 75% of its funding for community colleges from state

government and other sources (Ballard, 2017). Since 2008, funding for Louisiana's

higher education system has undergone at least fourteen budget cuts, and although most

of the other states' higher education systems are recovering nicely from the 2008

recession, Louisiana still lags (Colvin, 2017). Due to budget cuts, Louisiana colleges and

universities receive about $3,000 per student, which puts the state fiftieth in the nation when it comes to funding higher education (Colvin, 2017). Reduced funding is hindering Louisiana College's budgets and endangering the quality of education students receive.

In Section 1, I introduced the overall foundation of the study and the research question regarding strategies that community college leaders use to retain students to increase community college revenue to achieve financial sustainability. Section 1 is inclusive of the problem and purpose statements; nature of the study; research and interview questions; description of the conceptual framework; the significance of study; contribution to business practice; implications for social change; definition of key terms; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Also included in Section 1 is a review of professional and academic literature that is associated with the study.

Section 2 will document the methods used to conduct the research, identify the population used to collect data, and the methods used to analyze the data. Section 3 will consist of an analysis of the findings from the study.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in Louisiana for achieving financial sustainability. The participant sample included a dean of students, directors of student success, and student success advisors who have developed and implemented strategies that have helped to retain students and increase revenues. Identifying and exploring strategies to improve student retention may contribute to increasing graduation rates. Increasing the number of citizens who earn college degrees may increase the tax base for communities' growth that can benefit citizens.

Role of the Researcher

My role was essential to the strategy, exploration, and generalizability of the deductions from an investigation to business practice. Qualitative research is an approach where data are collected via a human instrument instead of through records, surveys, or other technological engines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Serving as the data collection instrument, it was important to make readers aware of my biases and assumptions, personal beliefs, and involvements to qualify my capability to pilot and control the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Gall et al., 2007). The inquiry responsibilities started with presenting a literature review, which cultivated an academic accumulation for my study. My role was to collect, organize, evaluate, and interpret data honestly and accurately. Additionally, my role was to study participants' experiences in an

unambiguous setting by utilizing techniques that constructed realistic analysis (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Brown & Treviño, 2014).

My relationship with this topic hinged on my long-time connection to higher

education, once being an academic advisor in the private sector with shared responsibility

for retaining students and now having the full responsibility of two satellite campuses.

Throughout the research process, I adhered to ethical principles (Robson & McCartan,

2016; Yardley, 2017). I may or may not have established relationships with some of the

participants currently working in my research area. However, acting as the research

instrument, I used methodical methods, which included data collection and explanation to

lessen bias.

Additionally, the Belmont Report, created as a result of the National Research Act

of 1974, identified critical ethical ideologies and guiding principles regarding ethical

concerns when performing research with human subjects (Miracle, 2016). The Belmont

Report safeguards against the exploitation of individuals or groups, in research, devoid of

permission, or any prospect of benefit (Cassell, 2000). Adhering to the Belmont Report, I

explained the purpose of the study to participants and informed them of potential risks,

incentives, and penalties and ensured participants were aware of their personal and

informational confidentiality in pursuant to the Belmont Report.

Study participants engaged in a 20-30-minute interview where I transcribed the

interview results and emailed the interview transcripts to participants to review for

accuracy (Yardley, 2017; Yin, 2018). I interviewed each participant individually via

telephone based on participant availability. I used open-ended questions, where I

gathered detailed information, and participants added additional information not included in the formal script, which strengthened the exploration of the qualitative investigation (Henry & Foss, 2015; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1991). I focused on the pertinent issues regarding the topic of the study and remained impartial when delivering questions and evaluating responses (Connelly, 2016; Lub, 2015; Yin, 2018). Based on each interviewee's response, I made necessary adjustments providing any unanticipated yet significant material should arise (Connelly, 2016; Yardley, 2017).

Participants

In this qualitative study, I used purposeful sampling to identify and select an information-rich sample of participants related to the phenomenon of interest (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). I sought participants from contact information housed within the LCTCS's database. Eligible participants for the study worked in the Student Services Division of the LCTCS and have or had the title of dean of students, directors of student success, and student success advisors. Once I identified potential participants, I contacted their supervisor via email to inform them of and explain the purpose of the study and to obtain permission to invite their staff to participate in the study. Once I obtained permission, I emailed potential participants, explained the purpose of the study, attached a consent form for participant review, and invited them to participate in the study.

Research Method and Design

I used the qualitative research method to study participants' actions (Mohajan, 2018). I used inductive positing as a basis of the qualitative research, and participants

spoke uninhibitedly and guided the course of the study (Bansal, 2018; Shah & Corley, 2006). I used the case study design to gather multiple forms of data and helped to increase my understanding of the case (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018).

Research Method

I used the qualitative methodology for this study because it permits researchers to use several approaches to gather and examine data, including interviews and audio recording (Crowley, 1994; Cypress, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this qualitative research, I was aware of the socially constructed nature of reality and was embedded intimately in the study's context, particularly the setting, participants, and data (Dodgson, 2017; Murshed & Zhang, 2016; Rosaline, 2008). I used the qualitative research method to explore the research topic, ask specific inquiries, identify potential patterns, and conclude with an observation that allows further testing (Dodgson, 2017; Hood, 2016; Kelly, 2017). In qualitative research, researchers use open-ended questions to examine thematic significance and contextualization of participants' observation of reality (Franco, 2016; Shah & Corley, 2006; Tillman et al., 2011). Qualitative research necessitates research questions that focus on identifying themes in historical data obtained by conducting interviews and focus groups (Cypress, 2018; Gelo et al., 2008; Quick & Hall, 2015). With good quality qualitative research, readers or future researchers can apply the theory or results to their unique situation (Cypress, 2018; Mohajan, 2018; Tetnowski, 2015).

I did not use the quantitative or mixed-method approach because I was not testing a hypothesis (Gall et al., 2007; Haneef, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2015), and the use of statistical data would not help to realize effective strategies to improve retention

numbers. The purpose of the quantitative research method is to collect and simplify

statistical data among groups of people to explain a phenomenon (Collyer, 2013; Haneef,

2013; Maher et al., 2013). Quantitative research methods do not permit provisions for

human interest within the investigation (Babones, 2015; Bryman, 1984; Latch, 2014).

Mixed method research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in the same

research investigation (Fetters et al., 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2015; Venkateshe et al., 2013).

The mixed-method approach also uses philosophical assumptions that influence the

course of collecting and analyzing data (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Mayoh &

Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Ren & Zhu, 2017).

Research Design

The case study design has undergone substantial methodological development

over the last four decades, which has resulted in a logical, flexible research design

capable of providing a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of various issues

throughout many disciplines (Harrison et al., 2017). The case study design is considered a

qualitative method (Elman et al., 2016) and allowed me to focus intensively on a single

case. Permitting the researcher to maintain significant attributes of life events (Yin,

2009), the case study design allowed me to comprehend the phenomenon, event, group,

or organization (Berg & Lune, 2012; Morgan et al., 2017).

