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## Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention Strategies at a Career-Based University

Sheila Annette Williamson-Branch  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Sheila Williamson-Branch

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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## Review Committee

Dr. Caroline Crawford, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty  
Dr. Jennifer Mclean, Committee Member, Education Faculty  
Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention Strategies at a Career-Based University

by

Sheila Williamson-Branch

MBA Capella University, 2013

MS, Strayer University, 2009

MBA, Averett College, 1991

BS, Hampton Institute, 1984

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

July 2023

## Abstract

In 2008, a career-focused university implemented a set of faculty-led retention strategies to address a steady decline in retention. Yet, despite the implementation of this program, retention continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention. The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's student retention theory promoting momentum to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. The research questions examined the perceptions of full and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the existing formal student retention strategies and ways to improve student retention. Thirteen faculty were recruited through purposeful sampling. The participants provided insights regarding the research questions through semistructured interviews. The qualitative data analysis process consisted of manual coding and inductive thematic analysis. Findings identified five major outcomes that emerged from the study's participant interviews: student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources. Key findings were developed from the themes with implications for policy recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness of student retention practices and support the university's ongoing mission of improving its workforce programs and student success. Social change implications include the increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty associated with effective student retention strategies.

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## Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my son, Samuel (Tre'), and my daughter, Sierra. For many years prior to pursuing my doctorate in education, I worked hard to obtain a PhD in Business. Amid that journey, it became obvious to me that my interest was in education. I wanted to fulfill a promise I made to a dear cousin, prior to her demise, to receive a doctorate, which was a dream of hers. We both shared a desire to show the younger generation in our family that you could become anything your heart desires if you are willing to do the work. I have worked so hard alongside you both pushing you to become the person you are and choose to be. I have always shared that you both have given talents, and it is up to each of you to use them. Education chose me; this was not a journey I thought I would be pursuing. As you continue your journey, I hope that you will understand the importance of education as it relates to your future well-being and that you will pass your knowledge on to others. It is never too late to pursue your dreams; just remember you can accomplish anything by being persistent and determined and by putting God in front of it all.

I also dedicate this work to all the young ladies following behind me who grew up in poverty. May you never allow your circumstances to define who you are and who you can become. Lastly, I dedicate this to a special friend who pushed me through the final steps in this journey and never allowed me to give up on my dream of obtaining the highest educational level I could.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

In 2008, faculty at Acoryn University (pseudonym), a career-based college located in a rural area in the Southeastern region of the United States, implemented a set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the university's retention rate. Yet, despite the implementation of this program, retention continued to decline in subsequent years. Retention of students at Acoryn University had been a problem for several years, the campus director noted. Accreditation data for Acoryn University for 2017 showed a 44% retention rate, down 16% from the prior year (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools [ACICS], 2017, 2018); given this, Acoryn University did not meet the accrediting body's required accreditation standard of a 60% student retention rate (ACICS, 2016). Additionally, the accreditation data showed that the retention rate in the business program in 2018 was 39%, down 13% from 2017.

University administrators and faculty, who worked closely with students, implemented the strategies, according to the campus director. The strategies consisted of providing tutoring assistance, increasing faculty awareness of their role in improving student retention, and launching an active reentry campaign for formerly enrolled students (see Appendix E). The campus director noted that recently, campus leaders shifted towards a self-regulated method, which required faculty to track student retention within their classrooms. The strategies were implemented campus-wide in all programs. The extent to which the campus-wide student retention strategies met specific course needs or



the needs of students or faculty was in question, based on the steady decline of student retention rates at the university, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Acoryn University Undergraduate Student Retention Rates (2015–2018)*

Year	Student retention rate (%)
2015	63
2016	60
2017	44
2018	22

*Note.* The data in the table are from the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2018). At the time of the study, 2018 was the least year for which data were available.

Acoryn University offers career-based training programs and primarily confers associate degrees and some bachelor's degrees. In 2018, Acoryn University had more than 45 academic programs offered through 30 community-based locations located within the Southeastern region of the United States and serving 917 undergraduate students (College Navigator, 2018). The career-focused school had changed its status from a college to a university and evolved into a graduate-level institution offering diverse academic, online, international, English as a Second Language, and corporate training programs. The university's focus was business, health care, and information technology, though it was also offering more in-depth courses and expanding into other fields where career opportunities continue to grow (College Navigator, 2018). The university previously offered certificate programs, but leaders found that this was no longer the norm, and

revised their program offerings. Students were pursuing more in-depth study leading to an associate degree and the university's first baccalaureate degree programs. Acoryn University offered a master's level program; however, unlike a typical university where students come to one campus, university leaders chose to go where the students are, offering more than 45 academic programs through 30 community-based locations in six states.

Acoryn University is accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (College Navigator, 2018). Additionally, some programs are programmatically accredited by independent organizations that verify that the training provided abides by professional standards, its website noted. The eUniversity concept allowed the university to serve students online internationally for academic degree programs as well as English as a Second Language instruction. The student population consisted of adult skilled and unskilled workers looking to improve their current employment or gain new employment.

At the time of the study, the student enrollment at the community-based campus study sites was approximately 358 students, the campus director noted. The campus director worked across the two community-based campuses, which had 12–15 full-time faculty members in addition to part-time and administrative staff. Although Acoryn University has student retention strategies designed to assist with retaining students, retention has continued to decline. Faculty perceptions about the student retention strategies utilized at Acoryn University are not known. Given the importance of faculty

involvement in retention efforts and their direct and ongoing contact with students, faculty were likely to have important insights into the retention strategies currently in place. Furthermore, the faculty offered additional points of consideration in the university's ongoing effort to improve student retention.

### **Situation of the Problem Within the Larger Educational Context**

Student retention continues to be a problem within higher education. Leaders of higher educational institutions continue to face challenges in identifying the effectiveness of student retention strategies (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Student retention and student departure are two very complex areas that they need to address. Institutional leaders remained concerned about the stigma of lower retention rates and the negative consequences for their institution's reputation (Hovdhaugen et al., 2013). Although there is a wealth of research on student retention, emerging research highlights the value of faculty input in identifying and implementing effective retention strategies (Bolliger et al., 2019; Kiser & Hammer, 2016; Sarfraz et al., 2019).

Student retention has been a focus within higher educational institutions for decades as institutions are still struggling with trying to identify ways to retain students, and continues to be a concern, partially due to the differentiated instructional environments of face-to-face, hybrid or blended, online, and microlearning engagement (Gauthier, 2016). Faculty have first-hand knowledge of student impact and disposition associated with student retention strategy effectiveness (Gauthier, 2016) Students who are retained create value for the local community when they graduate and become productive

citizens. Low retention rates make it challenging for a university to maintain accreditation, for faculty to be hired or remain in their positions, and for students to become productive citizens in the local community. The identified gap in practice was the problem of a persistent student retention rate issue within a career-based university, despite the implementation of formal student retention strategies starting in 2008. Postsecondary student retention is a higher education issue in the United States and in other parts of the world (Gauthier, 2016). The challenges associated with identifying and implementing successful student retention strategy effectiveness is an ongoing issue for institutions of higher education.

### **Rationale**

The formal student retention strategies at a local career-based college located in a rural area in the Southeastern region of the United States consisted of providing tutoring assistance, increasing faculty awareness of their role in improving student retention, and engaging in an active re-entry campaign for students who may have *stopped out* but who desired to reengage in university coursework, the campus director stated. Campus leaders had recently shifted their formal student retention strategies to a self-regulated method requiring faculty to track student retention within their classrooms, the director added. The same campus-wide student retention strategies were provided for all programs; however, the extent to which the campus-wide student retention strategies met specific course needs and the needs of students and faculty were in question. This was illustrated by the steady decline in student retention rates at Acoryn University as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Acoryn University Undergraduate Student Population and Student Retention Rates (2015–2018)*

Year	Student population	Student retention rate (%)
2015	113	63
2016	117	60
2017	22	44
2018	20	22

*Note.* The data in the table are from the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2018). At the time of the study, 2018 was the least year for which data were available.

Changing faculty and student learner needs might require the redesign of student retention strategies from class to class as well as from semester to semester. The lack of insight on faculty perceptions of the campus-wide approach to retention is problematic, both at the local level and more broadly. According to Sarfraz et al. (2019), little attention had been paid to faculty perceptions about the educational environment in which they instruct. The perceived success of formal student retention strategies by the faculty are important information that may support the refinement of student retention strategies (Sarfraz et al., 2019).

As the campus director noted, retention of students at Acoryn University has been a problem for several years. Data reported to the ACICS (2017, 2018) show that Acoryn University had a 44% retention rate in 2017, reflecting retention that was down 16% from

the prior year's retention rate. As such, Acoryn University did not meet the accrediting body's required accreditation standard of a minimum 60% student retention rate (ACICS, 2016). Additionally, the accreditation data for Acoryn University show that the student retention rate in one business program in 2018 was 39%, down 13% from 2017 (ACICS, 2017, 2018), reflecting a concerning downward trend in student enrollment.

According to the (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018), the retention rates for 4-year private for-profit institutions between 2015–2016 for first-time students was 65.8% and 75.4% in 2017, based on a 75% acceptance rate for first-time undergraduates. In 2018, the retention rate was 75.5% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). The lower rates at Acoryn University for 2015–2018 demonstrated that the university fell well below the national retention rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b). Table 2 presents the documented retention rates for the university, representing a decrease in retention over the last 5-year reporting period. A further investigation continued to show a decreased retention rate in five of the university's primary programs as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3***Campus Program Retention Rates, 2016 and 2017*

Program	%	
	2016	2017
Medical Assistant	70	45
Business Administration (Accounting)	55	50
Business Administration (Management)	52	39
Phlebotomy	66	38
Health Care Management	100	50

*Note.* The data in the table are from the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2018). No data was available for 2015, 2018, or 2019.

Towards more fully articulating the differentiation in retention rates between programs, Table 4 depicted the retention rate for two programs from 2015-2019. The two programs were signature programs for Acoryn University which discontinued prompting an interest in the student retention rates at this university site. This table addressed the concerns around the student retention rates at this university site.

**Table 4***Retention Rates for Business Administration and Medical Assisting Programs, 2016 and 2017*

Year	%	
	Business Administration (Management)	Medical Assisting Program
2016	52	70
2017	39	45

*Note.* The data in the table are from the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2018). No data was available for 2015, 2018, or 2019.

Decreasing retention rates specifically between 2015 and 2019, were a continuing problem at Acoryn University. Due to the decreasing rates, campus leaders recently voluntarily cancelled the institution's accreditation (see ACICS, 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are grounded within the literature and are used throughout this study:

*Career-based college:* A college or university that offers certificate programs, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees designed to prepare individuals for the workforce (Plasman et al., 2019; Rodgers et al., 2020).

*Faculty:* Persons who hold appropriate specialization area knowledge, degrees, and other knowledge base understandings that are appropriate for instruction. These persons serve as a primary classroom contact with students, playing a vital role in students' knowledge acquisition as well as course enrollment retention and degree attainment (Zerquera et al., 2018)



*Faculty perceptions:* The perceptions shared by faculty who rely on student retention strategies designed to manage classroom retention with the implementation of classroom strategies (Bollinger, 2019).

*Private-for-profit college:* A college or university that operates as a business that offers programs emphasizing career preparation with little or no general education requirements (Rodgers et al., 2020).

*Retention:* A process that incorporates academic and institutional social systems that influence academic performance (Kerby, 2018; Tinto, 2013). Student persistence is inclusive of a university's shared responsibility in influencing a student's decision to not drop out (Aljohani, 2016; Tinto, 1975).

*Student retention rate:* The rate at which a college or university retains and graduates students who first enter college to work towards an undergraduate or advanced degree (Lo et al., 2016).

*Student retention strategies:* Strategies implemented to initiate and support the student learner (Bollinger & Martin, 2018).

*Student retention theoretical models:* Literature rich on the history and study of student retention (Aljohani, 2016).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was to develop a better understanding of how formal university-implemented student retention strategies are perceived by full-time and part-time faculty and perceptions of ways to improve student retention in Acoryn University's

ongoing effort to better retain students. Additionally, the significance of this study suggested the importance related to how and to what extent these retention strategies may be perceived by faculty to be effective in retaining students. Faculty have firsthand knowledge of student impact and disposition associated with student retention strategy effectiveness. Students retained do create value within the local community, as graduates become productive citizens within the community. Students who graduate created a source of labor for the local community while also affording them with the resources needed to be productive.

Acoryn University programs offered hands-on education needed within the local community, and when students are not retained in chosen areas to graduate, the community suffers as well. This study made an original contribution to the local setting through better understanding the faculty perceptions of student retention strategy effectiveness when implemented within the instructional environment, including the faculty's perceptions associated with ways to improve student retention, which added to higher education leadership's understanding of, and implementation related to faculty perceptions of student retention strategies. Sarfraz et al. (2019) indicated little attention had been focused upon faculty perceptions about the educational environment in which they instruct. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

The potential findings lead to positive social change within Acoryn University by providing increased awareness about the student retention strategy effectiveness aided faculty in better understanding and enhancing student retention, and the University's ability to address the classroom-based understanding of perceptions related to a persistent student retention rate issue. Additionally, the findings lead to ways the university can improve student retention at Acoryn University based on the suggestions provided by the full-time and part-time faculty. Faculty, as well as the career-based university administrative leadership, benefited from this project study by supporting Acoryn University's need to improve a persistent student retention rate that remains a common concern highlighted amongst higher education institutions. Aljohani (2016) and Lo et al. (2016) noted student retention had been a major concern within higher educational institutions since the beginning of formal educational programs. Bawa (2016) noted student retention rate concerns within online course offerings as well as within higher educational institutions.

### **Research Questions**

The problem in this study was that, in 2008, despite the implementation of a faculty-led program to address a steady decline in Acoryn University retention rates, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short. As such, I sought to answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty member regarding ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?

### **Review of the Literature**

This review of the relevant literature presented the conceptual framework, as well as the review of the broader problem to address the multiple components associated with the topic of this study. A representative critical analysis of the literature associated with the broader problem was offered, representing a discussion related to faculty perceptions, student retention, student retention strategies, and student retention theories that support the main assertion of the problem statement that, in 2008, Acoryn University (pseudonym) implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework undergirding this study was Tinto's (2013) theory on student retention, acknowledging student departure, and the support of student retention throughout higher education. Tinto's theory focuses on the impact of academic involvement on a college-level learner's persistence on how the institution's involvement and student involvement can aid in reducing student retention issues (Tinto, 2013).

Tinto's theory recognized that students often lose momentum and interest before they become fully engaged in a university setting and, thus, are at a higher risk of dropping out of college (Tinto, 2013). Because this theory addressed the understanding of student retention strategies and effectiveness, Tinto's theoretical work supported student retention, addressing academic and social integration within higher education (Kerby, 2015). Tinto (2013) believed challenges faced by students upon arriving at college were associated with not being prepared academically, and the lack of soft skills needed to succeed in college. Tinto believed student retention while in college was built upon a student's experience in the classroom (Tinto, 2013), giving credence to the crucial role of faculty in retention efforts.

Tinto (2013) suggested many colleges and universities have designed programs inclusive of developmental components needed to help progress a student through his or her college experience. Like Tinto (2013), Gill (2016) suggested for student retention to have a secure and stable platform, and there must be motivated and committed personnel equipped to assist students.

As the instructional faculty serve as the primary and consistent contact with students, the faculty play a major role in student retention and the attainment process (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Gauthier, 2016; Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016); as such, faculty perceptions of student retention strategy effectiveness may support the development of a better understanding of the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016). According to Tinto (2015),

perceptions of the quality and relevance of the curriculum reflected a complex situation among a variety of issues including faculty teaching methods, perceived institutional quality, and student learning style preferences. Student retention intervention related to known factors have an impact on improving retention (Tinto 2015). The dynamics of student retention strategy effectiveness and the components that influence the effectiveness continue to be an area many researchers continue to investigate today.

Flores-Caballero (2020) noted that if higher education institutions do not promote social and academic integration, retention will become unstable, and students may drop out. Gautier (2016) study addressed the redesigning of academic skill-building courses while also addressing the involvement of faculty perceptions of student retention strategies with the inclusion of academic and social integration. Gauthier (2016) research focused on improving student academic success while also noting the lack of social learning and added part of the underpinning theory.

### ***Logical Connections With the Study***

Tinto's (2013) theory aligned well with this study as the components of this theory align effectively with student retention strategies, associated with student academic preparation, soft skill alignment with university norms, as well as comfortability of engagement within the classroom structure. Tinto believed challenges faced by students upon arriving at college were associated with not being prepared academically, and the lack of soft skills needed to succeed in college. Further, Tinto believed student retention while in college is built upon a student's experience in the classroom giving credence to

the crucial role of faculty in retention efforts. Successful completion of college was dependent upon success in the classroom (Tinto, 2013). The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University that align with the conceptual framework on student retention.