<div align="center">

Population and Sampling

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In this qualitative research, my goal was to deliver a comprehensive

understanding of the phenomenon, which required me to target a specific population,

event, or process (de Cassia Nunes Nascimento et al., 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018;

Van Rijnsoever, 2017). There were various types of sampling methods to choose from, such as purposeful, quota, and snowball sampling. To complete my study, I used purposeful sampling, which is the most commonly used method, to use pre-selected criteria to choose participants for the study based on shared experiences with the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Purposeful sampling also allows researchers to have a pre-determined sample size based on theoretical saturation (de Cassia Nunes Nascimento et al., 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Van Rijnsoever, 2017).

The focus of my research restricted the population to those responsible for creating and implementing retention efforts at 2-year colleges. This allowed me to increase knowledge of the subject (Palinkas et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). The research participants had extensive experience and knowledge in the student services division of higher education and the topic, which added value to the content of the research. I emailed the participants' supervisor to inform them of institutional review board (IRB) approval and requested permission to contact potential participants.

There are no absolute rules or formulas for determining sufficient sample sizes (Johnson, 2015; Yin, 2018); however, researchers have suggested that the qualitative research sample size be subject to saturation (Etikan et al., 2016; Malterud et al., 2016). The number of participants in a qualitative research sample is generally small, and scholars have proposed varying sample sizes from 1-30 participants to be sufficient for qualitative research (Gentles et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015). I emailed 10 employees across the roles of dean of students and directors of student success and student success advisors who had 5 or more years of experience advising students and who had a strong

knowledge of effective retention strategies. The participants provided consent by responding "I consent" to the email. I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data and an accurate understanding of the study topic seek (Yates & Leggett, 2016). I conducted interviews, via teleconference, and emailed interview transcripts to participants for them to review and approve or add additional information.

Ethical Research

Concerns of ethics, the foundation for guiding valuable and noteworthy research (Schwester, 2019; Roulston & Preissle, 2018; Walby & Luscombe, 2018), exist in all kinds of research, which can produce rigidity in the goals of the research. As suggested by previous researchers, I adhered to a standard of institutional imposed ethics as I conducted my study (Cross et al., 2015; Paton & Emmerich, 2017; Roulston & Preissle, 2018), which involved human participants. Researchers must acquire ample knowledge regarding their topic to avoid dishonorable practices (Reinecke et al., 2016). I safeguarded study participants and ensured they were free from harm by applying applicable moral philosophies (Gomes & Duarte, 2018; Shaw et al., 2019).

As I researched effective retention strategies to retain students to increase revenue and ensure financial sustainability in community colleges, I maintained behavior conducive to ensuring the research was ethical and non-biased. I complied with the guiding principles located in the Belmont Report (Miracle, 2016). I provided each potential participant with an explanation of the contextual background of my study and their potential role through the consent form. Additionally, I informed each participant of how their knowledge and expertise could positively impact and improve retention

strategies within higher education. The informed consent form also specified their voluntary participation, right to confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and that they will not receive any form of compensation for their participation in the study. The intended participants must easily understand the informed consent form, not feel pressure, and have time to consider taking part in the study (Manti & Licari, 2018; Resnik, 2015). Once participants reviewed the information regarding consent, I requested they respond to the email with "I consent" to ensure and document their willingness to participate in the study.

I advised participants of their discretion and privacy through the course of the study. Obtaining consent is not the only act that constitutes ethics, as researchers have to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participants (Rashid et al., 2015; Lancaster, 2016; Morse, 1998). I referred to each participant as "P" plus an assigned number (e.g., P1, P2, etc.). I did not include any participant's identifiable information in the study, such as names, contact, and organizational information. I secured all hardcopy files in a locked safety deposit box, and I stored all electronic data on my personal computer in a password-protected file. To safeguard participant privacy, I will save all collected data for 5 years. After 5 years, I will remove and eradicate all data by deleting all saved electronic files and shredding all hardcopies in accordance to Walden University's IRB and U.S. Regulations.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument in qualitative research is the researcher (Schwandt, 2015, Fletcher, 2016; Maxwell, 2018) and directed by a documented

interview protocol (see Appendix A). The quality of the interviews is contingent on the

researcher's competence and proficiency in interviewing (Janesick, 2012; Weiss, 1994;

Fletcher, 2016). When conducting case study research, there are 6 resources that

researchers frequently use to collect data: documentation, archival records, interviews,

direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). Of the 6

resources, Yin (2014) identified interviewing as the most vital source of data collection.

To ensure I was adept at conducting quality interviews, I studied applicable works on

interviewing procedures and rehearsed before beginning the interview process (Rubin and

Rubin, 2012).

Once I identified the population, I used semistructured interviews to ask open-

ended questions (see Appendix B) to collect data regarding their respective knowledge

and successes of effective retention strategies. Semistructured interviews are beneficial

when a foundational knowledge exists on a research topic, and the purpose is

homogeneous (Mealer & Jones, 2014; Morse, 2015; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I

obtained consent from each participant, via email, to use a recording device, which aided

in the analysis and accurate transcription of the collected data.

To safeguard the dependability and strength of the data collection process, I

conducted methodological triangulation of the data using various sources of data to

validate other sources of data. Researchers use triangulation, the use of multiple methods

of collecting data on a specific topic, to ensure the validity and reliability of research,

which aids in acquiring various scopes of the phenomenon (Varpio et al., 2016; Abdalla

et al., 2018). I conducted supplemental member checking to ensure data saturation and

realize the maximum value for dependability and strength. Member checking helps the

researcher to ascertain the principle of reliability in dependability in research (Varpio et

al., 2016). The member checking process included adding a succinct analysis of the

participants' responses to each question and providing a copy of the analysis with the

study participant to verify the analysis is in line with the participants' proposed response.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative research involves collecting holistic, rich, and nuanced data that

researchers can meticulously analyze to identify themes and findings. Qualitative

researchers accept the data and filter data themselves, which requires researchers to

diminish personal biases and understandings when trying to comprehend the emic

(Mertens, 2018). In this study, I utilized phone interviews, recorded, open-ended, and

semistructured interview sessions, while following the interview protocol. The interview

protocol helps to ensure an organized and comprehensive guide when interviewing

multiple participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Once I received IRB approval # 03-25-20-

0747637, to prepare for the interview, I ensured each participant had submitted an email,

which was the confirmation of their consent. Participants should be aware of the nature of

the study, the purpose of the research, and their involvement in the research, in clear and

concise language Baker & Chartier, 2018).

Ensuring participants are in a comfortable and familiar environment can aid in

participants responding more candidly. To ensure participant comfort, I conducted all

interviews based on the participants' availability. To safeguard interruptions, phone calls,

and other potential disruptions, participants chose the date and time of their interview

sessions. I called participants 5 minutes early to follow the interview protocol and to ensure the functionality of my cell phone as a recording device, per recommendations of Qu and Dumay (2014). To collect data, I used open-ended questions; Hartman (2013) theorized open-ended questions increases participant ability to remember answers as they are responding in their own words and allows participants to add additional information. After completing the interviews, I discussed the significance of member checking; Iivari (2018) postulated member checking allows participants to substantiate, elucidate, and provide added details to their responses.

Data Organization Technique

After each interview, I transcribed the data and utilized Microsoft Word to arrange and categorize all data collected from participants. Properly storing data collected for a case study is essential to increasing the trustworthiness of the study (Yin. 2017). I analyzed the Microsoft Word document to identify similar strategies and practices by using the, find, option. I ensured participant confidentiality by assigning each participant a code (e.g., P1, P2) in accordance with their interview; such coding is known as document cleansing (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), I secured all hardcopy files in a locked safety deposit box, that only I will have access to, and I will keep all electronic data on my personal computer in a password-protected file. I will secure all collected data for five years after completing the study. Once five years have been exceeded, I will shred any physical documents and delete all electronic files.

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, researchers commonly analyze data collected during interviews or notes from participant observation sessions. During the process, the researcher is immersed in reading and processing the collected data to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon (Azungah, 2018; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). In qualitative research, researchers rely on triangulation, two or more sources of data, to lessen bias and enhance the strength of data collected (Maher & Dertadian, 2017; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Yin (2014) and Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) identified four methods of triangulation, which includes: (a) methodological triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data triangulation. Methodological triangulation was the most appropriate form of triangulation for this research study because researchers can collect and compare data from various sources. I examined the data collected during the interviews and archived retention reports to realize similar strategies to retain students.

Qualitative researchers use themes to categorize collected data, which helps the researcher to better understand participant responses (Maher & Dertadian, 2017; Roth & von Unger, 2018). I used the model of classical data analysis to generate themes, from participant responses, based on the curriculum, action, or plan that college leaders use to increase retention efforts. Roth and von Unger (2018) asserted participant data aids researchers in theme development, and Best et al. (2017) and Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) suggested researchers group and analyze data by similarities, differences, or misinterpreted information to develop themes. Researchers conducting

qualitative studies are trying to reach data saturation when interviewing study participants (Peters & Halcomb, 2015; Constantinou et al., 2017; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Researchers realize themes through data saturation and member checking; therefore, data saturation is vital to the development of themes during transcription (Yin, 2014; Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

In qualitative research, researchers seek to understand or deduce a particular phenomenon based on participant presentation (Wilson & Creswell, 1996; Azungah, 2018). I used mind mapping, a technique involving clear thinking through analysis, note-taking, brainstorming, and memorization (Robertson, 2008; Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). It was useful to construct concepts and groupings of my thoughts. To assist with coding, mind mapping, and analyzing processes, I utilized Microsoft Word.

Reliability and Validity

Guiding a qualitative study is a more multifaceted investigation than a conventional investigation. In realistic explorations, formation and execution are concurrent, and researchers can modify the study design while in development (Cypress, 2017; Nakkeeran & Zodpey, 2012). Initial stages must be achieved prior to the implementation of the design, which includes reaching out and entering the identified site, obtaining permission, developing and sustaining a trust relationship, and realizing participants. Throughout the process the steps mentioned above are often repetitive, and as the design develops, so are the rudiments of the design. The researcher has little control; therefore, flexibility is a necessity. Cypress (2017) and Kornbluh (2015) theorized that throughout the study, the researcher encounters constant reexamination and

repetition, which requires the researcher to be mindful of precision and consistency. Reliability and validity are two vital qualities of all research studies (Cypress, 2017; Nakkeeran & Zodpey, 2012).

Reliability

In qualitative studies, researchers ensure the reliability of the study by safeguarding the precision and uniformity of the processes and outcomes through documentation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Yin, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Ma et al. (2015) hypothesized that researchers demonstrate reliability by presenting the impartiality and replicability of gathered data and harmonious outcomes. Yin (2018) posited researchers could use audit trail, member checking, review transcripts, and interview protocols to enhance the trustworthiness of a study. To authenticate the study's dependability, researchers must confirm that all study elements are consistent (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2016).

To escalate the reliability of my study, I analyzed and paraphrased each participant's responses to the pre-determined semistructured interview questions. I followed up with each participant to have them read my summations to ensure that I captured the essence of their intended responses. To ensure the reliability of the study, after each interview, I utilized member checking, which requires researchers to follow-up with each participant to ensure the outcomes are in line with the participants' intentions and will allow participants to offer feedback and rectify any inaccuracies in the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Iivari, 2018). Throughout the research process, I assessed the steps taken to ensure I took the necessary steps in documenting to increase

reliability. Also, I used an established interview protocol to achieve a more significant comprehension of the occurrence from the participants and to heighten the study's reliability.

Validity

Yin (2012) posited a key concern for qualitative researchers is achieving validity by maintaining credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability throughout the study. To substantiate research integrity, researchers must comprehensively summarize participant interviews and member checks to verify details (Yin, 2012; Morse, 2015; Pandey and Chawla, 2016; Lather, 2017). I recorded all participant phone interviews using the voice memos recording application on my mobile phone while simultaneously taking notes. I transcribed all interviews and emailed the transcriptions to each participant to ensure accuracy and to allow them to provide feedback. I used the classical data analysis method to group participant responses to generate themes based on the curriculum, action, or plan that college leaders use to increase retention efforts. I used mind mapping to generate an analysis of the responses to provide to each participant aid in ensuring accurate analysis of data through member checking. Member checking will also help to ensure data saturation and realize the maximum value for dependability and strength. I also used methodological triangulation to collect and examine data from numerous sources to strengthen the credibility of the research study.

Utilizing adequate case study procedures and exploration permits researchers to guide studies methodically (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2009, 2018). It allows others to decide if the study findings are transferable to an organization or research. Abdalla,

Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018) suggested it is the researchers' responsibility to confirm the study has adequate information, i.e., time, location, and participants for the audience to conclude the usability of the study findings. Noble and Smith (2015) and Yin (2018) postulated that presenting comprehensive records of data collection methods and safeguarding data saturation allows researchers to increase transferability. I ensured transferability by remaining consistent throughout all interviews and analysis of collected data. I reviewed all transcribed data, conducted member checking, and utilized the classical data analysis method to aid readers in determining the transferability of my findings.