### ***Relation to the Study Approach and Research Questions***

The conceptual framework for this study related well with this basic qualitative study approach where the study was developed to solve a problem addressing student retention. Tinto's (2013) theory supported this study's research questions to understanding student retention strategies. Student interaction and involvement with their professors are important to the retention of students in a course, as framed through Tinto's work (1975). According to Tinto (2013), student coursework success and programmatic progression are dependent upon how well an institution identifies ways to help students retain momentum and continue.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

Student retention and student departure are two very complex areas, and higher educational institutions remain challenged with identifying the effectiveness of student retention strategies (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Several keywords were used to obtain peer-reviewed articles 5-years or less inclusive of career-based college, student retention, faculty perceptions, faculty involvement, student retention strategies, student success,

academic integration, social integration, student challenges in career colleges, private-for-profit colleges as well as student retention strategies involving tutoring assistance, community involvement, faculty awareness, and active re-entry campaigns. Several databases were utilized as well to gather peer-reviewed articles and statistical data inclusive of the *Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Educational Sciences*, *the National Center Educational Statistics College Navigator*, *ERIC*, Google Scholar, textbooks, and journals such as the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practices*.

### ***Student Retention***

Student retention had been a major concern for years. For decades higher educational institutions have been challenged with many obstacles inclusive of retaining students. Years of research have addressed retention within higher education institutions according to Kiser and Hamer (2016). Kiser and Hamer (2016) noted institutions need to explore issues surrounding retention and what can be done to increase retention. Many researchers agree student retention had been an issue in higher education (Aulck et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2016). Student retention was the rate at which a higher educational institution retains students and who graduate after first entering the university and obtain a degree (Lo et al., 2016). Students are more likely to succeed when there are clear expectations presented to them whether during orientation, meeting formal or informal advising, faculty interactions and expectations, and institutional involvement (Lo et al., 2016).



Students would drop out when there was a problem with policies and practices that do not prevent them from dropping out (Lo et al., 2016). Lo et al. (2016) investigated current trends with student retention while noting a needed focus on the implementation of effective student retention policies that help higher educational institutional student retention rates. Disparities between countries and institutions suggested there are substantial variations in policies and practices that may influence student retention and success. In similar research, Cotton et al. (2016) shared differences in policies and practices within a higher educational institution can have an impact on student retention and success.

The continuous problem with student retention concerned the institution still. The continuous problem with the student retention rate had been a major concern for higher education institutions around the world since the establishment of formal education (Aljohani, 2016). Mah and Ifenthalen (2018) indicated student retention in higher education has been a global problem for years with continuous research attempting to identify ways to improve student retention strategies designed to address student attrition. Like traditional learning, online learning continued to suffer from student retention problems (Muljana & Luo, 2019). The dropout numbers in online learning environments are reportedly higher in the traditional learning environment (Muljana & Luo, 2019).

Student retention models have been developed for years addressing retention issues with traditional and non-traditional students. Models addressing non-traditional students such as students who attend career-based higher educational institutions found

such students were less likely to integrate socially into an institution (Yu, 2015). The inclusion of academic and social integration strategies has a positive impact on student retention (Gauthier, 2016; Yu, 2015).

**Programs to Address Student Retention in Higher Education.** Many colleges and universities implement various programs designed to address issues associated with student retention. Student retention strategies generally are embedded with an institution's academic support program (Kiser & Hammer, 2015). Acoryn University student retention programs consisted of tutoring referrals by faculty, faculty-led student retention within the classroom, and a community service program designed to engage students within the course. Academic support systems included various student retention strategies designed to assist with retaining students in the classroom (Kiser & Hammer, 2015). However, as shared by Haverila et al. (2020), ineffective support services impacted the retention of students negatively, or they can make it worse by doing nothing at all.

**Retention Issues in For-Profit Institutions.** Many colleges and universities, whether public-for-profit or private-for-profit, are facing many turning points to retain students in higher educational institutions (Kiser & Hamer, 2016). Higher education institutions today are either public or private-for-profit. Students attending higher educational institutions are given access to a variety of amenities designed to engage and influence their progress, whether in a 2-year college or a 4-year university, where many are now offering bachelor's degrees in some locations. Higher education over the years

has evolved to meet the needs of its students, whether traditional or non-traditional (Haverila et al., 2016). According to Kiser and Hamer (2016), college education has presented opportunities for students to excel academically and socially engage with others. However, these opportunities are found to be challenged by retention issues at 2-year colleges and 4-year universities where non-traditional students exist as well (Kiser & Hamer, 2016).

According to ACICS.org (2017), student achievement standards are a factor in retention and placement rates at the campus and program levels. Minimum standards are intended to ensure that a substantial majority of students at ACICS-accredited campuses are retained ACICS.org (2017). Accreditation processes are designed to ensure compliance with higher educational institutions. According to Sysoiev (2019), accreditation was used to assess the potential and effectiveness of a college or university effectiveness. The assessments help ensure the quality of the activities and assurance systems in higher educational institutions (Sysoiev, 2019).

Accreditation was designed to improve academic quality and accountability to the stakeholders and public (Kumar et al., 2020). Accreditors associate accreditation with excellence to define the level of quality processes and services offered by institutions for the stakeholders' satisfaction and success of students (Kumar et al., 2020). Accreditation was a process of QA and improvement where an institution or program was evaluated based on certain standards and to promote excellence found within higher educational institutions (Kumar et al., 2020). The closing or reorganization of colleges inclusive of

career-based colleges was nothing uncommon. According to Frisbie and Converso (2016), career colleges faced a surge of closings from 2010-2012 in the for-profit sector due to a decline in enrollments. Donoff and Rosser (2016) noted departmental and program eliminations contributed to college closings because of budget shortfalls.

***Career Colleges.*** Career-based colleges have been in existence for centuries created to offer certificate programs, associate degrees designed to prepare men and women for the workforce (Plasman et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2020). Most career-based colleges are private-for-profit institutions and are designed to meet the educational need of students who want to obtain a job in a particular field while forming relationships with the local community it serves through employer engagement (Rogers et al., 2020). Fry and Cilluffo (2019) also shared career-based colleges that are private-for-profit institutions account for over 3,400 colleges and universities that operate as a business. Additionally, career-based colleges provided a form of education designed for students who choose not to go the traditional route of obtaining an education that offers programs that emphasize career preparation and require few to no general educational requirements (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019; Plasman et al., 2019).

### ***University Mission Statements***

A mission statement defined a higher educational institution that was in alignment with the practices and student outcomes. According to Seebera et al. (2019), university mission statements reflected the strategic direction of a higher educational institution. According to Guimarães et al. (2020), a higher educational institution's mission statement

lays out its intentions in its mission statement. Higher educational institutions began using mission statements as early as the 1980s (Cortes-Sanchez, 2018).

The objective of the mission statements in higher educational institutions are to share what their overall goals are. According to Seebera et al. (2019), the mission statement at higher educational institutions reflected how an institution sees itself while sharing how they want to be viewed by others. For example, an institution will share a narrative about the higher educational institution representing what the organization wanted others to believe to be true about the intentions of the institution.

### ***Acoryn University***

Acoryn University is a private-for-profit higher educational institution that provides opportunities for adult learners to achieve their career goals through degreed credentials through distance and blended learning (College Navigator, 2018). Acoryn University was founded well over 100 years ago by a group of visionary educational leaders who envisioned the need to create an institution focused on career-based training to meet the workforce needs in the southeastern part of the United States (nces.org, 2018). This was significant because many communities lacked skilled workers where the community-based campuses were located. Acoryn University's objectives include programs designed to enhance student learning in business, information technology, health science, and paralegal professional. Acoryn University engaged students with a well-developed program designed to allow students to achieve their program outcomes (nces.org, 2018).

**Mission, Vision, and Values.** Acoryn University's reputation was established based on training men and women with an education designed to prepare them for the working world while instilling values in their students designed to help them live a productive life in their community (nces.org, 2018). Acoryn University traditionally believed in the need to provide 1-year certificate programs to adult learners looking to attain a certificate in a specific career. The goal was to provide educational programs designed to offer career jobs allowing its students to become productive citizens within the communities they lived.

***Strengths and Areas in Need of Development.*** Acoryn University continued to strive but with obstacles. Over the years, Acoryn University programs have changed the university now offering programs where jobs are more prevalent. In Acoryn University earlier model programs consisted of diplomas and certificates in the areas of business administration, accounting, and medical fields. Over the years Acoryn University programs were challenged with retention and enrollment issues resulting in many of its community campuses closing (nces.org, 2018). Currently, the career-based college improved upon its direction by switching to a university model offering more master's degree programs. However, since switching Acoryn University had to close several of its community campuses after suffering years of retention and enrollment concerns (nces.ed.org, 2020). Most recently Acoryn University diverted its attention to online learning.

### ***Instructional Engagement and Motivation***

Institutional engagement created an opportunity to increase and improve retention. According to Kiser and Hamer (2016), higher education institutions explored issues surrounding retention problems and responsibility by identifying a process from within to increase retention within a university. For example, Lerdpornkulrat et al. (2018) shared student engagement lies not only with students but also it was necessary for institutions to provide environments, conditions, and opportunities that motivate students to want to persist in college. Institutional engagement and modes of motivating students to a major role in how students are retained (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018; Tinto, 2020). As noted by Lerdpornkulrat et al. (2018), institutional structures whose goals focus on self-improvement positively impacted on students identifying with the institution's intention for them to persist in college.

Career-based colleges possessed a multitude of experienced professionals. According to Rogers et al. (2020), the engagement between the employer and instructors at college-based colleges was highly valued in the relationships forms in providing industry standards and onsite experience to students. Instructors at career-based colleges are an invaluable resource, as noted by Sheely (2014).

Much work had been done on student perspectives; however, little had been on faculty perceptions (Sarfraz et al., 2019). Faculty serves as the primary point of contact for students while playing a vital role in student retention and attainment (Zerquera et al., 2016). Like Sarfraz et al. (2016), Zerquera et al. (2016) noted the importance of knowing

what shapes a student while in school. Claybrooks and Taylor (2016) shared models that align with the methodologies of this study. Claybrooks and Taylor (2016) noted it was important for higher education institutions to have the necessary tools available for faculty to create a campus-wide support system that has an impact on whether a student stays or departs.

Faculty perceptions are needed to assist higher education institutions that know how to improve retention within the classroom while also assisting with identifying what strategies may work. Faculty served as the primary point of contact for the student while playing a vital role in student retention and attainment (Zerquera et al., 2016). Faculty perceptions gave directions to policy makers helping institutions to take the necessary steps to modify their existing policies to produce better outcomes in the future (Safraz et al., 2019). Faculty perceptions presented an opportunity for improving student retention. Shaw, Wu, Irwin, and Partizi (2016) indicated faculty perceptions influence student retention, and service quality was a determining factor in retaining students. Tinto's (2015) research shared perceptions of the quality and relevance of the curriculum reflect a complex interplay among a variety of issues including faculty teaching methods, perceived institutional quality, and student learning style preferences and values. Student retention intervention related to known factors have an impact on improving retention (Tinto 2015).

Higher educational institutions provided training student retention to faculty designed to assist with retaining students, and in maintaining appropriate retention rates. Bolliger and Martin (2018) noted student retention was important when effective student



retention strategies are implemented that are designed to help with improving retention.

Bolliger et al. (2019) indicated that faculty bridges the gap between the student and the higher educational institution. More research was needed on faculty perception addressing the reasons for selecting a course, and faculty perceptions of the strategies given to implement as presented to assist with sustaining students (Bolliger et al., 2019).

Faculty involvement has shown an impact on student retention. According to Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018), positive interactions between faculty and students have been known to increase the probability of student retention and student success. Research suggests the relationship be effective in improving student retention (Bolliger et al., 2019).

Most students who attend career-based-colleges are adult learners or students right out of high school looking to obtain an educational degree or certificate in a specific career (Plasman et al., 2019). The challenges faced by the non-traditional student tend to mirror some of the same challenges faced by traditional students. The challenges students faced during the transition in college as well as while in college influenced whether they remain in college or not to pursue a degree (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016).

According to Macalaster.edu (2018), student challenges varied in a multitude of areas inclusive of transitional issues, academics, home and family, and college life in general. Non-traditional students in career-based colleges faced similar challenges such as student work schedules, dependent care issues, life balance, family obligations, motivation, and college procedures (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016).

Institutional engagement and motivation created an opportunity for higher education institutions to identify ways to help students identify with the need to persist with attaining their degree. Tinto (2010) noted engagement influenced retention. More recently, Tinto (2017) noted institutions must identify ways to help students with self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-belonging.

**Self-Efficacy.** Students arrive at college with many expectations. According to Li and Wong (2019), students arrive with challenges associated with social integration, academic learning challenges, and motivational factors needed to ensure their success in the first year of college. Tinto (1975) model shared interaction between students and the academic and social programs at a university must become a part of a student's campus life.

Students have many needs, and if not met they are likely not to persist in college. According to Li and Wong (2019), financial and family issues can have an impact on why students will leave college. Additionally, students leave for medical reasons, transferring to another college, anxiety, and career indecisiveness (Haverila, 2020). If a student's needs are not addressed, they will not persist and will create retention problems for the school (Villano et al., 2018; Yu, 2015).

Tinto (2017) noted self-efficacy referred to how students refer to their ability to succeed. Students who have high levels of self-efficacy will be more engaged and motivated to succeed (Tinto, 2017). Students who do not have a greater sense of self-

efficacy will struggle in college and become discouraged easily and will discontinue college (Tinto, 2017).

**Self-Regulation.** Self-regulation required personal persistence. According to Kizilcec et al. (2017), students with a strong sense of self-regulation to manage and plan their learning environment have a greater chance of success than those who do not. In practice, self-regulation consisted of students working independently to complete the course work by setting goals and designing task strategies. Students who excel in self-regulated settings need little assistance from an instructor.

However, according to Wan et al. (2020), it was important for instructors to be a good example as students look for role models to have someone to identify with when creating their own learning goals in the process. Instructors used various techniques to help students identify ways to help with achieving their learning goals such as finding a means to communicate with the instructor or find a tool that will help them enhance their learning goals and experiences. Students in online settings are accustomed to finding ways to engage with instructors (Kizilcec et al., 2017). In normal settings, the lack of this engagement with instructors affected the personal learning objectives of a student (Kizilcec et al., 2017). Like Kizilcec et al. (2017), Wan et al. (2020) characterized self-regulation as an attribute possessed by individuals who are responsible for their learning objectives.

**Cognitive Load.** Cognitive load was related to how much an individual can mentally handle. Sepp et al. (2019) noted cognitive load is impacted when one or more

elements associated with working memory was lost. However, Sweller (2020) suggested cognitive load was associated with primary memory which was acquired automatically and secondary memory that was acquired during a limited time frame during the working memory process and was then stored too long-term memory. In contrast, Leppink (2017) noted self-regulation required a working memory component associated with cognitive load that sometimes individuals must identify with to decide what task to complete. In practice, instructors offered help with the cognitive load by offering options to students to help with solving a problem. According to Sepp et al. (2019), instructors who provided intermediate steps to learners in solving a problem without an end goal, noted students can find solutions through the exploration of other techniques compared to only having one way to solve a problem.

The cognitive load theory focused on the student. According to Sepp et al. (2019), the cognitive load theory addressed a learner's ability to complete a goal. However, according to van de Heiden et al. (2020), cognitive load associated with one task can have an impact on another task. For example, individuals perform one task at a time. Cognitive load influenced learning (van de Heiden et al., 2020). Like van de Heiden et al. (2020), Sellers (2018) suggested cognitive load was measured by learners being able to identify extraneous and intrinsic cognitive load. As shared, Seller (2018) noted learners sometimes overlooked physical instruction shared in a problem that was easier to find versus trying to process instructions shared in a split instruction. According to Sweller et al. (2019), extraneous cognitive load was not determined by the intrinsic complexity of the

information provided, but rather how the information was presented and what the learner was required to do by the instructional procedure. Unlike intrinsic cognitive load, it can be changed by changing the instructional procedures (Sweller et al., 2019).

### ***Student Support***

Student support was important and vital to the development of a student's ability to succeed in an educational environment (Haverila, 2020). Tinto's (2013) theory on student retention, acknowledged student departure and the support of student retention throughout higher education. Tinto's theory focused on the impact of academic involvement on a college-level learner's persistence on how the institution's involvement and student involvement can aid in reducing student retention issues (Tinto, 2013).

According to Haverila (2020), students functioned effectively within an environment. Academics and retention shared a common thread when addressing student persistence in choosing to remain in college or withdraw (Haverila, 2020). Research continued to share colleges and universities must provide support services that are designed to assist students with being retained, inclusive of faculty engagement, support services, and academic help (Haverila, 2020).

Institutions are the focal point of improving student retention. According to Kiser and Hammer (2016), shared it was the responsibility of institutions to promote programs effectively and successfully to ensure student engagement and participation with the faculty and administrators occurs. Higher education institutions utilized the faculty and student engagement processes related to improving student retention strategies.

**University-Based Support.** Student success is associated with retention and academics. Mah and Ifenthaler (2018) shared students entering college with many expectations and perceptions of what college life will be like, and how to meet academic requirements designed to help them succeed. Like Mah and Ifenthaler (2018), Cuseo (2007) noted student success was associated with student outcomes such as persistence, educational attainment, academic achievement, and student advancement.

Little research has been formed on the successes of retaining students. Colleges and universities attempted to make changes with the possibility of increasing retention; however, they continue to struggle (Kiser & Hammer, 2016). Many institutions continued to struggle with identifying how best to improve retention (Kiser & Hammer, 2016). According to Li and Wong (2019), student persistence (success) received much attention and continues to be a significant area of research within large and small colleges and universities.