Confirmability in qualitative research is the extent that other researchers can substantiate or validate the findings of a study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Roulston, 2017;). Cypress (2017) and Korstjens and Moser (2018) posited qualitative researchers realize confirmability by keeping a journal of notes to reflect on throughout the study. I maintained a reflective journal, where all actions and events from the beginning of the data collection phase to the end, were recorded, mitigating potential biases.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of Section 2 was to articulate the method and design for exploring the primary research question: What strategies do community college leaders use to retain students to increase community college revenue to achieve financial sustainability? I selected a qualitative single case study to realize strategies and practices of community college administrators who have elevated retention rates within two-year colleges. In Section 3, I will describe the data collection and analysis of findings, which will also

include how the findings are applicable to professional practice, recommendations for

community college leaders to improve retention rates, and implications for social change.

Section 3 will also include recommendations for future research, reflections, and

conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in Louisiana to achieve financial sustainability. In 2017, the NCES reported that in fall 2016, 36% of undergraduate students dropped out of school, which decreases a college's revenue and negatively affects its financial sustainability. But leaders can achieve success by designing a pathway to sustainability through innovation and long-term strategies (Marcy, 2017).

To answer the research question, I interviewed five staff members within student services of a community college in Louisiana. Each participant had five or more years' experience as dean of students, director of student success, or student success advisor and had successfully developed and implemented strategies to retain students. I conducted semistructured interviews with each participant via phone and used archived institutional retention documents for methodological triangulation. The findings that emerged from the study revealed collaboration, student orientation, and intervention programs to be the prominent themes.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was the following: What strategies do community college leaders use to retain students to increase community college revenue to achieve financial sustainability? The conceptual framework for this study was the advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework ((Kemmis & Wilkinson,

1998). I used the advocacy and participatory worldview conceptual framework to analyze the strategies that leaders of community colleges use to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability. To address the research question, I collected data by interviewing five participants from a community college in Louisiana with a minimum of 5 years of experience who had successfully implemented strategies to retain students. I assigned a reference code to each participant (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) and after interviewing the participants, I performed data analysis on the interviews and archived institutional retention documents.

I used Microsoft Word to organize the data and search for reoccurring words, to analyze the data, create codes, and identify themes. Lastly, I used data source triangulation to merge data collected from the interviews with institutional retention documents. The results suggested collaboration, student orientation, and intervention programs as likely to improve student retention. Identifying strategies to retain students in community colleges is vital to the college's financial sustainability (Watson & Chen, 2018). Leaders of community colleges can retain students and improve retention numbers with effective retention strategies. In higher education, leaders can use this study's results to improve retention numbers and contribute to financial sustainability and positive social change.

The three main themes are consistent with existing research and supported by the advocacy and participatory conceptual framework. In the following sections, I share and discuss the findings associated with the themes and subthemes, offer participant quotes to support the findings, and link the themes to the existing research.

Theme 1: Collaboration

Collaboration emerged as the first theme for strategies that community college leaders use to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability. Further analysis into collaboration revealed two subthemes, which are communication and student-focused. Among the participants, four explained how the positive effects of collaborations aided in students' success. Mitigating students' problems is not the sole purpose of academic affairs or student affairs; however, to achieve success, an institution's retention successes are a collaborative effort between both departments (Brown et al., 2018). P2 discussed how vital it is to have staff from various departments within the college come together to make decisions that directly impact the students and add to their success. P2 stated, "We have a main campus, which houses the folks who work in student and academic affairs, and that makes it easy for us to come together and make magic."

Advising and instructing students, creating programs, and organizing tools to offer support and encouragement are fundamental to the roles of the divisions of academic and student affairs (Walker, 2018). P1 stated, "I think the most effective strategy is having both sides, Academic Affairs and Student Services, come to the table and work together to identify and implement strategies for our students." To increase accountability, merging faculty into student affairs is a necessary collaboration, which improves the quality of student outcomes (Pope, 2019). P2 stated, "Because the college is small, the Student Services and Academic Affairs offices are, physically, close together,

on the main campus, which makes it relatively easy to collaborate when discussing

retention and looking at retention programs."

P2 also shared that although some faculty members serve as student advisors, they

have minimal contact with members within the student services team. However, bridging

the gap between the two divisions fosters a culture where students receive the same

information from either division (Gulley, 2017). P2 stated,

> Through collaboration, the people in academic affairs are consistent in their
>
> communications and work closely with members of student services, who are
>
> doing the initial interactions with the students, to ensure that they are conveying
>
> the same message when interacting with students.

When members in both academic and student affairs realize how their roles contribute to

the mission of their departments and the vision of the college, bringing the divisions

together can be easy (Gulley, 2017). When the departments of student affairs and

academic affairs collaborate, there is a positive correlation to students' success, retention,

and completion (Commodore et al., 2018). Merging administrations from academic and

student affairs helps to cultivate a better understanding between the two departments and

produces a more supportive atmosphere for students.

Subtheme 1: Communication

The first subtheme that emerged as a strategy for leaders of community colleges

to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability was

communication. All the participants mentioned the importance of communicating

effectively to ensure that students are receiving the same message. P3 mentioned the

importance of everyone being on the same page. P3 said, "There is a retention committee, which consists of leaders from various departments throughout the college, who develop and implement retention strategies." P3 also asserted that every department bears some responsibility to students persisting to graduation through coaching or encouragement. P3's statement is supported by the results of two studies that revealed developing effective strategies to retain students to completion is the responsibility of everyone who has constant and face-to-face contact with students is the responsibility of the members within the divisions of academic and student affairs (Floyd, 2018; Walker, 2018).

Further, communication in higher education is multifaceted because of the number of interested parties (McNaughtan et al., 2019). P2 spoke about meetings that are specific to sharing new information that is beneficial to continuing students: "We have these meetings, where department heads come together and the idea is to communicate new information, from each department, that, may or may not be known to everyone at the table." P5 said, "We have worked really hard to develop our communication skills and we work diligently to listen to understand rather than listening to respond." Effective communication entails people disclosing information to work together or in the same or different directions concerning their approaches to a phenomenon (Rogers, 2003). P1 stated, "Once we started having meetings of substance, I mean, actually bringing pertinent data and information to the table, and sharing it with everyone who has a hand in students' success, we started to see significant results in retaining our students." P4 confirmed P1's statement by sharing,

When we started involving staff, who really needed to be involved, to talk about

what they were seeing, and working to mitigate what wasn't working, we saw

retention numbers headed in a positive direction and that allowed us to breathe

and see that the changes we made were really for the better.

I found additional data to support communication by reviewing the institution's

archived institutional retention documents, which shows a consistent increase in retention

(see Table 1).

Table 1

Fall to Spring Retention Rates from 2015-2020 for All Entering Students

Period	Retention Rate
Fall 2015 to Spring 2016	67.9%
Fall 2016 to Spring 2017	70.8%
Fall 2017 to Spring 2018	75.2%
Fall 2018 to Spring 2019	76.2%
Fall 2019 to Spring 2020	77.1%

Subtheme 2: Student-Focused

The second subtheme related to collaboration is student focused. Community

college leaders are tasked with improving retention numbers to help sustain the colleges

financially. Thus, college leaders are working to make institutions more student-focused

to aid in retention efforts (McClenney, 2013). In alliance with the literature, four of the

five participants identified being student focused as important to the communication

strategy. P2 discussed keeping students at the forefront when department heads come

together: "We have to remember that we hold students' livelihoods in our hands; so when

we are in meetings and discussing potential changes, or whatever, we have to imagine

how those changes will impact the students." Adding to leaders putting students at the forefront, P3 stated, "As an institution, we understand that we are selling a product and we want to get buy-in from students; therefore, we have to be sure that each and every student is satisfied with at least one thing within our brand." P1 and P5 talked about faculty and staff interacting with the students. P5 said, "We want to interact with our students because we don't want them to feel like they are in this alone." P1 confirmed P5's sentiment by adding,

> You would be surprised at the students who lack strong support systems and when we show them that we are human, we like to have fun, and we like to have fun with them, that creates a foundation and an environment that they are less-likely to walk away from.

The importance of focusing on students is supported by Bean (1990), who argued that students seek to leave college because of institutional and satisfaction fit. The more the college can sustain the students' needs over time, the higher their satisfaction and the chances of retention (Roberts, 2019). Through social, academic, and organizational interactions with the college, students generate attitudes of the perceived quantity of college loyalty and fit (Bean, 1990). The institutional loyalty and fit of these students impact their intent to leave and eventually, the decision to leave. Within Bean's model, it is believed that satisfactory academic performance, a students' in-class performance, and college integration, transitioning and becoming acclimated to college, support the students' decision to stay.

Leaders in the higher education sector should make the necessary changes to become more student focused as it is a way to serve the students better (Stark & Weinbaum, 2018). To become student focused, leaders are recognizing that they should focus on the student rather than the learning models (Stark & Weinbaum, 2018). Tinto's model of integration (2006, 2007) also supports and incorporates interactions between students and members of the institutions throughout the first year of college. Tinto suggested that first-year college students lack college readiness and are unprepared for the college experience (Tinto, 1999). According to Tinto (1993), first-year college students also possess traits that influence their level of commitment to college (i.e., high school achievement, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity). Table 2 shows the subthemes, number of sources, and frequencies that emerged from the collaboration theme.

Table 2

Collaboration

Subthemes	# of sources	Frequency
Communication	5	8
Student-Focused	4	5

Theme 2: Student Orientation

The second theme identified as a strategy that leaders of community colleges use to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability is student orientation. Institutional leaders' responsibility is to increase retention numbers because, among the many positive results, increased revenue and financial sustainability is a strong effect (Tinto, 2017). Through further analysis, two subthemes relating to student

orientation developed, which were new student orientation and FYS (see Table 3). Of the

five participants, four mentioned the importance of providing adequate orientation

programs for first-year and returning students. P1 stated, "We have two initiatives; one

that focuses on our new students, those who are coming to us and have never been to

college before and the second initiative focuses on continuing students." P2 mentioned

the two initiatives and added, "What is unique about the two initiatives at this school is

that rather than simply registering students for classes, we're training them on how to use

the software to do that." P5 added,

> We believe our orientation programs have contributed greatly to our students
>
> persisting because we have every department that has dealings with the students
>
> in one place and that saves the students time and cultivates a culture where they
>
> feel valued.

This theme aligns with previous research from Tinto (1987), who identified

orientation programs as essential to retaining students and vital to academic success.

Leaders in higher education actively seek to realize ways to provide services intended to

support students, particularly within the first year of the college life cycle (Vuckovic et

al., 2019). P5 stated, "As a college, we have worked diligently to streamline processes to

alleviate stress for the students and our new student orientation process is one of the

processes that have been very successful."

Subtheme 1: New Student Orientation

Retaining college students requires leaders in higher education to create student

and academic support programs that aid in promoting student success (Roberts, 2018).

Among the participants, four discussed a successful new student orientation program. P4 said, "What we did was, we took bits and pieces from our first-year seminar class and created an orientation for new students and sort of a refresher for returning students." New student orientations typically focus on increasing students' chances of academic success, establishing connections with peers, assisting students in adjusting to the social environment, and providing information about the college environment to students and family. P2 mentioned the two initiatives and added, "What is unique about the two initiatives at this school is that rather than simply registering students for classes, we're training them on how to use the software to do that." P5 stated,

> One of the things we did, for our primary student orientation, was department leaders came together, we did our research and realized that having people from multiple departments come together, in an orientation, and touch thirty or more students all at the same time is beneficial.

P3 mentioned the success of the orientations and how the students have embraced the new model. P3 said, "Rather than running from department to department, having to stand in long lines, and potentially having to come back the next day, the students have access to all the departments at one time."

Research efforts regarding student success in two-year colleges have increased over the past 20 years (Astin, 1999; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). When leaders work to support students' needs, the more likely their satisfaction will increase, which can also increase retention efforts (Roberts, 2018). Bean's (1990) model of attrition supports that satisfactory academic performance and college integration are factors that strengthen

students' decisions to persist to completion. Bean theorized that the students' confidence in the college stimulates integration, primarily through support programs available to students. Leaders within state and federal government entities correlate student success to accessibility to reasonable higher education institutions, degree completion metrics, and employability and wages (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017).

Similar to the conclusions of previous research, the study's findings suggest that student orientations increase the likelihood that students will be retained (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016; Mi, 2019; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Villano et al., 2018). The more leaders can work to support students' needs, the more likely their satisfaction will increase, increasing retention efforts (Anderson, 2019). Administrators and staff, who work closely with students, associate student success with retaining students until graduation; comprehension of subject matter; critical thinking skills, and student engagement (Lane et al., 2019). The study's findings indicate that orientation programs have succeeded in integrating students with the institutions' social and academic environment. The study's findings indicate that orientation programs have succeeded in integrating students with the social and academic environment of the institution.

Subtheme 2: First-Year Seminar

The second subtheme that emerged relative to student orientation was FYS. In contrast to research in support of student orientations, McGuire et al. (2020) completed a study and concluded that rather than relying on a new student orientation model, which lasts two to four hours, colleges and universities are incorporating the data from the new student orientations into FYSs. Consistent with the literature, four of the five participants

referenced FYSs and how the course has contributed to students' successes. P3 said, "Our institution offers a FYS class, which is kind of what contributed to the new student orientation." P5 shared, "The students are very receptive to the information disseminated in the course; maybe because it is designed to provide needed resources." In alignment with the study results, Permzadian and Credé (2016) explored the successes of FYS and learned that FYS is most effective when delivered as extended orientation seminars, when facilitated by faculty or staff, and as a stand-alone course.