Student success was enhanced when assessments are performed, and feedback was shared. Lo et al. (2016) research suggested student success was better enhanced when feedback was shared with faculty, and staff as well as students. Such feedback created an opportunity to identify early warning signs associated with dropouts and the need to implement intervention actions designed to help improve student retention (Aulck, et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2016). Aulck, et al. (2016) examined trends in student attrition while noting 30% of first-year students at higher educational institutions do not return. Aulck, et al. (2016) provided indicators to higher educational institutions those factors that were

likely to identify what students may drop out, and factors that influence student attrition. Like Aulck et al. (2016), Villano et al. (2018) introduced the use of early alarm systems designed to address indicators associated with student departure warning signs of not returning to school. Several universities have created programs designed to identify students at risk (Villano et al., 2018). There are numerous reasons why students leave college. According to Haverila (2020), students withdrew for many reasons; however, there was not just one reason that can be attached to why students do not return.

**Classroom Instructional Support.** Instructional support aimed to support the instructor. According to Ertesvag (2019), instructional support was provided to help instructors with engaging students in classroom instruction. This enhanced instruction, according to Ertesvag (2019), this instructional support added to student development in the learning process while encouraging students to participate.

Instructional support differed between traditional and nontraditional students. Panacci (2017) noted instructional needs for each group vary. Traditional student learning experiences included classroom instructional approaches inclusive of a lecture while adult learners termed as nontraditional students rely heavily on the experience and knowledge of the instructor facilitating the course (Panacci, 2017). Ertesvag (2019) shared instructional support aligns teacher-student interaction in the areas of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. However, Panacci (2017) noted there was no one size fits all classroom instructional support due to the diverse characteristics, needs, and experiences found amongst traditional and adult learners.

### ***Acoryn University Strategic Plan to Improve Student Retention***

Acoryn University-based support consisted of faculty-led student retention within the classroom requiring the faculty to identify ways to ensure students were continuously engaged in the course. The community service program required instructors to identify local businesses within the community which connected with their course. Instructors were required to bring in local speakers to share their experiences within the field of study related to the course being taught. Students were required to participate in this activity. Many student retention programs fueled the higher educational system (Chamely-Wilk et al., 2020). Many programs tended to focus on the contributions made by the involvement of faculty in the student retention process (Chamely-Wilk et al., 2020). Institutions are responsible for implementing effective University-based support student retention programs that successfully ensure students are engaged and participate while also ensuring they succeed in graduating (Kiser & Hammer, 2015). Colleges and universities utilized various university-based support programs inclusive of tutoring assistance.

At Acoryn University tutoring was provided to students based on a referral from the instructor was or if a student requested it. As a part of the university's university-based support programs, academic advisors monitored the students' performance and would reach out to a student(s) sharing their ability to receive tutoring if needed (Campus Director, personal communication, 2020). Tutoring assistance was provided to assist students needing help and according to Kiser & Hammer (2015), tutoring assistance provides help to students struggling within a subject.



Acoryn University's improved retention with (a) tutoring assistance, (b) community involvement exercises, (c) supplemental instructions, and (d) faculty-led retention monitoring (Campus Director, personal communication, Dec 2020). The university retention plan mirrored a one-size-fits-all design used to address the retention of students in all the campus programs. The implementation included providing instructors with the retention tools presented while also requiring instructors to maintain a certain percentage of students in the classroom. Instructors were required to refer students for tutoring while also suggesting students for tutoring when prevalent.

**Implementation and Outcomes.** Acoryn University current program began with students being flagged for the retention program whether being identified by the instructor or voluntarily added by the student. Early alerts are used to notify students of their struggles in a course to develop a plan of action.

Faculty ultimately were responsible for maintaining the retention of students by using the strategies provided. As shared previously, according to the Campus Director (2020), the current retention program was guided by the strategies provided; however, instructors also are required to ensure they maintain a reasonable retention level within their courses. The strategies utilized included tutoring, math labs, Smarthinking, and supplemental instruction.

### **Implications**

Student departure from college without attaining degree completion had been a major concern for years. Significant research has been conducted to address the

improvement of effective student retention strategies. Faculty perceptions offered viable and useful input to stakeholders, resulting in the ability to support institutions towards making positive modifications to existing policies that may produce stronger student retention results (Safraz et al., 2019). Researching faculty perceptions presented an opportunity to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

Based on the anticipated research findings, three of the four project genres may be viable. The evaluation report genre was only focused upon an evaluation study, which this study does not reflect, so this project genre was rejected outright. The remaining project options available included three project genres: 1) a curriculum plan, 2) a professional developmental/training curriculum and materials, and 3) a policy recommendation with detail.

The curriculum plan included a purpose, designate the level of learners, define the scope, and articulate the sequence of events. Further the curriculum plan included a description of the material, lessons in detail inclusive of objectives, activities, assessments, teacher notes, and evaluation plans. The details of the curriculum plan are provided, noting the minimum nine-week length of the curriculum plan. The findings from this study suggested a curriculum plan that outlines viable recommendations that are not only connected to the findings but are also related to the target audience in focus. The findings of this study suggested that an appropriate revision to the in-college programmatic course

curriculum may be a requirement and, as such, a curriculum plan may need to be implemented to support the revision of course curriculum. The attendees would be the Acoryn University faculty and leadership, towards enhancing the course curriculum with student retention tools and procedures. Alternatively, the results of the study suggested that the student support services may require revision, resulting in a curriculum plan that revised the resources available within the student support services areas as well as the potential revision to policies and procedures within the student support services. Depending upon the study findings, the curriculum plan may be a viable project genre.

A professional development/training curriculum and materials project should include a purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and a target audience. The project should include an outline as well as a timeline, activities, and notes. Materials included a slideshow presentation along with an assessment plan or evaluation plan. The project included a detailed hour-by-hour plan with a minimum of 3 full days of training. The findings from this study may suggest a professional development event such as a community of practice as founded by Wenger-Trayner (Johnson et al., 2019). An audience would be in a place that would be able to benefit from the training sessions, a curriculum, and materials that would be made available during a three-day professional development workshop. The findings from this study could create a community of social learning in landscapes such as blackboards that are asynchronous, allowing the engagement and sharing of skills designed to enhance and strengthen a study topic within a study site. Additionally, should the findings from the research suggest the most

appropriate project to be the professional development/training curriculum with associated materials, a minimum of three-day workshop would include a timeline, activities, trainer notes, an implementation plan, and an evaluation plan.

The policy recommendation includes the background of the existing policy/problem and a summary of analysis and findings. It also presents major evidence from both literature and research. An outline of recommendations may be provided that are connected to the evidence as it relates to the intended audience. The findings from this study may suggest a policy recommendation that outlines viable recommendations that are not only connected to the findings but are also related to the target audience in focus. The findings from this study could create an opportunity to create a document such as a policy recommendation in the length of 15 to 30 pages that will provide recommendations addressing the purpose of this study to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

The findings were based on qualitative analysis of the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty as regards what aspects of the current student retention programs require reconsideration and potential revision, with the specific focus being to develop a stronger understanding of student retention through the Acoryn University faculty's viewpoint. The goal of a proposed project genre was to strengthen the current student retention program based upon the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time

faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. An additional goal of the proposed project was to inform the Acoryn University leadership and associated stakeholders of the processes, procedures, and potential policies needed to address ways to improve student retention.

### **Summary**

Student retention issues and ineffective student retention strategies continue to impact higher educational institutions. Much research has been performed on student retention strategies and continues to be more of a challenge today than ever. The problem in this study was, in 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus for this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The conceptual framework undergirding this study was Tinto's (2013) theory on student retention, acknowledging student departure, and supporting student retention throughout higher education. Tinto's theory focuses on the impact of academic involvement on a college-level learner's persistence on how the institution's involvement and student involvement can aid in reducing student retention issues (Tinto, 2013). The literature review of peer-reviewed

articles covered topics inclusive of career-based colleges, student retention, faculty perceptions, and student retention strategies, and student success. The research questions presented address what the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies were implemented at Acoryn University, what are full-time faculty and part-time faculty perceptions why students are leaving Acoryn University, and what are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

Section 1 introduced the local problem rationale, definition of terms, the significance of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, the literature review, the review of the broader problem, and limitations. Section 2 outlined the methodology inclusive of the qualitative design and approach used, participant criteria, data collection, data analysis procedures, limitations found during the study process, and data analysis results. Section 3 presented a brief description of the final project study inclusive of a rationale, project genre review of literature, project description, project evaluation plan, and project implications. Section 4 was the reflections and conclusions addressing the project strengths and limitations, recommended alternative approaches, scholarship, project development, and leadership and change, reflections on the importance of the work, implications, applications, and directions for future research, and a conclusion.

## Section 2: The Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program at Acoryn University are falling short and why students are leaving the university. In this section, I describe the research design and how it was derived from the problem and guiding RQs. The section includes information on the participants and the steps that I followed to gain participant access and steps that I followed to protect their rights. I also discuss the data collection and analysis process.

### **Research Design and Approach**

In 2008, faculty at Acoryn University implemented a set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the university's retention rate. The problem was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short. I created the RQs based on the purpose statement to bring an understanding of the study (see Merriam, 2009). The RQs for this study were

RQ1. What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University, and

RQ2. What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University.

The RQs were informed by the literature and were developed to provide the insights necessary to address the identified problem.

Qualitative research was consistent with this study's focus on faculty perceptions of the student retention strategies used at Acoryn University. For example, Mertes and Jankoviak (2016) noted that faculty perceptions play a major role in student retention and the retainment process. Like Mertes and Jankoviak, Gill (2016) addressed issues with poor retention of students in higher education and the use of ineffective strategies. As I discussed, a basic qualitative design was appropriate for exploring the perceptions of participants who experienced the phenomenon and could share those experiences.

### **Description of Qualitative Research Design**

Basic qualitative researchers are motivated by an interest in a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). I chose a basic qualitative research design for this study based on the practice problem, which is that, starting in 2008, the faculty of Acoryn University implemented a set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate. Despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline (see Appendix E). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is appropriate when the variables are unknown to the researcher and there is a need to explore the topic more fully. Like Creswell (2012), Lodico et al. (2010) noted that qualitative researchers focus on a social phenomenon by giving voice to the perceptions of participants.



### ***Basic Qualitative Research***

By using a basic qualitative research design, researchers can better understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). The basic qualitative research design has been used in many disciplines and is the most common form of qualitative education research (Merriam, 2009). With basic qualitative research designs, data are collected through interviews, observations, and relevant documents deemed useful to the research (Merriam, 2009). The primary goal of a basic qualitative research study is to uncover or interpret the experiences of participants with a particular phenomenon (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). I conducted this project study to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program were ineffective in improving student retention at Acoryn University and why students are leaving Acoryn University.

In contrast, narrative researchers study one or two individuals by collecting and analyzing the individuals' stories and then reporting the individuals' experiences in chronological order (Creswell, 2007). Narrative research did not fit well with this study's RQs because I was not attempting to collect stories from one or two individuals. Phenomenological researchers examine individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences of a phenomenon to a single description (Creswell, 2007). This design does not have a focus on process or strategy, both of which are of interest when addressing retention; as such, a phenomenological design would not be helpful in answering the RQs.

Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation of a process shaped by a larger number of participants (Creswell, 2007).

Grounded theory researchers hold that theories should be grounded in data from the field (Creswell, 2007). This was a project study, and I was not attempting to create a theory; therefore, a grounded theory design would not have been helpful in answering my RQs.

Ethnographers focus on an entire group (Creswell, 2007). They seek to describe and interpret shared behaviors, beliefs, and language among a cultural group (Creswell, 2007).

Because this study was not focused on a cultural group, it was not an appropriate method to answer the RQs. Qualitative research was consistent with this study's focus on faculty perceptions of the student retention strategies used at Acoryn University.

### **Justification for Research Design**

The basic qualitative methodology fits this study well for many reasons. First, given the exploratory nature of the study's examination of faculty perceptions related to the student retention strategy effectiveness and why students are leaving Acoryn University, a qualitative methodology approach was appropriate as qualitative research is commonly implemented to examine such themes (Creswell, 2017). Second, Meriam (2009) shared that basic qualitative research was found throughout many disciplines and was used only in education. Third, the focus on faculty interviews as the single source of data aligns with a basic qualitative approach rather than a case study, whereby multiple sources of data are analyzed within a bounded context or case (Creswell, 2017).

The design inquiry methodology used should align to address the research questions.

The design of inquiry included in-depth data collection processes inclusive of in-depth interviews, documents, and observations (Creswell, 2012) that were used to collect the data needed for the study. In this type of qualitative design, a with-in state study site was used (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I used a with-in study site. Because in-depth interviews were used with multiple participants, this design of inquiry fits well with this basic qualitative design to answer the research questions in this study.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of 12-16 faculty across the various disciplines taught at Acoryn University as well as those teaching in general education ideally with a 50/50 split on full-time and part-time faculty. This allowed for more breadth of perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2012). Like Creswell (2017), Merriam (2009) shared that purposeful sampling requires determining the selection criteria in choosing individuals to be studied. For this basic qualitative study, the participants were selected based on certain criteria. For the participant pool criteria, the participants were required to be current faculty members working at the study site as full-time faculty or part-time faculty member with at least one year of teaching experience at the study site. This was important as this give some participant viability whereby the participant pool would include participants who are familiar with the study site, who have used the student retention strategies, and who are familiar with the current student retention strategies.

The full-time and part-time faculty were selected from general education courses such as math, English, written communication, oral communication, as well as technical

and specialized courses that include medical and business administration disciplines inclusive of business management, accounting, medical assistance, and information technology. This was important as it will allow the researcher to attain different perspectives from the different disciplines. Also, this was important because participants tended to be selected by researchers because of different variables (Lodico et al., 2010).

Creswell (2017) noted that purposely selected participants help with the understanding of the problem and the answering of the research questions, wherein shared purposeful sampling was used when the participants belong to a common group. Creswell (2017) further noted that purposefully selected participants supported the understanding of the problem and the answering of the research questions, reflecting that researchers implement purposeful sampling when the researcher intentionally select individuals and sites to understand a phenomenon, further noting that homogeneous sampling was a purposeful sampling strategy utilized when the researcher purposefully samples individuals or a site based on the individuals found within a membership setting.

### **Justification for the Number of Participants**

For sampling purposes, the intent of this study was to describe in-depth the perceptions of the participants. The decision to select six to eight full-time and six to eight part-time faculty created an opportunity to obtain in-depth responses to the interview questions intended to address the research questions. Merriam (2009) stated that specifying a minimal size created the opportunity to obtain reasonable coverage given the purpose of the study. With consideration towards saturation, the researcher must

determine when saturation was reached through the participant interview process. For this study, saturation was reached when it was determined that adding additional participants would not provide additional insights into the topic (Lodico et al., 2010). The researcher determined such saturation during the analysis phase, reflecting that new data reflects a similarity to data already collected and analyzed. Once data began to appear redundant, saturation becomes obvious at that point (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Means of Gaining Access to the Participants**

The university president was contacted and met with the researcher to discuss the University IRB process. According to the university president, there was no formal IRB process in place. The university president stated they would follow Walden University process of approval whereby the researcher will obtain approval from Acoryn University in the form of a letter from the university president and then to the completion of an application with Walden University IRB for approval to proceed with the research. Research ethics must be followed before the researcher was given access to the participants. When conducting research, the Internal Review Board (IRB) at a college or university must review the researcher's proposal before being approved to conduct research on the research site (Lodico et al., 2010). Once approval from Walden University's and Acoryn University's was granted, the gatekeeper would be the president's designee who has access to the participants through university e-mail and telephone and who may be able to provide a list of potential participants for the study who meet the participant criteria.

At Acoryn University, the designated gatekeeper was the president's designee from the university. Gatekeepers are individuals who have official or unofficial roles in managing access to individuals at a site (Lodico et al., 2010). To gain access to the participants, accepted procedures must be followed. According to Lodico et al. (2010), before data can be collected, the researcher must identify how to gain access to the participants. In general, this included gaining permission to conduct observations or interviews while also developing a relationship with a person the research can trust. The gatekeeper provided the names and contact information of potential participants only. The gatekeeper functioned as the study gatekeeper, fulfilling the obligation to make available a list of potential participants that are specifically based upon study participant pool criteria. The gatekeeper did not have the opportunity to review raw data nor be involved in the recruitment or data collection process. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher in developing a list of full-time faculty and part-time faculty who meet the parameters of the study's participant pool that meet the criteria that includes the participants name, email address, job role, job title, number of years employed at the research site, if employed full-time or part-time, and the disciplines they teach.

The researcher invited participants to participate in the study via e-mail (See Appendix C). The participants were required to respond to an e-mail indicating their choice to participate in the study. The participants were sent a confidential e-mail requesting their participation (See Appendix C) and an informed consent form. The letter of invitation shared the length of commitment needed for the interviews, and a reminder

their participation was completely voluntary and would have an option to cease the interview at any moment.

Semistructured interviews were offered via Zoom video conferencing or face-to-face in a private area at the study site in the faculty's office or a private conference room chosen by the participant. The researcher would be the only one to know the interviewee's identity. The participants were allowed to decide if they prefer to conduct the interview on campus or via Zoom video conferencing. If Zoom video conferencing was used, the interview was recorded within the Zoom video conferencing session and the participants would have their choice of location and would therefore determine the level of privacy with which they are comfortable within their chosen setting. The participants were given an opportunity to set up an interview time to participate in the study face-to-face on-site or via Zoom video conferencing.

### **Methods of Establishing a Working Relationship With the Participants**

Lodico et al. (2010) shared researchers must identify how to build trust and create a line of communication with participants throughout the study and establish credibility so participants will feel comfortable communicating with them to share their experiences. Before the beginning an interview with the participant, a simple one-sentence explanation of the study was shared with the participant, the researcher would listen and show a deep concern for the participants' feelings in what they say or do during the interview, the researcher showed up when required for the interview, the researcher wrote notes down on each visit, and the researcher placed the participant first in all settings (Lodico et al.,

2010). Additionally, the researcher listened tentatively to reflect that the researcher was genuinely interested in what the participant communicates throughout the interview experience.

Ethical conduct by the researcher was imperative. According to Creswell (2017), researchers should respect the participant, and not use the research to benefit anyone participating in the study, including the researcher. For this study, within the informed consent the participants were provided a statement sharing the ethical conduct requirement while participating in the study.

### **Measures for Protecting the Participants**

For this basic qualitative research, the researcher must understand the importance of doing everything possible to have measures in place that address the protection of the participant's rights, including confidentiality, informed consent, and the protection from harm.

#### ***Confidentiality***

Confidentiality was of the utmost importance. To protect the participant's confidentiality, the interview was conducted via Zoom video conferencing or face-to-face in a private area and the researcher will be the only one to know the interviewee's identity. An alias was assigned to each participant and a folder will be created and tagged with the alias assigned. During data collection, the participant's name and identity was not recorded; however, the data collection was not 100% anonymous due to the fact I would see the participants; however, I maintained an alias for each participant to maintain the



confidentiality of their identity. The participant proper names and aligned alias list were maintained separately from the data sets and remained confidential and secure in a separate digital thumb drive that will be secured within a locked file cabinet maintained in my home office. All transcripts were revised to reflect each participant's alias. The participants were allowed to decide if they prefer to perform the interview on campus or via Zoom video conferencing. If Zoom video conferencing was used, the interview was recorded within the Zoom video conferencing session and the participants had their choice of location and determined the level of privacy with which they are comfortable within their chosen setting. The interview recordings were downloaded from my laptop and saved to my laptop in a secured file and backed up to a secured flash drive that will be stored in a separate location.

### ***Informed Consent***

Ethics help safeguard and protect the rights of participants. This protection generally comes in the form of obtaining informed consent. For this study, from the list of potential participants meeting the required criteria an informed consent form was sent to potential participants explaining their rights, confidentiality requirements, protection from harm, and the need to sign and return the form to be included as a participant in the study and respond to me with an "I consent" via the email received. For this study, the participants were required to sign the informed consent form once they agreed to be a participant and were required to return the signed informed consent form. This was important because the interview cannot occur until the informed consent was documented

and received by the researcher and will not be considered credible if the participant's consent was not documented.

### ***Protection From Harm***

Protecting the participants' rights in any research was of utmost importance as it was the responsibility of the researcher. For this study, the participants were identified with an alias assigned to the participant by the researcher. The participants' alias was labeled as follows: (a) Acoryn Faculty FT or Acoryn Faculty PT with the number 1-16 based on the order they are interviewed. The researcher uses a neutral and convenient location suitable to the participant and that would limit the threat of any third-party interference. The participants were advised of any risk associated with their participation in the study and will be given instructions of how they will be protected based on the information shared in the informed consent form that will be e-mailed to each participant who agrees to participate in the study. Currently, I did not foresee risks associated with participation in this study; however, a designated counselor would be available to each participant in case the interview brings forward information that may be distressing to the participant.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research was implemented to examine issues and concepts that are not already defined by specific variables, and there was a need to explore the topic more fully. Procedurally, the data collection occurred through a clearly articulated methodological progression. Upon receipt of the potential participant pool list, I sent an email invitation to

participate in this study (See Appendix C). The data collected would come from face-to-face interviews or Zoom video conferencing with the participants.

For both methods of recording the participant interview, face to face interview or Zoom video conference interview, approval to record the interview was requested from the participant before the interview began and an assurance of participant response occurred, while restating the intent to record the interview after the interview began and attaining the participant's approval to record. Because this was a qualitative study, the use of face-to-face interviews or video conferencing coincided with this type of study. Semistructured qualitative interviews were appropriate for this study because it brought together a comprehensive understanding to the study and developed a depth of understanding of a phenomenon focusing on *what* and *how* related to the purpose of this study.

### **Semistructured Interview Format**

Like Merriam (2009), Thumburmung et al. (2016) communicated that semistructured interviews have the potential to share multiple participant viewpoints. A quantitative questionnaire would not have provided the depth and breadth of information necessary to address the research questions for this qualitative study. Additionally, with semistructured interviews, there was the potential to change the order of the questions or vary the wording based on the participant's response (Lodico et al., 2010), as well as considerations related to follow-up questions for purposes of clarity and detail.

The interview was an important data collection instrument allowing the researcher to gain one-on-one experiences from participants. For this study, the data collection instrument was via face-to-face interviews or Zoom video conferencing with the participants chosen for the study giving them the ability to choose which method works for them and who meet the participant criteria. The face-to-face interviews or Zoom video conference interviews were scheduled for 120 minute periods, and the 11 interview questions were open-ended and semistructured, as reflected through the Interview Protocols and Interview Questions document (See Appendix B).

The face-to-face interview or Zoom video conferencing interview was designated to engage the participants in the opportunity to share their experience verbally while allowing the researcher the ability to capture the participant's complete thoughts when answering the questions while also allowing the opportunity for the natural flow of an interview process conversation, through the addition of probing questions based upon the participant's initial responses, to focus upon a depth of engagement and understanding through the interview process. The semistructured interview process was important to this type of study because it offered flexibility associated with the interview questions follow-up understanding and enhancement, as semistructured interview questions are asked while also allowing the space for probing questions based on the participant's first responses (Thumburmung et al., 2016).

## **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol provided a structure for my data collection process assuring the alignment between the purpose, research questions, and interview. For this study, an interview protocol was developed by the researcher for use during data collection, consisting of written directions denoting the specific interview questions that were asked of all participants (See Appendix B). Utilizing the interview protocol, the participants read the interview script (See Appendix B). The use of an interview protocol allowed the researcher to share the interview process and what to expect before beginning the interview.

The in-depth one-on-one interviews were face-to-face or via Zoom video conferencing with the participant in a private setting at the university. The semistructured interview questions were developed applying basic qualitative research principles and focused on the purpose of the study. Once the participant was ready, the participant was again informed they would be recorded, and the researcher would proceed with the interview. This was important because the researcher must share with the participant they are being recorded and to ensure the participant understands what was happening every step of the process (Lodico et al., 2010).

For this study, before asking the first interview question, an icebreaker would be used to help relax the participant. After the interview began, the interview questions were asked of the participant according to each research question (See Appendix B).

### **Alignment of Interview and Research Questions**

According to Creswell (2012), the researcher will choose a data collection instrument that will allow the researcher to examine the participant's in-depth experiences. For this study, the source of the data collection instrument was researcher produced, consisting of 11 open-ended interview questions that aligned with the research questions. It was important to ensure proper interview questions were asked that would capture the data needed to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The data collection instrument for this study was open-ended semistructured interview questions scheduled for approximately 120 minutes based upon the interview's natural progression (See Appendix B).

Based on Merriam's (2009) thoughts about how interview questions should be developed, the 11 open-ended interview questions were developed from the research question and worded in a way to extract the data needed to answer the research question. For this study, each interview question was created from the research question using words embedded within the research question. Research questions 1.0 and 2.0 were used as a guide to develop each of the 11 open-ended interview questions. Table 5 reflects RQ1 with a critical analysis and alignment explanation of interview questions reflecting the sufficiency of the data collection instrument.

RQ1

**Table 5***Alignment of RQ1 and Interview Questions*

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What can you tell me about the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?</li> <li>2) What are your perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies?</li> <li>3) In your view, what are the strengths of the current formal student retention strategies?</li> <li>4) In your view, what are the weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies?</li> <li>5) In your view, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies utilized have helped improve retention at the university?</li> <li>6) In your opinion which of the formal student retention strategies are most effective?</li> </ol>

The first research question was, What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? This question was created using the problem identified within the study, and the need to ensure it addressed the topic of the study first-hand. This question was designed to begin the open discussion with the participants and to help create interview questions centered on the problem. Open-ended

interview questions were created beginning with *what*. This process was important to this type of study because qualitative research questions ask *what* and *how* questions that are designed to create discussion during a semistructured interview (Merriam, 2009). After analyzing RQ1, interview question number one was developed based upon the study's research question one. To ensure alignment, the researcher created interview question number one in a manner to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and would allow the participants the opportunity to share their opinion. Interview question number two was developed based upon the study's RQ1, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. To ensure alignment, interview question number two was created to prompt responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their opinion. Interview question number three was developed based upon the study's RQ1, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. To ensure alignment, interview question number three was added to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their view and thoughts to help give quality to the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Interview question number four was developed based upon the study's RQ1, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. To ensure alignment, interview question number 4 was added to follow interview question number four to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their opinion. This interview question was also added too to obtain more quality data



to help answer research question number 1.0. Interview question number five was developed based upon the study's RQ1, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. To ensure alignment, interview question number five was created to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants the opportunity to share their opinion to help gather additional quality data needed to answer the research question number 1.0. Interview question number six was developed based upon the study's RQ1, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. To ensure alignment, interview question number six was created to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their opinion. This question was added to obtain additional knowledge from the participants that would add more quality data.

In summary, the semistructured interview questions are open-ended questions that include some follow-up questions that may lead to additional questions during the interview process. Additionally, Merriam (2009) noted, researchers select interview questions that will stimulate responses from the interviewee. This was important to this process because if the right interview questions are not used, the researcher may not get the data needed to bring insights to the study while also not getting the answers needed to answer the research questions. Table 6 reflects RQ2 with a critical analysis and alignment explanation of Interview Questions reflecting the sufficiency of the data collection instrument.

RQ2

**Table 6***Alignment of RQ2 and Interview Questions*

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?	1) What role do you play in helping retain students? 2) In your opinion, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies in place do you think students are benefiting from? 3) Can you suggest some ways that the university can improve its current retention strategies? 4) Are you aware of any other strategies used by your peers that seem to improve retention in their courses? 4a) Can you describe these to me? 4b) How could these strategies be utilized in other courses to improve the retention efforts at Acoryn University? 5) Can you share what strategies you are using that are not in the institutional playbook per se, but are a part of your personal teaching practice to help improve retention at Acoryn University?

After a critical analysis and alignment of the first research question and interview questions, a second research question was added to address potential ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The second research question was: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? This question was added after at first only using one research question and then identifying the need to add a second question that aligned with the purpose of the study.

The semistructured interview questions 1-5 for RQ2 were developed based upon the study's research question, ensuring alignment with the problem statement and purpose of the study. The open-ended interview questions were created beginning with *what*. This process was important too to this type of study because qualitative research questions ask *what* and *how* questions that are designed to create discussion during a semistructured interview. To ensure alignment, interview question number 1 was created to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their experience as a faculty member. This question was added to additional data to help answer the RQ2. To ensure alignment with RQ2, interview question number two was developed to obtain responses from the participant that would add more quality data to help ensure RQ2 was answered. Interview questions number 3 was developed to obtain responses from the participant that would answer the research question and to allow the participants to share their opinion. This value interview question was created from the research question to gather additional quality data to help answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). Interview question number 4 was created using probing questions designed to gather additional data as a follow-up from an interview question already asked (Merriam, 2009). Probing was a strategy used to obtain additional information during an interview (Lodico et al., 2010). Creswell (2017) shared probes are sub-questions under each question that may be used by the researcher to solicit more information and to use to clarify or expand on ideas expressed by the participant. For this study, this probing method will be used to explore the content in a more in-depth manner

requiring the participant to explain their answers in a more detailed manner for clarification purposes. After each question, the researcher will ask the interviewee to explain the answer in a more detailed or clarifying manner. This was important because the researcher may need the participant to explain their comments in a more detailed manner for clarification which was indicated during the interview process, and it will help with the collection of additional data to help ensure the alignment with the RQ2 with identifying ways to improve retention. Interview question number 5 was developed from RQ2 to add additional quality data to ensure RQ2 was answered.

### **Sufficiency of Data Collection Instrument**

Data was collected where participants are located and where shared experiences exist (Creswell, 2012). The data collection instrument for this study was the open-ended semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to examine the participant's experiences and their perceptions attached to the research questions. The data for this project study was aligned with two research questions.

### **Process for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data**

In review, I generated the data from face-to-face interviews via Zoom video conferencing. I developed an informed consent form that consisted of 11 interview questions (See Appendix B). I conducted face-to-face, individual interviews with 13 participants that were recorded with their permission and transcribed into a note file. I assigned a file title related to the participant pseudonym and the date of the interview. I

then created a backup of the participant interview audio file on a flash drive that remains in my possession or in a locked file cabinet.

The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. This led me to gathering the data via Zoom video conferencing interviews of the study's six part-time faculty participants, and seven part-time faculty participants. After completing the coding process, I noted five major codes which I used to create five themes. Through hand coding, I highlighted keywords to identify words and phrases used by the participants which included: 1) engage, 2) flexibility 3) financial aid, 4) scholarships, 5) advising, 6) one on one, 7) awareness, 8) technology, 9) connections, 10) relationships, 11) social activities, 12) alerts, and 13) emails. The themes that emerged from the study's research questions and data analysis were: 1) Student Awareness, 2) Engagement, 3) Social Interaction, 4) Communication, and 5) Resources. The themes aligned with my data analysis of the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants. Both the codes and themes identified linked directly to the conceptual framework on student retention as they presented strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants transcripts were color-coded and the Zoom video conference individual participant interviews were recorded and saved to my password protected laptop and to jump drive that stays in my possession or in locked file cabinet. The overarching results of the study revealed that the six-part-time and seven full-

time participants in this study responded with discomfoting statements sharing their concerns of the current formal student retentions strategies and possible ways to improve student awareness at the university about the resources available to students to help retain them in a course. The part-time and full-time instructors expressed their need for information that would inform them and improve their ability to engage their students to help retain them as well as allow them to approach administration for assistance.

### ***Data Generation***

I contacted the campus president at Acoryn University, and she granted me a letter of approval from the institution. With this letter, I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (no. 02-15-22-0553325). The gatekeeper indicated that he had access to employee records and contact information at the university. I emailed the gatekeeper the criteria for the potential participant group and asked for the results to be sent to me via email. The resulting information allowed me to conduct my study with participants who met the selection criteria.

In accordance with the Walden University IRB application material, I emailed an invitation to participate in the study to the potential participants who fit the study participation criteria. The initial email to the potential participant pool included a letter providing an overview of the purpose of the study. I included my email through which the potential participants could contact me if a potential participant was interested in the study and wanted to learn more about the study. The consent form was also attached, asking the potential participants to reply "I consent" to the original email invitation, to indicate their

participation interest. I sent two requests for participation, over a two-month period, due to many faculty being unavailable for at least two weeks at the beginning of the participant solicitation period.

### ***Data Gathering***

I did not give the participants the option to meet in person for the initial interview session but informed each participant that the interview would be held via Zoom video conferencing. I also did not offer potential participants an option to telephone me in order to express an interest in the study due to the desire for written documentation of each participant's consent to be a part of the study.

### ***Data Recording***

I used the Zoom video conferencing application to interface with each participant as well as to record all interviews. During each interview, the participants transcripts were created using the Zoom video conferencing transcription feature. Once the interview was over, the transcription was saved to a flash drive that continuously remained in my possession or was securely protected by placement in a locked file cabinet. The recording of each participant was then saved into a note file on my password-protected laptop. The Zoom video conferencing software had transcription capabilities that allowed the recording of the participants words to speed up or slow down according to the participants pace. I followed the interview protocol and interview questions (See Appendix B) for each interview.

Once the participant interview audio files were uploaded to my password-protected laptop. I assigned a file title related to the participant pseudonym and the date of the interview. I then created a backup of the participant interview audio file on a flash drive that remains in my possession or in a locked file cabinet. A backup of the audio recordings was downloaded onto a flash drive solely dedicated to my study that remains in my possession or in a locked file cabinet. I stored the password-protected laptop, the flash drive participant audio interview files, and all paper documentation were stored at my house in a locked file cabinet of which only I have access.

The study's two research questions guided my development of open-ended research questions. The participant responses to the interview questions assisted with the development of themes as the data was analyzed during and after the data collection phase. I implemented the triangulation method (Lodico et al., 2010) throughout the data gathering and recording phase. The method allowed me to identify relevant data that was worthy of analysis.