Jaijairam (2016), on the other hand, investigated the impact FYS has on student retention. The results showed improvement among a large percentage of academic performances, critical thinking, and analysis skills, and improved proficiency with problem-solving, participation, and communicating with faculty. The author also learned that students, who participated in FYS, transitioned to the next semester at an 18 percent higher rate than expected. P4 mentioned the positive impact FYS had on many of the students. According to P4, "I am one of the instructors for FYS and I find it interesting how engaged the students are when I am facilitating the course." P4 went on to say, "I think it comes down to how you deliver the material because in actuality, the course is designed in a way where it can be self-taught; so I try to make it interesting and fun." In alignment with study results, Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) explored FYS programs at community colleges in California. The study results showed that FYS programs are vital to students' success; however, students struggled with institutional barriers.

Bean (1990) hypothesized that the student's closeness to the college encourages integration, mainly through increased support programs that colleges provide.

Permzadian & Credé (2016) explored the successes of FYS and contended that FYS is most effectively delivered as extended orientation seminars, when facilitated by faculty or staff, and as a stand-alone course. P5 said,

> I love teaching the First Year Seminar courses because I use it as an opportunity to really cultivate a relationship with the students and before the semester ends, I assist the students with registering for the next semester; lastly, I am proud to say that I have never had a student to fail the class.

This assertion is supported by Bean (1990), who suggested to help students with their transition, FYSs need to be a collaborative effort between faculty and student affair professionals that regularly monitors student outcomes. P1 discussed the information embedded in the FYS course and said,

> The course is really designed to make students aware of the internal and external resources that are available to them and although it is a lot of information, because the information is given over a matter of weeks, the students can effectively digest and retain the information.

> This data collected is supported by Renn and Reason (2012) who asserted that

FYSs provide new students with information on institutional resources that focused on increasing community and institutional commitment. The authors also contend that FYSs increase students' perception of the quality of advising and their satisfaction with the institution. Table 3 shows the subthemes, number of sources, and frequencies that emerged from the student orientation theme.

Table 3

Student Orientation

Subthemes	# of sources	Frequency
New Student Orientation	4	8
First-Year Seminar	4	7

Theme 3: Intervention Programs

Intervention programs emerged as the third theme for strategies that leaders of community colleges use to retain students to increase revenue to achieve financial sustainability. In addition, three subthemes developed that are in direct relation to intervention programs, which are, advising, early alert, and peer tutoring. P4 said, "The Division of Student Services offers several intervention programs designed to aid students who are entering and continuing college." Fredin, Fuchsteiner, and Portz (2015) posited a fundamental element to collegiate success is how immersed or enthralled students are with their studies.

Bean's (1990) model assumes that the students' variables will have one of two compensatory interactions. The first compensatory interaction involves environmental variables assumed to be of greater importance to nontraditional students than academic variables. The study's findings demonstrate that students will persist and remain in school if both academic and environmental variables are positive but will likely withdraw if both are negative. P1 said, "We are very intentional when it comes to the students and their needs." P1 went on to say, "Sometimes the students are not aware of what they, actually, need; therefore, it is our job to probe by asking specific questions to help them determine their actual need." P5 added, "Our institution is so focused solely on student

success because we have been where they are and we know what it feels like to transition

from high-school to college – sometimes it is difficult. Bean and Metzner (1985)

conducted a study and concluded that the inverse is also true; a student will remain in

school if the environmental support is positive, but academic performance is low.

The second variable, intent to leave, refers to the student's desire to withdraw

from the institution based on either psychological or academic outcomes. According to

Bean (1990), the student's background variables, to include educational goals and high

school performance, is expected to affect attrition. Lastly, environmental variables, such

as finances, employment, family dynamics, and transfer opportunities, are expected to

have a massive influence on the student's likelihood of withdrawing (Bean 1990). The

research outcome support Bean's (1990) student performance and integration

assumptions.

The study findings validate the need to identify effective strategies to retain

students. Investigating student persistence is vital in studies exploring retention methods

within higher education and echo participant responses that support the need to identify

at-risk students early to help and aid in persistence (Ortiz-Lozano et al., 2020).

Additionally, Tucker and McKnight (2019) support the need to monitor academic

performance throughout the first year, as it is a good indicator and forecaster for lack of

persistence.

P3 discussed students not realizing they have to maintain a certain GPA:

Sometimes they don't realize that they have to make a certain GPA to even

continue with financial aid and they don't know this until they actually lose the

financial aid; that really effects our retention because, I would say, 75-80% of our

students are financial aid eligible and that's what they depend on to attend school.

This is supported by Bean and Metzner's (1985) secondary compensatory interaction is

between academic outcomes, GPA, and psychological outcomes. The authors surmised

that students with low GPA's, based on their high school academic performance,

withdraw a higher rated that well-performing students. A student who has positive

academic and psychological outcomes is likely to remain enrolled but will withdraw if

both variables are negative (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Students with low levels of

satisfaction or goal commitment or high stress levels are likely to withdraw, even if their

GPA is high (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Those students who perceive gaining positive

psychological outcomes from their continued enrollment at the institution will likely

remain despite having a low GPA (Bean & Metzner, 1985). For nontraditional college

students, academic performance and positive psychosocial outcomes influence students to

remain enrolled (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The external environment and the student's

perception of how it affects their experience are the primary factors influencing their

persistence and continuation at the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

P2 talked about the significance of having programs and services in place to help

students who are at risk of not persisting. She said, "The Division of Student Services and

Academic Affairs work collectively to have programs and services readily available for

students who may be at risk of failing." P5 added, "We try to exhaust all avenues of

identifying students who need help before the student fails." P5 continued,

If a student is trying and they are just not getting it, whatever it is, or a subject is

too difficult for them, we want to be there to offer a service to help them because

we want them to succeed and know that they aren't just a number to us.

The results of this theme is supported by Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016)

who conducted a study on first-year students and intrusive advising. The authors learned

that students did not find there were adequate services available and that community

college leaders can improve the delivery of academic advising and student support

services at community colleges.

Subtheme 1: Advising

The first subtheme that emerged in relation to intervention programs was

advising. As tuition increases and funding decreases, leaders in higher education are

responsible for retaining students to completion (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018). To increase

persistence and retention, administrators rely on advisors to collaborate with students

throughout the student life-cycle (Schulenberg & Biek, 2019). All of the participants

brought up advising and how instrumental and effective the service is to retention efforts.

P3 said, "The most effective retention strategy for the college is intrusive advising and

coaching, because students tend to be shy about asking for help or asking questions." P3

mentioned that advisors meet with students three times during the semester to ensure

students are doing well and answering students' questions. Faculty also monitor and

reach out to reinstated students to discuss missed attendance and low grades. P3 stated,

"It is a combination of various areas collaborating to ensure students are aware of where

they stand, academically and financially."

P4 said, "It is through a department dedicated to minorities, where advisors meet students and discuss their personal and academic goals for the semester." This is in alignment with Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016) who used the qualitative single-case study methodology to examine the relationship between intrusive academic advising and community college student success. The study results support that intrusive advising is beneficial during the first semester; explicitly, encouraging students to create degree plans, which forced them to create long-term goals. The results also showed that students developed an increase in confidence when degree planning and seeking additional assistance.