### **Means of Tracking the Data and Preliminary Understandings**

The tracking of data remains important in any research. For this study, the data was collected by the researcher from each participant and will be organized in individual digital participant folders on my security protected laptop. Additionally, the recorded data was maintained on a separate flash drive to be kept in a secure location to ensure the security of the data while also maintaining it within the audio recorded option within Zoom video conferencing or Voice Recorder & Audio Editor App. The participant names



and alias were maintained separately from the recorded data to prevent the exposure of their identity. During data collection, the participant's name and identity were not recorded; however, the data collection was not 100% anonymous due to the fact I will see the participants; however, I maintained an alias for each participant to maintain the confidentiality of their identity. The participant proper names and aligned alias list were maintained separately from the data sets and remained confidential and secure in a separate digital thumb drive that was secured within a locked file cabinet maintained in my home office. All transcripts were revised to reflect each participant's alias. A reflective journal was used during the research to document the thoughts and feelings during the research process as this will allow the researcher to keep track of other participant responses for accuracy following their interview.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

To gain access to the participants, accepted procedures were followed. According to Lodico et al. (2010), before data can be collected, the researcher must identify how to gain access to the participants. For this study, the gatekeeper was the president's designee. Because the research site does not have an Internal Review Board, the university President provided a written letter of approval allowing the use of the university as my study site, upon approval by Walden University's Internal Review Board. The gatekeeper president's designee assisted with identifying a list of participants in a participant pool that met the specified criterion that included the participant's name, e-mail address, job role, job title,

number of years employed at the research site, if employed full-time or part-time, and the disciplines they teach.

Once the participants were identified, the participants were invited via email by the researcher to participate in the study (See Appendix C). The researcher emailed an informed consent form to the participants that would be signed and returned by the participants. This form informed them of the nature of the study and the participants were given an opportunity to set up an interview time to participate in the study face-to-face on-site, or if deemed necessary, via a Zoom video conference call. Because this was a qualitative study, this process ensured the protection and confidentiality of the participant.

### **Role of the Researcher**

First, my role as the researcher will be to implement the study ethically. The project study took place at a campus I have knowledge of but have never been on the study site campus, worked on the study site campus, or been associated with persons on the study site campus. When communicating with the study site President, I communicated to the university President I did have contact with an Acoryn department chair mainly to inquire about a position at the study site. I also shared that I have a personal relationship with one potential participant. I assured the university President if the contact and personal relationship might impact this study, the participants would be removed from the potential participant pool inviting participants in the study. Because I do not have any past/current professional roles at the study site, my ability to collect the data will not be affected in any manner.

My experience with the related topic was reflected through my prior experience teaching in higher education; this was disclosed to the study site university President verbally during my meeting with her in May 2021 during which time the topic of conversation was to discuss the IRB process to obtain approval to implement Acoryn University as the study site

To further minimize any personal bias, and to add credibility to this study (Lodico et al., 2010), the researcher utilized member checking whereby the participant was allowed to check the transcribed data and any findings for accuracy (Creswell, 2012) following the interview. This was important to this study as any potential bias or perceived experiences shared by the researcher can potentially influence the data analysis phase of this study and, as such, it was important to lessen the potential impact of the researcher's experiences or bias upon the participant's communicated information and associated thoughts throughout the interview process.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis requires time, and the use of a process designed to assist in organizing data collected by various means (Cayr & Saritas, 2017). According to Creswell (2012), the constant comparative method consists of moving back and forward between data collection and analysis.

### **Procedures for Analyzing the Collected Data**

During the analysis and interpretation phase, the researcher used the Microsoft Word feature (Dictate/Transcribe) feature to transcribe the Zoom video conferencing

sessions and the Voice Recorder & Audio Editor transcription feature on my smart phone to transcribe the face-to-face semistructured interviews of which has been tested. The analysis occurred after the interviews were complete, and the transcriptions were manually coded. The information was edited for redundancy and organized in manner to help with understanding the data (Merriam, 2009).

After each interview, I reviewed my researcher journal notes taken to look for patterns, any relationships, themes, and discrepant concerns and compiled this in a Word document as part of the data collection process. After addressing any concerns found within the notes, I listened to each interview recording and will create a table to begin the hand-coding process. Using the transcribed data from the interviews, open coding was used to support the identification of themes. The open coding process was a manual coding process done by hand that was used to transcribe the data from the interviews and to also help identify themes. The open coding process was important because the data collected needed to be analyzed to identify themes within the data collected from the participants. Without this process, the researcher would not know if the data collected answers the research questions. The recordings were listened to three-times while also utilizing a table to help with the coding process. During the manual coding process, I used Clark and Veale's (2018) sorting methodology to help identify similarities, frequency of words, sequential order, and differences. This process consisted of reviewing the data, stated within each participant's interview, for common words, sentences, and phrases to

help identify similarities and differences as well. Highlighters were used during this process and within the journal.

### ***Transcription of Recordings***

Before meeting with the participants, I assigned each participant an alias, and used the recorder within Zoom video conferencing record myself and the participant. The alias ensured the identity of the participant was kept confidential. The recorded data was maintained on a separate flash drive kept in a secure location to ensure the security of the data while also maintaining it within the audio recorded option within Zoom video conferencing. The participant names and alias were maintained separately from the recorded data to prevent the exposure of their identity. This step allowed for the checking for any problems that could occur during the recording of the interview. The recorded interviews were transcribed within 7 days of their occurrence. Once transcribed, the researcher played back the recording and highlighted it in real-time during the recording. Upon the completion of the data transcription, member checking was implemented to offer the participants the opportunity to review the results of the transcription for accuracy and dependability (See Appendix B). Once the participant corrected, clarified, or adjusted the transcription and returned the document, the researcher began the data analysis coding process.

### ***Coding***

According to Creswell (2012), coding begins with dividing the text into segments allowing the analysis of the data for broad themes and patterns. During the coding of the

data, the researcher used two methods for coding the data: open coding utilizing manual coding and Atlas.ti software. The first method of coding was open coding whereby manual coding was used to transcribe the data from the interviews and to also help identify themes. Once an interview session was done, my notes were reviewed for patterns and themes as well. The recordings were listened to three-times while also utilizing a table to help with the coding process. During the coding process I used Clark and Veale's (2018) sorting methodology to help identify similarities, frequency of words, sequential order, and differences. This process consisted of reviewing the data, stated within each participant's interview, for common words, sentences, and phrases to help identify similarities and differences as well. Highlighters were used during this process and within the journal. The second method of coding was with the use of Atlas.ti software to assist with the coding of the transcribed data. Atlas.ti software was a qualitative data analysis tool designed to assist the researcher with acquiring an in-depth examination of the data collected. This software was chosen by the researcher after testing the trial version on a test run and realizing the ease in the use of the software in producing an in-depth examination of the data. The use of the Atlas.ti software was important because the data collected was analyzed to identify themes within the data collected from the participants. The data analysis process was important to this study as it helped make sense of the data (Merriam, 2009). Atals.ti allowed me to acquire an accurate and in-depth search within the transcribed data. After the transcription process, I utilized the word search feature within Atlas.ti to help identify keywords and to help with the organization of the data and ideas

as I progress through the various stages within the project study (Renfro, 2017). Each interview was reviewed three times. This second and third review consisted of reviewing the keywords identified against the initial data to gain a general perception of the data collected (Creswell, 2012). The keywords were used to identify keywords within the context that lead to the development of the major codes that lead to the final themes (Merriam, 2009). To determine themes within the data to identify commonality and differences from one participant to the next, I employed the thematic analysis method to code the data by organizing the data related to each code per interview while checking for commonality and differences. This process was employed with the data from each interview. The interview data was analyzed independently for each participant whereby the focus was to identify a theme within the context to create a clear definition and name for each theme.

### **Evidence of Quality**

According to Creswell (2017), validating findings included determining a manner by which accuracy or credibility can be assured through the various stages. The goal was to ensure methods are used to ensure the enhanced credibility of this study. To enhance quality, accuracy, and credibility triangulation and member checking was utilized.

### ***Member Checking***

In this project study, member checking was used to maintain accuracy and credibility whereby the participants were allowed, following an interview, to read over their transcripts about the accuracy of the report commenting on the interpretation and

completeness of the data (Merriam, 2009). This process occurred after the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. For this study, the researcher sent the participant a secured copy of their transcript to review for accuracy and to ensure validity of the data (See Appendix B). The use of member checking was important to this study to ensure the comments shared by the participants reflect what they stated. This procedure was also used to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data collected from the participant. Upon completion of member checking, the transcripts were saved to my password protected laptop and a jump drive that remains in my possession. I identified codes from the research to help me classify the major themes from the transcripts (Levitt et al., 2018). I highlighted keywords that appeared in the data to develop a thematic plan for creating the analysis. I continued to review transcripts to strengthen and refine the overall study produced by the analysis.

### ***Procedures for Minimizing Potential Researcher Bias***

Recognizing researcher bias, for this study during the data collection process, data analysis, and finding process, the researcher recognized how potential bias may color the lens of the information to be shared by the participants that may impact this study. For this study, to lessen the researcher's personal level of bias and the impact associated with my knowledge of the study site, and prior experiences, the researcher intended to not have interviews with any known participants by assigning each participant an alias where their identity will not be known during the data collection and data analysis process. This was



important because any biases or experiences shared by the researcher can potentially influence the participant's thoughts.

### **Treatment of Discrepant Cases**

In research, conflicting information does occur. According to Lodico et al. (2010), if sources provide conflicting information, the researcher should discuss the conflict and potential understandings associated with reason for the conflicting information provided. For this study, during the analysis of the data, the researcher cross checked the responses from the participants by reviewing their comments against the comments of other participants, and in the event a discrepant case was identified, the information was placed in a separate category and would be used to help compare any different themes and perspectives from other participants. Additionally, any information shared outside of the scope of the study was included as well. Identifying discrepant cases helped to ensure they are addressed within the study with the intent of inclusiveness and correction.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The data was generated, gathered, and recorded was updated and is communicated in the data collection section with a detailed explanation of the process by which the data was generated, gathered, and recorded. Further, the data analysis patterns, relationships, and themes that are presented as findings that are supported by the data and as aligned with the research questions. Salient data in the findings and appropriately handled discrepant cases was presented. The evidence of quality and procedural accuracy of the data was represented. Finally, a summarization was offered of the logically and

systematically summarized outcomes that are directly associated with the study problem and research questions, within the larger body of literature that also includes the conceptual framework. I concluded with the project deliverables as an outcome of the study results.

A total of 13 participants replied and consented to participate in the study by stating “I consent” in a reply to the original email invitation (See Appendix C). Six part-time faculty and seven full-time faculty with over one year teaching experience replied to the initial email sent out after several attempts over a time span of two and a half months; all 13 participants agreed to participate via a recorded Zoom video conference call rather than using audio only via telephone. During the initial communication with the participants via email, the participants and I agreed that I would email a copy of the interview questions (See Appendix B) for review prior to our scheduled Zoom video conference session. If the participants noted any questions or concerns while going back over the consent form and interview questions, I informed them I was available through email to address any questions or concerns. In Table 7, I have presented demographic information related to the six part-time faculty and seven full-time faculty. The 13 participants were given the pseudonym designations as PT1, PT4, PT6, PT8, PT9, PT11, FT2, FT3, FT5, FT7, FT10, FT12, and FT13. I provided a column that lists the gender of the 13 participants. Some of the participants shared information during the interview as it pertained to their level of education, and the number of years employed in their part-time or full-time role with Acoryn University; however, this information was not required. I

included a column representing the number of years each of the participants worked at Acoryn University; however, I did not share their level of education as this was information, I felt was unnecessary. It was important to highlight this demographic information to ensure the reader understood the participants' level of expertise and experience.

The participant demographic information related to two groups of participants as faculty Participants (Table 7). The Acoryn University website designated faculty members as full-time faculty/course instructors or part-time faculty as adjunct faculty. The Acoryn University faculty members are not contractually obligated to teach in the summer; however, they have the option to do so based on the course offerings. The interviews were conducted individually. The participants had the potential to share similar experiences; however, there was an opportunity for each group to share unique details related to their different roles at Acoryn University.

**Table 7**

*Demographics of Part-Time and Full-Time Faculty Participants*

Pseudonym	Part-Time or Full-Time Employment Status	Years Employed at Acoryn University	Designated Gender
PT1	Part-Time	3	F
PT4	Part-Time	3	F
PT6	Part-Time	-	F
PT8	Part-Time	2	M

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PT9	Part-Time	5	M
PT11	Part-Time	-	M
FT2	Full-Time	5	F
FT3	Full-Time	-	M
FT5	Full-Time	8	F
FT7	Full-Time	-	F
FT10	Full-Time	-	M
FT12	Full-Time	5	M
FT13	Full-Time	35	M

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I allotted two hours for each interview session and informed the participants there would be a follow-up (member checking) whereby the participants would receive a copy of their transcript asking them to review and then email me back via granting permission to use the transcript. All the interviews took place via Zoom video conferencing. None of the participants requested person-to-person interviews. The recordings were saved on my password-protected laptop. The recordings were also saved to a flash drive that always remains in my possession or maintained in a locked file cabinet.

### **The Findings in Relation to the Problem**

The problem was that, in 2008, Acoryn University (pseudonym) implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study was that

despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The 2018 archival data from ACICS that I reviewed showed a persistently declining student retention rate issue within a career-based university, despite the implementation of formal student retention strategies.

After each interview, I reviewed my researchers journal notes twice to look for patterns, any relationships, themes, and discrepant concerns and compiled this in a Word document as part of the data collection process (Lodico et al., 2010). After addressing any concerns found within the notes, I listened to each interview recording and created a table to begin the hand-coding process. Using the transcribed data from the interviews, open coding was used to support the identification of themes (Levitt et al., 2018). The recordings were listened to three-times while also utilizing a table to help with the coding process. During the manual coding process, I used Clark and Veale's (2018) sorting methodology to help identify similarities, frequency of words, sequential order, and differences. This process consisted of reviewing the data, stated within each participant's interview, for common words, sentences, and phrases to help identify similarities and differences as well. Highlighters were used during this process and within the journal. During this process, I was able to identify similar phrases and codes that helped with identifying patterns and relationships amongst the participants (Levitt et al., 2018).

Once I completed the manual hand coding of the data, I next used the software, Atlas.ti to assist with the coding of the transcribed data three times to gain a more in-depth analysis. The results from the use of Atlas.ti did not provide much insight as hoped. I did not change anything from what I was able to obtain from the manual hand coding process. This was a validation of my manual hand coding process. Once I coded the data in its entirety, I began to build data analysis patterns, data analysis relationships, and data analysis themes. On a broader scale, the literature review examined perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling exhibited a lack of identifying the faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of student retention strategies (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Gauthier, 2016; Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016; Tinto 2015) correlated with RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? In this study, I aimed to seek the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty of ways to improve student retention as derived from RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The study's problems aligned with the research questions and provided the foundation for the interview questions that led to an array of responses from the thirteen participants (see Tables 5 and 6). There was a total of eleven questions asked of the study's participants. The first six interview questions aligned with RQ1 (See Appendix D). The final five interview questions aligned with RQ2 (See Appendix D).

## **The Findings in Relation to the Research Questions**

The participants' responses to the interview questions (See Appendix B) allowed me to gain insight into the problem at Acoryn University. The six-part-time faculty and seven-full-time faculty shared similar responses when speaking about their experiences with the current formal student retention strategies. The participants shared their opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the current student retention strategies as well as ways to improve the current student retention strategies. The participants also discussed which of the student retention strategies were most effective in their opinion.

After compiling all the above interview responses, I read each interview transcript twice before I began the process of developing categories. I then categorized the responses into segments that were related to the two research questions. The segments of data that offered pertinent information related to the study, the research questions, I began to manually code each section based on similar interview responses from the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants. Lodico et al. (2010) described coding as "the inductive process of data analysis that involves examining many small pieces of information and abstracting a connection between them" (p. 183). After each interview, I reviewed my researchers journal notes taken to look for patterns, any relationships, themes, and discrepant concerns and compiled this in a Word document as part of the data collection process. After addressing any concerns found within the notes, I listened to each interview recording and created a table to begin the hand-coding process. Using the transcribed data from the interviews, open coding was used to support the identification of

themes. The recordings were listened to three-times while also utilizing a table to help with the coding process. During the manual coding process, I used Clark and Veale's (2018) sorting methodology to help identify similarities, frequency of words, sequential order, and differences. This process consisted of reviewing the data, stated within each participant's interview, for common words, sentences, and phrases to help identify similarities and differences as well. Highlighters were used during this process and within the researcher's journal.

Once I completed the manual hand coding of the data, I next used the software, Atlas.ti to affirm my analysis to gain a more in-depth analysis. The results from the use of Atlas.ti did not provide much insight as hoped. I did not change anything from what I was able to obtain from the manual hand coding process. Once I coded the data in its entirety, I began to build data analysis patterns, data analysis relationships, and data analysis themes. In conclusion, the six part-time and seven part-time faculty expressed vividly the importance of the institution finding a way to communicate with the students. Some of the faculty referenced a sense of the lack of knowledge about the university's formal student retention strategies and the need to identify what they were based on their own personal perspective. Throughout the interviews, the part-time and full-time faculty did not reference any provided training available to faculty expressly designed to help them understand their role in addressing student retention in the classroom.



### **Data Analysis Results: Patterns**

I used Clark and Veale's (2018) sorting methods as a means of identifying themes and categorized the data using the patterns to identify similarities, differences, frequencies, and sequential orders in relation to other events. Using Clark and Veale's (2018) suggestions, I was able to identify similarities, differences, frequent comments, and statements as well as the ability to identify other patterns or relationships of the data from participants as suggested. Interview questions were intentional because each participant had different experiences that may be easy to understand or relevant to the study (Williamson, Creswell, Butler, Christie, & Halligan, 2019). After all interviews were transcribed, I read each one several times. Once all interviews had been completed, transcribed, and compiled, I began the process of manual hand coding first by identifying recurring words, and phrases and comments found to be frequently stated in the interviews. Each segment produced at least 32 codes. I began to consolidate the codes based on redundancy of information. It was at this stage I recognized the emerging patterns because of the coding process.