Advising higher education students is vital; yet, a constant and perplexing undertaking (Zhang, Gossett, Simpson, and Davis, 2017). P3 stated, "intrusive advising is an assurance mechanism that lets students know that someone is there to assist them from beginning to end." The results of this study show that an effective retention strategy is an advising service coordinated by the manager of advising, an assistant dean, and a faculty director. P2 stated, "a highly effective retention strategy for the college is an advising service, which is coordinated by the manager of advising, an assistant dean, and a faculty director." P2 went on to say that the advising service consists of student services staff working with academic staff who train advisors to work with students and ask and answer questions comfortably.

Retaining college students, who do not seek assistance themselves, can be challenging (Bean, 1990). Although P4 and P5 talked briefly about students who, traditionally, would not seek help, P1 said,

You know, we may have those students who are so shy in nature that they won't

go out of their way to get help or even those who figure they can turn things

around before the end of the semester, but those are the very students that we need

to be here for.

P1 continued to say, "We try to touch everyone who needs to be helped and it's amazing

how comfortable they are in a one-on-one level." In contrast, Hatch and Garcia (2017)

used quantitative methods to explore advising methods and how intrusive advising

impacted freshmen students. They learned the correlation between engagement and

persistence is dependent on individual goals, that students respond to advising efforts in

varying ways, and becoming involved in academic and student engagement support

systems are vital to retaining students throughout the student life-cycle.

Subtheme 2: Early Alert

The second subtheme that emerged relating to intervention programs was early

alert. P1 says,

The early alert program identifies students who are not doing well in a particular

class, and advisors reach out to them to learn their needs and work with the

student to provide the necessary assistance to get them to where they need to be.

West, Luzeckyj, Toohey, Vanderlelie, and Searle (2020) theorized that leaders

implemented the early alert system to help faculty identify students who are not

performing well. The authors also contended that the system was designed to alert

advisors to reach out to students with hopes of offering assistance to the students'

particular issues, which aids in increasing retention numbers. Villano, Harrison, Lynch, &

Chen (2018) links learning analytics with leaders utilizing early alert systems to increase student retention. Villano et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore the early alert system and student retention. The authors learned that the systems could detect students at risk of not persisting. Based on the results, the authors ascertained that early alert systems are valuable tools and deliver useful data to faculty and staff to help support students.

P3 suggested that early alert is vital to identifying and addressing student issues early so the student can move forward and be successful. P5 said, "The system tracks attendance, and once a student is absent three consecutive days, advisors receive an alert, and their objective is to contact the student to follow up on absenteeism." Mi (2019) conducted a study that included a methodical review of student outcomes using the early alert system. The results showed that by using the early alert system, faculty and advisors could identify students in need of assistance before they are in dire danger of failing the class. The results of this study suggests that offering assistance to students and their specific needs, early, increases the general proficiency and success of early alert makes the system vital to student success.

The prominent attrition models provided by Tinto (1975) places a heavy reliance on a student's social involvement with the environment of the institution as a predictor of persistence. P4 said, "Not only do we pay close attention to our new students but we have to be aware of our nontraditional students as well." P2 also said, "We have students that have been out of school for a long time and they, sometimes, have trouble transitioning back into an academic setting." P2 went on to say,

This is where early alert comes in handy, you know, because they are older and coming back to school is intentional for them; so, we can catch these students early and provide them with the tools necessary for them to succeed.

Tinto's (1987) model supports this assertion as he posits college students arrive with individual characteristics, ambitions, intentions, and goals. These pre-college characteristics directly and indirectly (through their goals and institutional commitment) influence their likelihood of persistence (Renn & Reason, 2012). Depending on students' perceptions of their social and academic integration, they reevaluate their goals and institutional commitments and decide whether to remain at the institution (Renn & Reason, 2012).

Subtheme 3: Peer Tutoring

The third theme that emerged relating to intervention programs was peer tutoring. Four of the five participants referenced peer tutoring as being essential to retaining students. P5 discussed the amount of students needing remediation and how that impacts retention efforts. According to P5, "Many of our new starts have to take a developmental math and or English and if they don't pass the class, they are at greater risk to drop out." This assertion is supported by Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) who suggested that 58% of students entering community college are placed into developmental reading and math and Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010) concluded that 31% of students placed in developmental math and 44% of students placed in developmental English successfully complete the courses. P5 continued,

That is why we offer tutoring in math and English and with the early alert system in place, we can identify those students before it is too late, we can intervene before it is too late and get them the help they need.

P3 said, "Sometimes students won't come to us when they are doing poorly; therefore, we have to go to them and let them know that we offer tutoring in math and English." Quarles and Davis (2017) posited developmental math classes are commonly seen as an obstacle to student success and contribute to student departure. P4 discussed the college having a department specifically to assist students with tutoring. P4 said, "As far as academic success, our first contact with student is in a department that is specific to meeting with students, discussing their personal and academic goals, and tutoring." P2 mentioned,

What we do is, that has shown to be a huge success, is we solicit help from other students, you know, who are proved they are really good in math and English, and we get them to tutor those students who may not be doing so well.

Eun and Min (2019) conducted a study on the impact of peer tutoring on students and learned that peer tutoring had a positive impact on students' academically and collaboratively. Additional support for peer tutoring comes from Srivastava and Rashid (2018) who contends that peer tutoring is an effective approach because it provides and active and interactive participative learning process, which aids in the development of a deeper comprehension for the tutor and the tutee. Table 4 shows the subthemes, number of sources, and frequencies that emerged from the intervention programs theme.

Table 4

Intervention Programs

Subthemes	# of sources	Frequency
Advising	5	9
Early Alert	4	6
Peer Tutoring	4	5

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in Louisiana to achieve financial sustainability. The findings of this study could be used to help community college leaders improve retention strategies that can lead to financial sustainability. Community college leaders could utilize my findings to augment their retention strategies, which can lead to increased student retention numbers. The results could persuade community college leaders to implement stronger collaborations between the divisions of student services and academic affairs, to include stronger communication that are focused on students, their needs, and their success. McNaughtan, DePue, and McNaughtan (2019) postulated that leaders of colleges and universities face challenges that are specific to their particular institutions; however, they can apply strategies that have been effective for other leaders.

The results of this study could also encourage community college leaders to offer more stringent student orientation programs to new students. Dewey (2018) suggested that unlike courses relating to a specific curriculum, student orientation programs are meant to concentrate solely on methods to help students acclimate, successfully, to

college and helps to cultivate an environment of unity and camaraderie for new students. Literature, such as Jaijairam (2016), who conducted a study and learned that 85% of participants completing a freshman orientation course improved their academic performance, communication with faculty, problem-solving skills, and were more likely to be retained.