After completing the coding process, I discovered that there was an alignment between the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants patterns and RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? and RQ2: What are full-time and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The patterns identified were used

developed from the codes identified during the manual coding process amongst the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants. The first pattern that aligned with RQ1 when interviewing the participants was observation, I noticed how the participants had an excited voice when they were answering certain questions and, in some cases, exhibited concerned tones when answering some questions. The second pattern that aligned with RQ1 when interviewing the participants was that the faculty shared similar statements associated with the code awareness. The third pattern that aligned with RQ1 was engagement where several participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of engagement between the faculty and students. There was also an alignment between the six part-time faculty and seven full-time faculty and RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The first pattern that aligned with RQ2 was the phrase/code “reaching out to students” that was repeatedly stated. The second pattern that aligned with RQ2 was the code communication that was repeatedly stated. The third pattern that aligned with RQ2 was the code resources that were repeatedly stated. Once all the emerging patterns were identified, I discovered that there were emerging patterns that aligned with the study’s research questions 1.0 and 2.0 and the thirteen participants responses to the interview questions. Table 8 shows the patterns identified as aligned with the research questions.

**Table 8***Alignment of Participants' Patterns to Research Questions*

RQ1 RQ2	Part-time and Full-time Participant Patterns
RQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	Concerned Tone  Awareness  Engagement
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?	Reaching Out to Students  More Communication  Resources

In the following two sections, I have offered information related to the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants. Once all the emerging patterns were identified, I discovered that there were emerging patterns that aligned with the study's participants.

***Participant Patterns***

The participants' responses to the interview questions lead to the segmentation of the information. Each segment produced at least 32 codes. The patterns began to inform my coding process as I progressed through the initial round of the data analysis. As I continued to review the transcripts, the repeated appearance of various words and phrases

helped me identify my codes. I identified keywords and patterns after reviewing the interview transcripts three times. After I recognized the patterns, I was able formulate the codes from the patterns. I began to consolidate the codes based on redundancy of information. The codes and key words/phrases identified were 1) engage 2) flexibility 3) financial aid, 4) scholarships, 5) advising, 6) one on one, 7) awareness, 8) technology, 9) connections, 10) relationships, 11) social activities, 12) alerts, and 13) emails. As for language patterns, when interviewing the participants, the participants had an excited voice when they were answering certain questions and, in some cases, exhibited tones of concern when answering some questions. For example, Participant FT3 stated in a concerned tone “they do not know who to go to sometimes.” Participant FT2 stated in a concerned tone “I just feel like it’s not enough information to the public as far as weaknesses.” From these three participants, the code awareness emerged as a redundant word used by several participants. Once this pattern was identified, I turned the patterns in to codes due to the repeated usage of the word.

During the Zoom video conferencing interview sessions, the participant cameras were turned off, so I was unable to identify any facial expressions or body movements while answering the interview questions. Some of the participants shared their past experiences teaching at other universities comparing the student retention strategies between the two universities. I observed the full-time male participants were concerned about student awareness, whereas full-time female participants were more vocal with social interaction that agreed with the part-time female participants. To illustrate, FT3

noted “orientation was provided making students aware of those services available.”

Participants FT2 and FT7 each agreed “one on one” interaction with their students benefited the students. From these three participants, the code interaction emerged as a redundant word used by several participants. Once this pattern was identified, I turned the patterns in to codes due to the repeated usage of the word.

Another pattern observed was that the part-time and full-time faculty agreed there was a need to improve student engagement while also identifying a way for faculty and administration to work together. To illustrate, PT8 and FT10 noted, “I did a lot of reaching out, personal touch”; “engagement is important.” From these three participants, the code engagement emerged as a redundant word used by several participants. Once this pattern was identified, I turned the patterns in to codes due to the repeated usage of the word.

Another pattern observed was the part-time and full-time participants had similar responses concerning faculty communication with students. To illustrate, PT1 noted, “The most effective strategy was the frequent communication.” FT12 noted “some communication was needed; no plan B identified; communication with students; make technology available for them.” From these two participants, the code communication emerged as a redundant word used by several participants. Once this pattern was identified, I turned the patterns in to codes due to the repeated usage of the word.

Similar patterns also emerged when the full-time and part-time participants agreed in context the need for more resources for students to help retain them to ensure they

complete their program. To illustrate, FT12 noted the need “keep tuition cost low; more in-depth training for all employees; FT13 noted the need for “more resources, more dollars to support faculty awareness of their role in improving student retention and engagement”; PT1 noted the need “make resources available to students.” From these three participants, the code resources emerged as a redundant word used by several participants. Once this pattern was identified, I turned the patterns in to codes due to the repeated usage of the word. After looking at the patterns, I discovered that there was an alignment between the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants relationships whereby the codes were combined to create the relationships identified amongst the six-part-time and seven full-time participants. Once this was identified, I proceeded to analyze the relationships as presented in the next section as shared in Table 9.

### **Data Analysis Results: Relationships**

After looking at the patterns, I discovered that there was an alignment between the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants relationships and RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? and RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The patterns began to inform my coding process as I progressed towards identifying the relationships. This process helped me see the various relationships embedded within the data collected.

To identify the relationships, I reviewed the patterns once again for each participant. This required me to create a spreadsheet breaking down the participants by part-time and full-time and male and female. As I continued to review the transcripts, the repeated appearance of various words and phrases helped me to see the relationships amongst the participant groups. This process helped me to see how the participants responded similarly to certain interview questions as well as how the male and female responses tended to be indifferent in some cases.

The patterns identified were used to help identify the relationships amongst the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants. The first relationship that aligned with RQ1 was some of the part-time faculty and some of full-time faculty began to speak about their current role and opinion of the current student retention strategies. The second relationship that aligned with RQ1 was that the faculty shared similar weaknesses associated with the current student retention strategies. There was also an alignment between the six part-time faculty and seven full-time faculty and RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The relationship that aligned with RQ2 was that the part-time and full-time faculty were eager to share their opinion about how to improve its current retention strategies.

After looking at the patterns, I discovered that there was an alignment between the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants relationships whereby the codes were combined to create the relationships identified amongst the six-part-time and

seven full-time participants. Once this was identified, I proceeded to analyze the relationships as presented in Table 9. Table 9 shows the patterns and relationships identified as aligned with the RQ1RQ1 and RQ2.0.

**Table 9**

*Alignment of Participants' Patterns and Relationships to Research Questions*

RQ1 RQ2	Part-Time and Full-time Participant Patterns	Part-Time and Full-time Participant Relationships
RQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	Concerned Tone Awareness Engagement Reaching Out to Students	Student Awareness Student Engagement Student Interaction
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?	More Communication Resources	Communication Resources

***Part-Time Participants' Relationships***

The six part-time participants' relationships built out of the six part-time patterns indicated that all six part-time participants had similar feelings towards Acoryn University. The six part-time participants viewed their current roles as professionally rewarding and uplifting. The relationships also indicated that the six part-time participants



were eager to share their opinion about the current student retention strategies. The relationship indicated that the six-part-time were somewhat confused about what the student retention strategies were. The six part-time participants did not share their levels of education; however, one participant did share their profession outside of being adjunct faculty member at Acoryn University. The six part-time participants were willing to share ways to improve the current formal student strategies. The seven full-time participants had similar experiences with their colleagues, when compared to the six part-time participants.

### ***Full-Time Participants' Relationships***

The seven full-time participants' relationships built out of the seven full-time patterns indicated that all seven full-time participants had similar feelings towards Acoryn University. The relationships also indicated that the seven full-time participants were eager to share their opinion about the current student retention strategies. To illustrate, PT1 was eager to share his opinion "I think some of their techniques are antiquated and there needs to be more social media and social environments." FT3 noted, "students are not aware of who to go to." PT6 alluded to "there was an overuse of faculty to retain students." FT10 noted, "they rely very heavy on the faculty; they think the faculty are the key to keeping students in the school." The relationship indicated some full-time participants were somewhat confused about what the student retention strategies were. To illustrate, PT6 alluded to "Faculty as the sole catalyst for retention." PT11 noted part-time tend to feel out of the loop by stating "there's a lack of information for part-time." All

participants were aware of strategies available but noted the need for improvements towards helping the students and faculty awareness of the student retention strategies.

### **Data Analysis Results: Themes**

In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. Upon the conclusion of my data analysis, I recognized patterns and relationships in the development of the data sets, resulting in the emergence of themes and subthemes (see Table 10). Toward aligning the emergence of themes and subthemes throughout the data analysis process with RQ1 and RQ2,

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. After completing the coding process, I noted five major codes which I used to create five themes. Through hand coding, I highlighted keywords to identify words and phrases used by the participants which included: 1) engage, 2) flexibility 3) financial aid, 4) scholarships, 5) advising, 6) one on one, 7) awareness, 8) technology, 9)

connections, 10) relationships, 11) social activities, 12) alerts, and 13) emails. Although other potential themes emerged with reading the transcripts, I decided to analyze the strongest themes that appeared more frequently in the transcripts and from the in-depth analysis performed using Atlas.ti. software. Both the codes and themes identified linked directly to the conceptual framework on student retention as they presented strengths and weakness and ways to improve the current formal student retention strategies. The overarching results of the study revealed that the six-part-time and seven full-time participants in this study indicated student awareness was a problem. Some of the participants also shared Acoryn University had a student orientation program; however, the faculty and students were not completely aware of what the student orientation program consisted of and its connection with student retention. For example, during the interview with Participant FT2, it was communicated:

Students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course. Students would reach out to them, but the student found it hard to get current information or was unaware of who to go for help. Some of my students were impossible to reach or locate at all but would reach out to us to inquire what was going on in their life and try to come up with some type of action to keep from dropping or failing the course.

Participant F13 shared:

At student orientation students are made aware of accommodations and resources; we make those services available and make the students aware of those services. We make

those services available and make students aware of those services as that is a big piece. Often students are not aware of the services that are here. I do think it is important for the administration to get involved where all should work together; make them aware to know what was available to help them from failing the course. One student nearly dropped out due to not having a computer or even internet access.

A couple of the participants shared different subthemes due to RQ1 association with the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies and RQ2 association with ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University. Two of the six part-time faculty members indicated the need for help with ways to communicate with their students to keep them engaged.

For example, participant PT1 communicated:

There is a need to increase the frequency of communication with students and be in tune with their studies and the resources available to students. Faculty should attempt to meet students where they are; have an idea where to start' consider one on one.

Participant FT2 shared the importance of communicating with students sharing he would email his students daily to imply some form of formal communication. Participant FT2 also stated:

Students need to be aligned with other students. I would do one on one Zoom calls or email my students to see why they were not passing my class. Students want to feel welcomed, and I feel having those interactions and types of events with me

throughout the day or in the evening time can help make a student feel like I can be successful and hey, their professor was there for them.

Additionally, the six part-time and full-time participants stated the need for more technological improvements and instructional support for the students to improve communication. For example, a participant PT1 stated:

I think some of their techniques are antiquated and as I mentioned previously, I think there needs to be more social media and social environment. Participant FT2 also stated:

Students need to be aligned with other students. I would do one on one Zoom calls or email my students to see why they were not passing my class. Students want to feel welcomed, and I feel having those interactions and types of events with me throughout the day or in the evening time can help make a student feel like I can be successful and hey, their professor is there for them.

Part-time and full-time participants also shared their concern for more financial support for students to help them remain in class. For example, Participant PT1 discussion during the interview communicated the need for the university to make resources available for them to keep them in class. Participant PT11 was precise in stating:

Identify resources available such as food to keep students in school; identify resources for tuition while also stating “keep tuition low.

Some participants shared the same sentiments with improvements to the alert system for tracking students. For example, participant FT5 communicated there needs to

be strategy involved monitoring student engagement; the tracking of students via alert system.” Participant FT5 shared they would email students by logging in online.

The part-time and full-time participants did not share themes and subthemes exclusively. The themes and subthemes resulted from responses from both groups of participants. I did not align the themes in a manner to make them explicit to part-time participant comments and full-time participants in this study.

Together the themes and keywords described the perceptions of part-time and full-time faculty sharing the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies and ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University. I ensured that Table 10 represents the themes and subthemes aligned with RQ1 and Table 14 represented themes and subthemes aligned with RQ2. I present Table 10 and Table 14 toward representing the alignment of the research questions and the study’s themes and subthemes in a clear and concise fashion.

RQ1

**Table 10**

*Themes and Subthemes for RQ1*

RQ1	Themes -	Subthemes (Strengths)	Subthemes (Weaknesses)
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RQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	Student Awareness	Orientation Program	Barriers, Faculty awareness
	Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy	Instructor Interaction	One on one, Administration/ Instructional Support
	Social Interaction	Relationships	Technology, Student Activities

Table 10 represented the organization of the thematic structure and strength subthemes and weaknesses subthemes found in the data collected that aligned with RQ1. The first column identifies the research question, RQ1 that aligned with the themes in the second column. The second column identifies the themes retrieved from the collected data. The third column explains the strength subthemes that appeared during the interview. The fourth column explains the weaknesses subthemes that appeared during the interviews. Codes were identified by the reoccurring of significant words and phrases throughout the interviews. The frequency of code words and phrases was used to determine the chosen themes but was not added to this table. Findings formulated from these research questions and interview protocols help to identify five themes from the study findings. I chose to select vivid and captivating excerpts from the data analysis and conducted a final analysis (Vaugh & Turner, 2016). The five themes that emerged from the study's research questions and data analysis were: 1) Student Awareness, 2) Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy, 3) Social Interaction, 4) Communication Amongst

Faculty and Students, and 5) Resources to Assist with Attendance needed. The themes aligned with my data analysis of the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

### ***Research Question 1***

RQ1 was about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University. Specifically, RQ1 was articulated as: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? The findings from the collected data highlighted the following codes: 1) engage, 2) flexibility 3) financial aid, 4) scholarships, 5) advising, 6) one on one, 7) awareness, 8) technology, 9) connections, 10) relationships, 11) social activities, 12) alerts, and 13) emails. These codes led to the development of the themes highlighted, the need for faculty and staff to go the extra mile, and for advisors to be aligned with students (student awareness), for faculty to meet students where they are (student engagement as a retention strategy), and to reach out to students, and to have one-on-one with students (student interaction).

Table 11 was developed to depict the sample responses to the interview questions that connected the theme identified. The theme referenced in Table 11 about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty about the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies was: (a) student awareness which referred to the need for faculty and staff to go the extra mile.



**Table 11***Sample Responses for Theme 1: Student Awareness*

Theme	Sample Responses to the Interview Questions (IQ)
Student Awareness	<p>FT2- (IQ 3) “Impossible to reach.”</p> <p>FT3-(IQ 4) “Hard to find current info online.</p> <p>PT6-(IQ 11) “Check in with students to see how things are going in a class.”</p> <p>FT13-(IQ 5) “Make them aware of student activities that can help them feel more connected.”</p> <p>FT13-(IQ 7) "Often times students are not aware of the services that are here.”</p>

Following, I represent Theme 1 details for student awareness which referred to the need for faculty and staff to go the extra mile for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

**Theme 1: Student Awareness.** Theme 1 emerged from the analysis of RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? According to Macalster.edu (2018), student challenges varied in a multitude of areas. Non-traditional students in career-based colleges face similar challenges such as student working schedules, dependent care issues, life balance, motivation, and college procedures (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2017). The interview questions resulted in several

similar responses from the full-time and part-time faculty concerning student awareness as a problem as such. Participant FT2 communicated:

Students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course. Students would reach out to them, but the student found it hard to get current information or was unaware of who to go for help. Some of my students were impossible to reach or locate at all but would reach out to us to inquire what was going on in their life and try to come up with some type of action to keep from dropping or failing the course.

Similarly, F13 communicated:

The difficulty in locating information by suggesting it was hard to find current info online; there's not enough information shared with the public. While also stating when my students come in, I want to keep them actively engaged in the program. They have a lot of programs that help the students stay in school and help with their tuition. I think our program was set up so that they will do whatever they can to keep a student.

PT6 shared:

There is a need to check on students by communicating the need for student conferences to check in with students to see how things are going in a class. I notice most at our school is the retention strategies, they expect the faculty to be a soul catalyst for holding student retention. so they want to know what you're doing in the classroom that encourages the students to come back. Are you encouraging

the student? Are you reaching out, you know, maybe via email giving them phone calls and in that nature. So it falls on the faculty a lot of the times to maintain retention.

Additionally, PT8 communicated it was important for the administration to get involved as well stating we need to do something before it was too late; act as soon as we can.

Some participants felt students were unaware of a lot of resources available to them when life challenges happen that prevent them from attending classes or before even dropping out. There was much concern about student awareness where participant F13 shared:

At student orientation, students are made aware of accommodations and resources; we make those services available and make the students aware of those services.

We make those services available and make students aware of those services as that is a big piece. Often students are not aware of the services that are here. I do think it was important for the administration to get involved where all should work together; make them aware to know what was available to help them from failing the course. One student nearly dropped out due to not having a computer or even internet access. This student was not even aware the college was making laptops available to students while also assisting students with finding a way to be able to connect online.

***Subtheme 1: Orientation Program.*** Some of the participants also shared Acoryn University had a student orientation program; however, the faculty and students were not

completely aware of what the student orientation program consisted of and its connection with student retention. For example, during the interview with Participant FT2, it was communicated:

Students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course. Students would reach out to them, but the student found it hard to get current information or was unaware of who to go for help. Some of my students were impossible to reach or locate at all but would reach out to us to inquire what was going on in their life and try to come up with some type of action to keep from dropping or failing the course.

Participant F13 shared:

At student orientation students are made aware of accommodations and resources; we make those services available and make the students aware of those services. We make those services available and make students aware of those services as that is a big piece. Often students are not aware of the services that are here. I do think it is important for the administration to get involved where all should work together; make them aware to know what was available to help them from failing the course. One student nearly dropped out due to not having a computer or even internet access.

***Subtheme 2: Barrier: Faculty Awareness.*** The lack of faculty awareness was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. For example, participant A3 shared:

They do not know who to go to sometimes, and students are not aware of where they need to go to. Sometimes they just do not follow through because of the red tape or the number of people they have to go see before they get help. Faculty sometimes are not aware of all the resources.

***Summary of Theme 1.*** In conclusion, the keyword identified and coded was “awareness” that was added to my list of codes during the manual hand coding process. The insight offered by FT2 and FT13’s was significant and suggests students are not aware of the resources available to them. The response shared by FT13 comments highlighted that orientation was provided when students are enrolled; however, students still are not aware of the current resources when they run in to challenges with attending class and shared student should continuously be made aware of the resources available to them.

To address the importance, the impact, and the importance of the quotes identified, I shared the importance, the impact, and my reflection in choosing the quotes selected. The quotes shared were important to this theme as they presented the connection of the participants’ comments to the theme identified. This connection was important to identify as it provided insights to me into how the participants’ thoughts were similar and different in some cases. In reflection, the usage of the quotes was a part of helping to see the connection of the patterns and relationships that later help identify the themes. The quotes helped give credibility to the themes as well as the true perspectives of the participants. Upon recognizing the patterns, and relationships and the developing of the coding sets, I

discovered the emergence of the themes student awareness, student engagement, and social interaction that led to the development of sub-themes that aligned with RQ1. The strengths for theme 1 were orientation, and the weaknesses were barriers, and faculty awareness.

Table 12 was developed with the sample responses to the interview questions that connected with the theme identified. The theme referenced in Table 12, below, with the focused theme about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty about the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies was (a) student engagement as a retention strategy which referred to advisors to be aligned with students, and for faculty to meet students where they are.

**Table 12**

*Sample Responses for Theme 2: Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy*

Theme	Sample Responses to the Interview Questions (IQ)
<i>Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy</i>	FT2-(IQ 3) Reach out to the student.”
	FT5-(IQ 1) “Strategy involved monitoring student engagement.”
	FT5-(IQ 2) “I would email students by logging in online.”
	PT6-(IQ 3) Involve engagement activities.”
	PT8-( IQ 6) “I did a lot of reaching out.”
	FT10-(IQ 5) “Engagement was important.”

Following, I represent Theme 2 details for student engagement as a Retention Strategy which referred to advisors to be aligned with students, and for faculty to meet students where they are for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

**Theme 2: Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy.** Theme 2 emerged from the analysis of research question one, RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University. Tinto (2013) recognized that students will lose momentum and interest before they become fully engaged in the university setting and are thus a higher risk of dropping out of college. The research question resulted in several different responses from the full-time and part-time faculty, but most of the faculty stated they did reach out to students and were very engaged with ensuring students remained in contact with them. About 90% of the participants' felt engagement was imperative to motivating students to continue their plan from the start to the end. Some participants acknowledged students would appreciate their support which would benefit the retention of students in their classroom. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty shared the need for more engagement with students throughout the process of retaining them in the class. For example, participant FT2 shared:

Professors need to reach out to students as well as advisors to do outreach to keep students engaged and motivated to continue their plan from the start of the degree to the end. Participant FT2 also indicated the need to check on students by stating the need for weekly checks; making sure they are ok; "Hey" what was going on to

help them stay motivated to continue. I think the strength was like, just the fact that the professors are trying to reach out to the students and are trying to make sure the students are okay.

Participant FT5 communicated, as a strength, one strategy used was the monitoring of student engagement with the tracking of students via an alert system. Participant PT6 shared it would be great for face-to-face classes. Institutional engagement modes of motivating students play a major role in how students are retained (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018). Participant FT7 shared:

The retention strategies do not take into account the amount of time needed to build retention in the classroom. More often faculty are expected to engage above and beyond whether it be through advisement, whether it be through, you know, participating in orientation.

Participant FT10 communicated as well:

I think the best strategy has been engagement, and keeping the students informed; Before I said with student and faculty, but it's also important that they engage with one another and build that support system so when they make friends and meet other people in the learning environment, it helps tremendously. They feel like they have more support.

Participant PT8 shared this about student engagement:

I know we have counselors that we can use for that purpose, I think the personal touch, know them, know that we care they we are here, and we care about them as



people that I think that is biggest strength or connection. I think it's that personal connection I get to know these folks, and you know I have. I have had one or I have had to sit down and talk with them, and you know explain to them that if you continue on the path that you're on you know you're going to fail out of the class, so you know. I try to encourage them to come back and straighten things out and stay with us by offering them help, as well you know, if there is anything that they need help with such as transportation, family issues, you know, knowing that we have counselors, or we have, you know, different resources to help.

***Subtheme 1: Instructor Interaction.*** The importance of Instructor interaction was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Participant FT2 also stated:

Students want to feel welcomed, and I feel having those interactions and types of events with me throughout the day or in the evening time can help make a student feel like I can be successful and hey, their professor was there for them.

***Subtheme 2: One-on-One Administrative/Instructional Support.*** The need for one-on-one instruction as well as administrative support was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Participant FT2 also stated:

Students need to be aligned with other students. I would do one on one Zoom calls or email my students to see why they were not passing my class.

Similarly participant FT7 shared:

You have to find ways to ask a student how they are doing in a course. It was the one-on-one relationship.

*Summary of Theme 2.* In conclusion, the keywords identified and coded were “engagement and alerts” that was added to my list of codes identified during the manual hand coding process. The insight offered by FT2 and FT5 was significant and suggests student engagement was important as a method to continuously engage students to continue in a course. The response shared by FT2 comments highlighted the need for faculty to try to reach out to their students as well as advisors. This engagement was significant with tracking a student’s progress in a course whether in an online or face to face course.

To address the importance, the impact, and the importance of the quotes identified, I shared the importance, the impact, and my reflection in choosing the quotes selected. The quotes shared were important to this theme as they presented the connection of the participants’ comments to the theme identified. This connection was important to identify as it provided insights to me into how the participants’ thoughts were similar and different in some cases. In reflection, the usage of the quotes was a part of helping to see the connection of the patterns and relationships that later help identify the themes. The quotes helped give credibility to the themes as well as the true perspectives of the participants. Upon recognizing the patterns, and relationships and the developing of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the themes student awareness, student engagement, and social interaction that led to the development of sub-themes that aligned with RQ1. The

strengths for theme 2 were student engagement, and instructor interaction. The weaknesses were one on one support, and administrative/instructional support.

Table 13 was developed with depict the sample responses to the interview questions that connected the theme identified. The theme referenced in Table 13 below with the theme about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty about the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies was: (a) social interaction which referred to reaching out to students, and to have one-on-one with students.

**Table 13**

*Sample Responses for Theme 3: Social Interaction With Faculty and Others*

Theme	Sample Responses to the Interview Questions (IQ)
Social Interaction with Faculty and Others	<p>PT1-(IQ 4) "I think there needs to be more social media and social environment."</p> <p>PT1-(IQ 6) The most effective strategy was the frequent communications that they offer."</p> <p>FT2-(IQ 6) "Can reach out to student to ensure student was passing class."</p> <p>FT2-(IQ 11) "Students need to be aligned with other students."</p> <p>FT7-(IQ 6) "I would do one on one with my students."</p> <p>FT13-(IQ 2) "More understanding of student".</p>

Following, I represent Theme 3 details for social interaction which referred to reaching out to students, and to have one-on-one with students for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

**Theme 3: Social Interaction.** Theme 3 emerged with the analysis of research question number 1, RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? According to Haverila (2020), students need to function effectively within an environment. The research question resulted in several similar responses from the full-time and part-time faculty, but the majority felt there was a need for more social activities that could improve upon the social interaction between faculty and students. Based on the theme that emerged, the full-time and part-time faculty shared the need for more social interaction between them and students as well as the need for the university to consider offering activities designed to improve upon the interaction when a student starts to the point of graduation. For example, a participant PT1 stated, “I think some of their techniques are antiquated and as I mentioned previously, I think there needs to be more social media and social environment. Participant FT2 also stated:

Students need to be aligned with other students. I would do one on one Zoom calls or email my students to see why they were not passing my class. Students want to feel welcomed, and I feel having those interactions and types of events with me throughout the day or in the evening time can help make a student feel like I can be successful and hey, their professor was there for them.

It was also suggested by participant FT7 that one on one with students was important.

FT13 shared:

The need for more understanding of the students as well as the more reaching out by the faculty. Utilize how to help improve student attention again, by doing just all the things that I have mentioned. You know there is no one magical piece to it so to speak, again. But just the fact that you have to have those services and you've got to make those services available and make students aware of those services that is a big piece Often times students are not aware of the services that are here.

And sometimes they kind of fall through the crack, so to speak.

***Subtheme 1: Relationships.*** The need to improve upon student relationships was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. For example, participant FT2 made the following comment:

I believe faculty can reach out to the student or the students should feel they can reach out to the faculty anytime then need help. Faculty can assess the classroom as well as whatever courses that they are taking to try and make sure that they pass the class. I think it is just having that could be a how student relationships help out.

***Subtheme 2: Technology and Student Activities.*** The need to improve upon the technology and provide an opportunity to increase student activities was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Some of the six part-time and full-time participants stated the need for more technological improvements and

instructional support for the students to improve communication. For example, a participant PT1 stated:

I think some of their techniques are antiquated and as I mentioned previously, I think there needs to be more social media and social environment. Some participants shared the same sentiments with improvements to the alert system for tracking students. For example, participant FT5 communicated there needs to be strategy involved monitoring student engagement; the tracking of students via alert system.” Participant FT5 shared they would email students by logging in online.

Participant FT2 also stated:

Students need to be aligned with other students. I would do one on one Zoom calls or email my students to see why they were not passing my class. Students want to feel welcomed, and I feel having those interactions and types of events with me throughout the day or in the evening time can help make a student feel like I can be successful and hey, their professor was there for them.

***Summary of Theme 3.*** In conclusion, the keywords identified and coded were “one on one, social activities, and emails” that was added to my list of codes identified during the manual hand coding process. Faculty involvement has an impact on student retention. According to Perkin-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018), positive interactions between faculty and students have been known to increase the probability of student retention and student success. Research suggests the relationship be effective in improving student retention (Bollinger et al., 2019).

The insight offered by PT1 and FT2 was significant and suggests social interaction was important as a method to improve the relationships between students and faculty. The insights shared by F2 suggest the university could do a better job with offering activities that would provide the students with the ability to interact with other students. The response shared by PT1 was significant as the offering of more social media presence was not available while noting how antiquated the techniques were.

To address the importance, the impact, and the importance of the quotes identified, I share the importance, the impact, and my reflection in choosing the quotes selected. The quotes shared were important to this theme as they presented the connection of the participants' comments to the theme identified. This connection was important to identify as it provided insights to me into how the participants' thoughts were similar and different in some cases. In reflection, the usage of the quotes was a part of helping to see the connection of the patterns and relationships that later help identify the themes. The quotes helped give credibility to the themes as well as the true perspectives of the participants. Upon recognizing the patterns, and relationships and the developing of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the themes student awareness, student engagement, and social interaction that led to the development of sub-themes that aligned with RQ1. The strength for theme 3, social interaction, was relationships, and the weaknesses were technology and student activities.

Table 14 was developed to depict the themes and subthemes as aligned with RQ2. Table 14 represents the organization of the thematic structure and subthemes found in the

data collected that aligned with RQ2. The first column identifies the research question, RQ2 that aligned with the themes in the second column. RQ2

**Table 14**

*Themes and Subthemes for RQ2*

RQ2	Themes	Subthemes
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?	Communication	Warning Alerts
	Resources	Financial Aid, Living Expenses, Tuition Administrative Support

The second column identified the subthemes retrieved from the collected data. Codes were identified by the reoccurring of significant words and phrases throughout the interviews. The frequency of code words and phrases was used to determine the chosen themes but was not added to this table.

***Research Question 2***

RQ2 was about full-time and part-time faculty members' perception of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The search results for perceptions of ways to improve student retention revealed 13 common phrases associated with ways to improve student retention. The participants highlighted the need for more communication between the administration, faculty, and students while also sharing the need to offer more resources to students to assist with their ability to remain in school or be retained. The



codes, more communication, and resources, were then combined to form two themes about the full-time and part-time faculty perceptions of ways to improve student retention: (a) communication, and (b) resources.

Table 15 was developed to depict the sample responses to the interview questions that connected the theme identified. Below I offer the details for communication and resources for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants. The theme referenced in Table 15 below with the theme about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty about how to improve the current formal student retention strategies were: (a) communication which referred to the need for faculty and staff to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom.

**Table 15**

*Sample Responses for Theme 4: Communication Among Faculty and Students*

Theme	Sample Responses to the Interview Questions (IQ)
Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	PT1-(IQ 5) “Improve the frequency of communication with students.”
	PT1-(IQ 9) “Meet students where they are in their environment.”
	“FT2-(IQ 7) “Email daily; Offer one on one time.”
	PT4-(IQ 7) “Meeting students where their needs are.”
	PT6-(IQ 8) “Communicate with students so they can be successful.”
	PT9-(IQ 3) “The communication between student and faculty.”

Following, I represent Theme 4 details for communication amongst faculty and students which referred to the need for faculty and staff to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

**Theme 4: Communication.** Theme number 4 emerged from the analysis of research question number 2, RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? According to Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018), positive interactions between faculty and students have been known to increase the probability of student retention and student success. The research question resulted in similar responses from the full-time and part-time faculty whereby the faculty agreed communication with the students was imperative. Meeting the students where they are was one comment 90% of the faculty agreed upon. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. For example, participant PT1 communicated:

There was a need to increase the frequency of communication with students and be in tune with their studies and the resources available to students. Faculty should attempt to meet students where they are; have an idea where to start' consider one on one.

Participant PT4 shared:

Faculty need to meet the students where their needs are; consider one on one time. Well, the road I have been helping students is meeting them where their needs are, and in order for me to do, I have to have some sort of idea as to where to start with the intent of meeting them where they are. What I want to say, is a student may not want to sit there who knows a concept to have to wait on others. Somethings you must do. Some one on one is okay.

Participant PT6 was eager to share:

Faculty at the university need to communicate so their students can be successful as this would imply the faculty cared. Students are benefiting from knowing people care. That is what is the most meaningful is for students to build rapport with their faculty and staff on campus and, to be able to have that mentor or that person they can contact or reach out to, you know, when they have questions and concerns.

Participant PT9 also shared the same concern by stating it was important for there to be communication between the student and faculty which creates a level of success

conveyed to the student body. Participant PT11 communicated it was important to meet the students where they are, understanding the student in the classroom.”

Participant F12 communicated:

As for weakness, there needs to be some sort of continued communication. The cell phone allows students to communicate; however, phones get disconnected. Someone could look at the facts of not having a phone and it is use in the classroom setting. When Wi-Fi falls, they do not think of the other alternatives to communicating with students.

***Subtheme 1: Warning Alerts.*** The need to improve ways to catch students when they are about to drop a course or go missing was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. For example, participant FT2 stated the importance of communicating with students sharing he would email his students daily to imply some form of formal communication. Both Participant PT1 and FT2 identified with the need for one-on-one communication time with students.

***Summary of Theme 4.*** In conclusion, the keyword identified was communication and was added to my list of codes identified during the manual hand coding process. The insight offered by PT1 and FT2 was significant and suggests communication was important as a method to stay in touch with a student on the edge of dropping a course. The insights shared by F2 suggest one on one dialog with a student was important and creates an opportunity to build caring relationships with students. The response to meet

students where they are, as shared by PT1, was significant as it implied the need for improving better relationships between faculty and students.

To address the importance, the impact, and the importance of the quotes identified, I share the importance, the impact, and my reflection in choosing the quotes selected. The quotes shared were important to this theme as they presented the connection of the participants' comments to the theme identified. This connection was important to identify as it provided insights to me into how the participants' thoughts were similar and different in some cases. In reflection, the usage of the quotes was a part of helping to see the connection of the patterns and relationships that later help identify the themes. The quotes helped give credibility to the themes as well as the true perspectives of the participants. Upon recognizing the patterns and relationships and the development of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the theme 4, communication and theme 5, resources. This led to subthemes that aligned with RQ2. The subtheme for theme 4, communication, was warning alerts.

Table 16 was developed to depict the sample responses to the interview questions that connected the theme identified. The theme referenced in Table 16 below with the theme about the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty about how to improve the current formal student retention strategies was: (a) resources as a retention strategy which agreed the identification of resources such as food, transportation, technological assistance, affordable tuition, and financial aid were needed.