Lastly, the results of this study could influence community college leaders to offer more intervention programs to help identify and assist students who are at risk of failing. The findings show that it is vital for leaders to provide adequate access to services designed to help support students throughout their student life-cycle is essential to their success. Community college leaders can implement the early alert system, which can identify students who are at risk of not persisting before it is too late. Leaders can secure adequate advisors and peer tutors to assist students once they are identified as at-risk and they can receive the necessary assistance, which can lead to a positive overall student experience.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study could be used to contribute to positive social change by community college leaders improving strategies to retain students to improve retention numbers and financial sustainability. The improvements to strategies, retention numbers, and financial sustainability could be achieved through the identified themes this study; collaboration, student orientation, and intervention programs. Strategies applied to enforce collaboration, student orientation, and intervention programs could influence student persistence. Retaining students until they become graduates leads to increased

completion rates and, in many ways, contributes to a better quality of life for the student, their families, and promotes positive social change within communities (Brewer, Nicotera, Veeh, & Laser-Maira (2018). Retaining students to completion is linked to outcomes such as gainful employment and increased wages. Students who complete college are more likely to earn higher salaries, pay increased taxes, and have better benefits packages than employed people without a college education (Myeong et al., 2019). Students who are retained until graduation contribute to higher community involvement. Students who persist through college are more prone to participate in community events, such as resolving disparities within the community and volunteering (Jacoby, 2019). Loyal volunteers are necessary and appreciated within communities. Volunteers add to the sustainability of many essential foundations and groups within the community and lead to gainful employment or higher salaries (Baert and Vujić, 2017).

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in Louisiana to achieve financial sustainability. Students are vital to the existence and sustainability of colleges and universities (Moonhee, 2019). The results of this study could be useful to community college leaders as they work to improve strategies to retain students. These strategies include, communication and student-focused collaborations, providing student orientations for new students, and ensuring intervention programs, such as, advising, early alert, and peer tutoring are available to students. By applying the strategies within this study, community college leaders and other college administrative

professionals could improve student retention numbers and increase the colleges'
financial sustainability. In alliance with the results of this study, I would make three
recommendations for action.

My first recommendation is that community college leaders create a task force,
consisting of leaders from the divisions of academic and student affairs to collaborate in
identifying and addressing the needs of students. Leaders should ensure they are having
student-focused conversations to effectively identify students' needs and employing
policies, procedures, and mechanisms to adequately address those needs. My second
recommendation is that community college leaders require all new and returning students
to complete a student orientation. Leaders should mandate new and returning students
complete a student orientation because these programs have proven to be effective with
helping students to get acclimated to college and college resources. My final
recommendation is for community college leaders to implement services designed
identify students that are at the risk of failing before it is too late. By having services,
such as the early alert system, that can identify students needing assistance, students can
get the help they need and persist.

Community college leaders can use these tactics as a basis to create strategies to
retain students in accordance with the unique culture of their respective institutions. My
goal is to share my findings with national organizations within the higher education
sector, at conferences, and through additional published works. I am dedicated to
exploring the sustainability of community colleges.

Recommendations for Further Research

Throughout the United States, leaders of community colleges are faced with the challenges of retaining students to completion or until they transfer to a four-year university (Borgen & Borgen, 2016). Recommendations for further research associated with retaining students in community colleges is augmenting the study with a quantitative element to enhance the qualitative study. Having conducted a case study research, which is challenging to duplicate, future research should include quantitative data from proprietary and not-for-profit institutions to examine effective retention strategies. I recommend additional research inclusive of community college students to collect quantitative data, directly from the students, on their respective challenges and potential ways to mitigate those challenges. Finally, to increase the scope of this study, I recommend further research to duplicate the study using data from other geographical regions.

Reflections

Upon starting this journey, I thought this would be a relatively simple process; however, I was utterly wrong. The rigor of the program proved to be an enjoyable experience, one that has humbled and challenged me to think more critically and increase my efforts in being an agent of change. Although the work was intense, I believe this permitted me to expand my professional and academic skills. I have increased my understanding of how low retention numbers impact higher education institutions' financial sustainability and the need for continued research for effective strategies.

Whereas my goal was to do face-to-face interviews, conducting phone interviews allowed me to gauge the participants unfamiliarly. Nonetheless, the participants were engaging and thorough. Throughout the interview process, I found the participants' views on the lack of funding to vary. Though some felt funding is minimal, others' felt funding was adequate. I also have a better understanding of the positive impact that collaboration between the divisions of student services and academic affairs has on developing and implementing effective strategies.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that leaders of community colleges use to increase student retention and revenues in Louisiana to achieve financial sustainability. Since the recession, of 2008, state and federal funding for public colleges and universities has significantly decreased (Sav, 2016). The substantial decrease in funding has leaders looking at other ways of achieving revenue to sustain the institutions. Retaining students has become essential to financing the colleges' bottom-line (Ballard, 2017). To address the general business problem, which was, some academic leaders are experiencing a rapid decline in student retention, which results in a decrease in revenue, I identified strategies that leaders of community colleges could use to improve their retention strategies, which could result in increased revenue.

I conducted semistructured interviews with five participants from a community college in Louisiana, who developed and implemented strategies that have effectively helped to retain students and increase revenues. Through the analysis of the interview

data and internal archived retention documents, which I used for methodological triangulation, I identified three main themes, which were: collaboration student orientation, and intervention programs. The findings could persuade community college leaders to implement stronger collaborations between the divisions of student services and academic affairs, to include stronger communication that are focused on students, encourage leaders to offer more stringent student orientation programs to new students, and influence leaders to offer more intervention programs to help identify and assist students who are at risk of failing.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- Confirm receipt of participants' signed consent form.

- Contact participant 5 minutes prior to start time of the interview to ensure cell phone is set-up as a recording device.

- Welcome participant and ensure their comfort level before beginning the interview.

- Describe the interview process, e.g. reiterate the use of my cell phone as a recording device, their right to stop the interview, and their right to withdraw from the study without penalty.

- Allocate time to answer questions prior to starting the interview.

- Start interview.

- Once the interview is completed, allow participant to share additional information they feel may be vital to the study.

- Discontinue recording device.

- Inform participant of the importance of member checking and inform participant that once the recorded interview is transcribed, I will email the transcription to participant to review for accuracy and to allow participant to edit or add information where needed.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What are your most effective student retention strategies at your college?

2. What administrative departments are responsible for developing and implementing student retention programs and initiatives at your community college?

3. What types of data do you use to identify students who are at risk of not persisting?

4. At what stages of the student life cycle do you collect the data?

5. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the retention strategies?

6. What were the key challenges to implementing your organizations strategies for improved retention?

7. How did you address each of the key barriers to implementing your organization's strategies for improved retention?

8. What additional strategies are important to sustaining revenue through retaining students?