**Table 16***Sample Responses for Theme 5: Resources to Assist With Attendance Needed*

Theme	Sample Responses to the Interview Questions (IQ)
Resources to Assist with Attendance Needed	PT1-(IQ 4) “Make more resources available to them.”
	FT5-(IQ 7) “Evaluate students who are at risk of dropping out.”
	PT11-(IQ 6) “Offer more resources for tuition.”
	PT11-(IQ 9) “Keeping tuition low.”
	FT12-(IQ 8) “Offer assistance with transportation.”

Following, I represent Theme 5 details, resources, which referred to the identification of resources such as food, transportation, technological assistance, affordable tuition, and financial aid needed for the six part-time participants and seven full-time participants.

**Theme 5: Resources.** Theme 5 emerged from the analysis of research number 2, What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The research question resulted in several different responses from the faculty; however, the majority agreed resources need to be made available more readily to students to assist with remaining in a course or being retained. Many participants agreed the identification of resources such as food, transportation, technological assistance, affordable tuition, and financial aid were needed. Based on the interviews with the participants, many shared a lot of time students were not aware of

resources available to them to help support their effort to remain school as well as other support. As a result, sometimes students would just not return.

Feedback between faculty and students creates an opportunity to identify the early warning signs and a way to help improve student retention. For example, the importance of more resources or the lack of such things as financial aid was the main topic of the participants. Participant PT1 discussion during the interview communicated the need for the university to make resources available for them to keep them in class. Participant PT11 was precise in stating:

Identify resources available such as food to keep students in school; identify resources for tuition while also stating “keep tuition low. Yeah, I think that and finding resources keep the students in school. That is important as well as having relief funding and donations as resources for tuition.

Participant FT12 was clear during the interview sharing the importance of the financial piece, and assistance with transportation. Participant PT3 too communicated the university should be willing to use other teaching methods suitable to the student; evaluate students who are at risk of dropping out. Participant FT 13 communicated:

I would say at this point the big thing, or the best way to improve would be to provide more resources. Tutorial service at this point could always use more dollars, because like I said, we have to pay the tutor. There was a technology gap that we need to address. You know. One thing is probably jumps in my mind now is Covid set upon us, and we were force to, you know, to reduce delivery

instruction remotely. You know, found that many of our students again were somewhat lacking in technology. So, again, access to technology. So, if anything at all, we might want to look at how we could improve or make it more available to students.

***Subtheme 1: Financial Aid, Living Expenses, Tuition, and Administrative***

***Support.*** The need to offer more financial aid to support students and to help them be retained in class was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Part-time and full-time participants shared their concern for more financial support for students to help them remain in class. For example, Participant PT1 discussion during the interview communicated the need for the university to make resources available for them to keep them in class. Participant PT11 was precise in stating:

Identify resources available such as food to keep students in school; identify resources for tuition while also stating “keep tuition low.

***Summary of Theme 5.*** In conclusion, the keywords identified and coded were “financial aid, scholarships, technology, relationships, and advising” that was added to my list of codes identified during the manual hand coding process. The insight offered by PT11 and FT13 was significant and suggests the improvement of resources was important and should be made available. P11 and FT13 each stressed the importance of making students aware continuously of the resources available as well as the offering of more resources. The comments shared by PT11 and FT13 provided support for the need to improve resources while also improving on a technology gap that was identified as well.

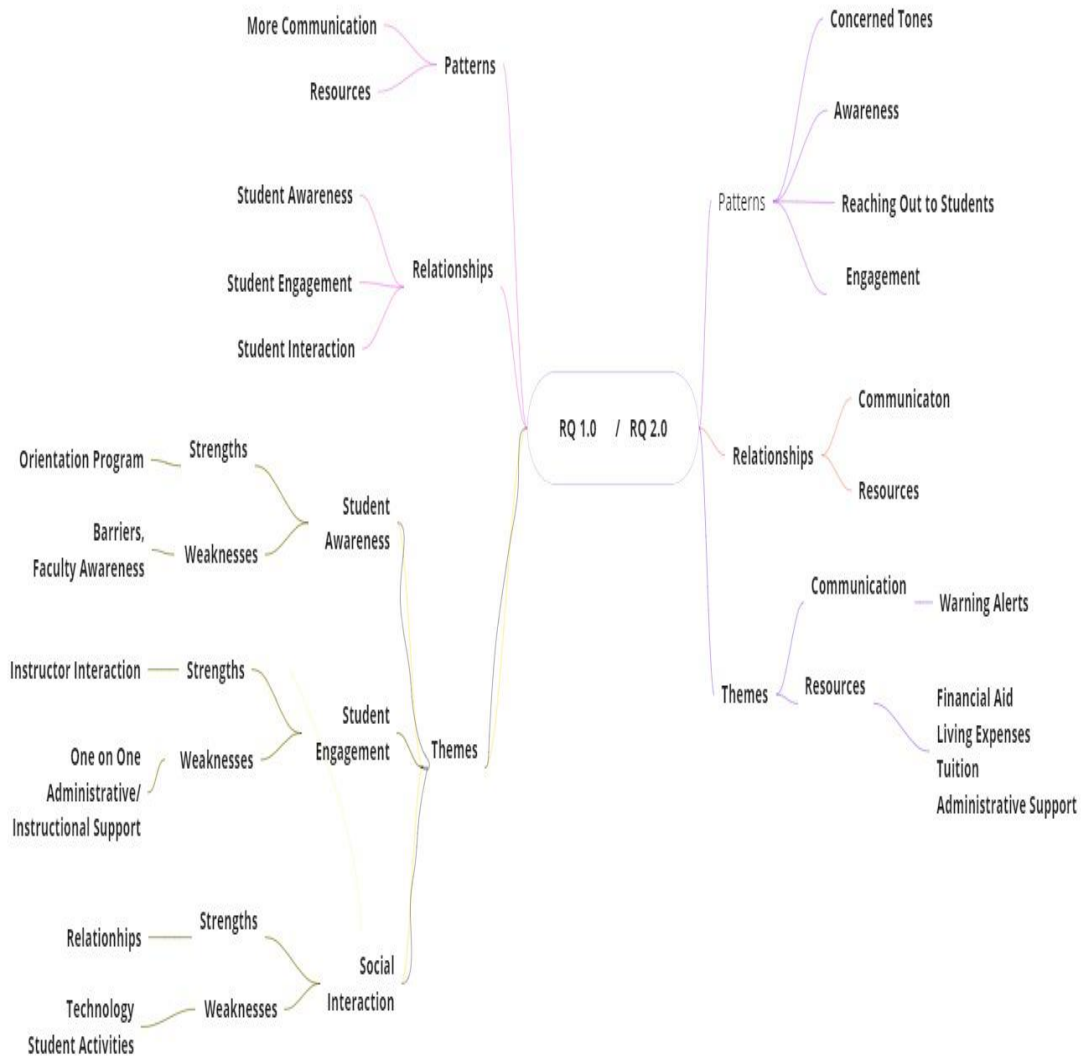


To address the importance, the impact, and the importance of the quotes identified, I shared the importance, the impact, and my reflection in choosing the quotes selected. The quotes shared were important to this theme as they presented the connection of the participants' comments to the theme identified. This connection was important to identify as it provided insights to me into how the participants' thoughts were similar and different in some cases. In reflection, the usage of the quotes was a part of helping to see the connection of the patterns and relationships that later help identify the themes. The quotes helped give credibility to the themes as well as the true perspectives of the participants. Upon recognizing the patterns and relationships and the development of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the theme 5, resources. This led to subthemes that aligned with RQ2. The subtheme for theme 5, resources, were financial aid, living expenses, tuition, and administrative support.

In Figure 1, a summary of RQ1 and RQ2 alignment with the patterns, relationships, and themes are presented. Figure 1 was developed to provide a big picture representation of the patterns, relationships, and themes broken down for a better view. This figure was developed mainly to help see the alignment of RQ1 and RQ2 that led to the emerging patterns, relationships, and themes.

**Figure 1**

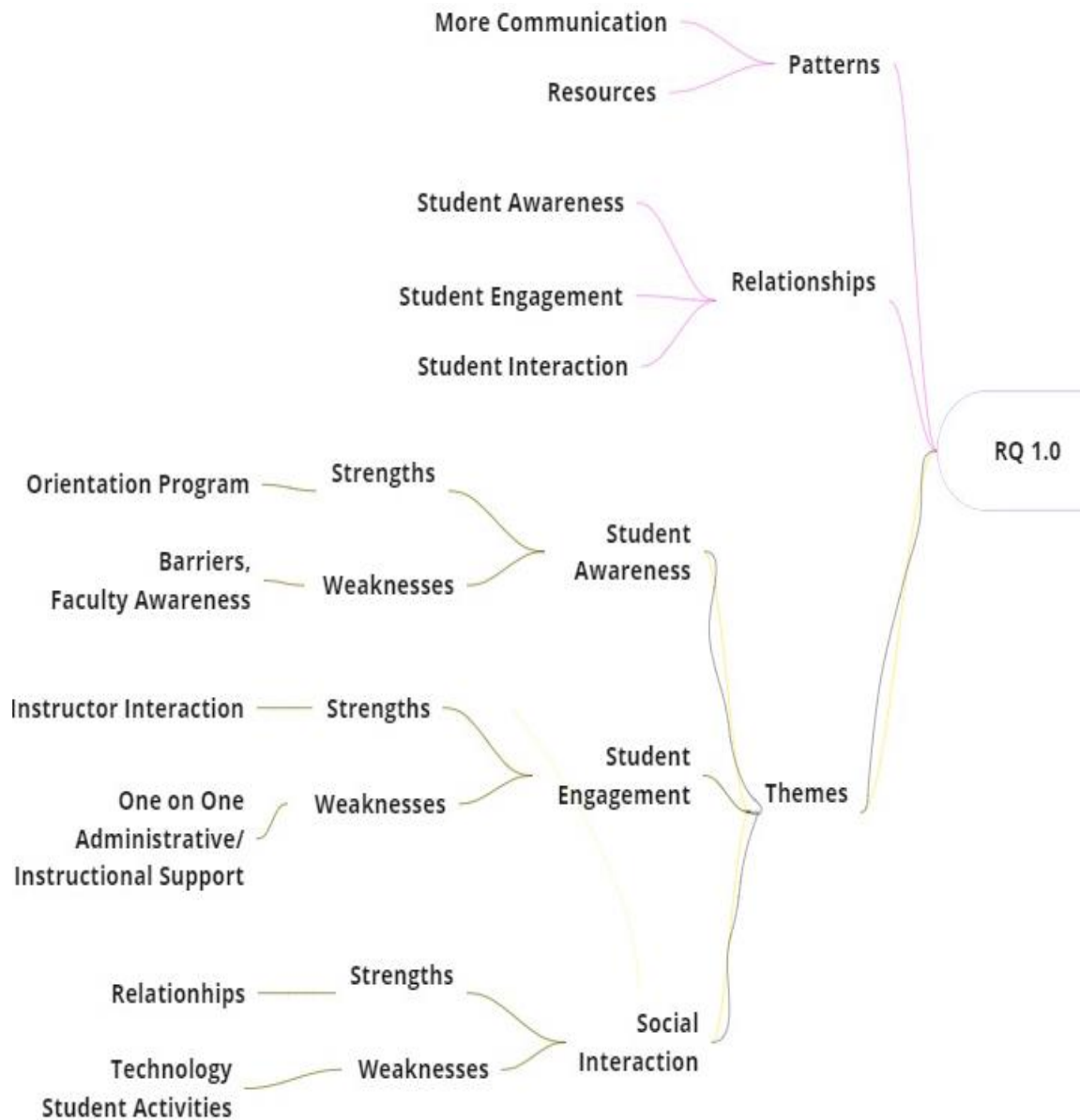
*Summary of Patterns, Relationships, and Themes for Research Questions 1 and 2*



From the emerging patterns, I discovered there was an alignment between the part-time and full-time participants relationships and RQ1 and there was an alignment between the part-time and full-time participants relationships and RQ2. Upon completion of my data analysis, I recognized patterns and relationships in the developing of coding of the data sets, resulting in the emergence of themes and subthemes sharing the strengths and weaknesses as they aligned with RQ1 and the themes and subthemes as they aligned with RQ2.

Toward aligning the emergence of the themes and subthemes throughout the data analysis process with RQ1 and RQ2, I ensured that Table 10 and Table 11 represented the alignment of the research questions and study themes and subthemes in a clear and concise fashion.

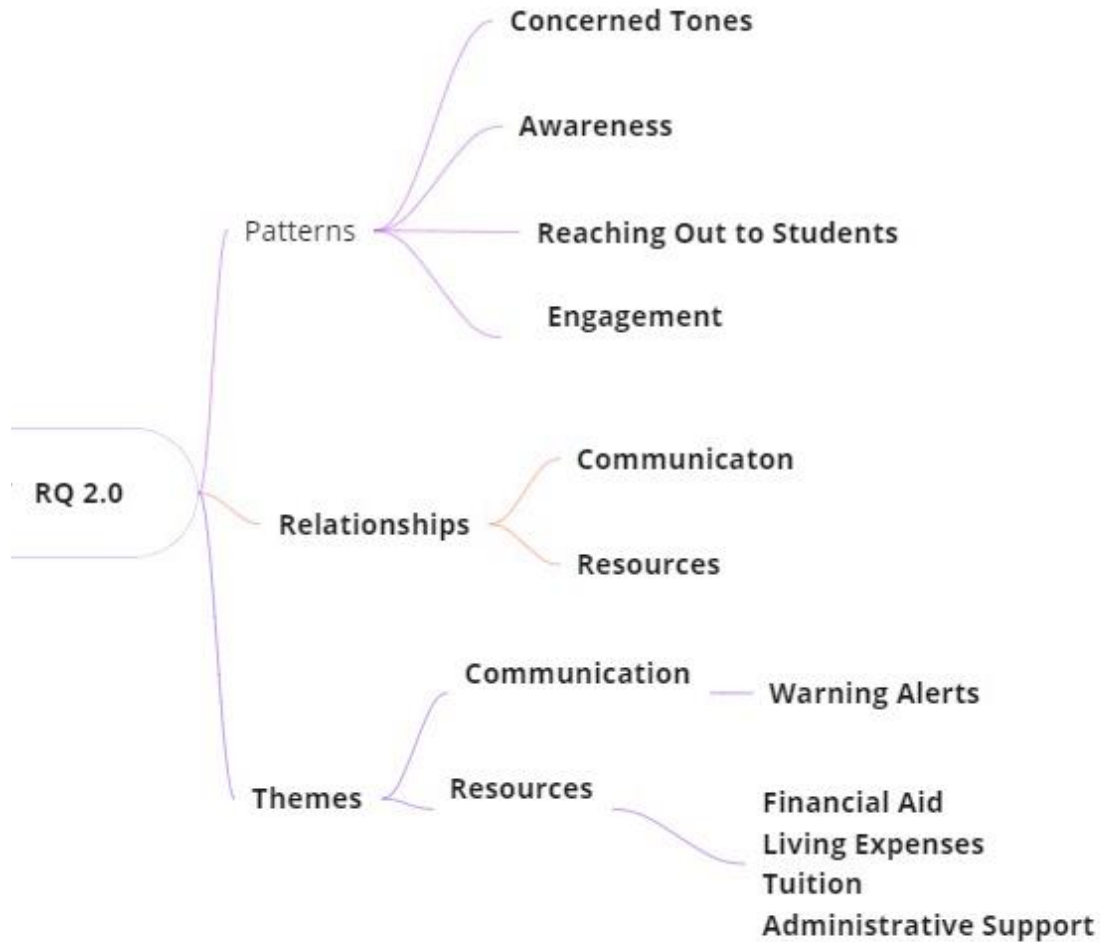
Recognizing there was significant information illustrated for review in Figure 1, I represented a focused depiction of RQ1 patterns, relationships, and themes alignment (Figure 2), and equally represented the RQ2.0 patterns, relationships, and themes alignment (Figure 3). Following is a summary of data analysis of RQ1, representing the development of patterns, relationships, and themes. (Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Patterns, Relationships, and Themes for RQ1*

In Figure 2, the patterns identified that aligned with RQ1 were more communication and resources. The relationships built out of the thirteen part-time and full-time participant patterns were student awareness, student engagement, and student interaction. Upon recognizing the patterns, and relationships and the developing of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the themes student awareness, student engagement, and social interaction that led to the development of sub-themes that aligned with RQ1. The strengths for theme 1 were orientation, and the weaknesses were barriers, and faculty awareness. The strengths for theme 2 were student engagement, and instructor interaction. The weaknesses were one on one support, and administrative/instructional support. The strength for theme 3, social interaction, was relationships, and the weaknesses were technology and student activities. A summary of data analysis of RQ2 follows, representing the development of patterns, relationships, and themes (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Patterns, Relationships, and Themes for RQ2*



In Figure 3, the patterns identified that aligned with RQ2 were concerned tones, awareness, reaching out to students, and engagement. The relationships built out of the part-time and full-time participant patterns were communication, and resources. Upon recognizing the patterns and relationships and the development of the coding sets, I discovered the emergence of the theme 4, communication and theme 5, resources. This led

to subthemes that aligned with RQ2. The subtheme for theme 4, communication, was warning alerts, and the subthemes for theme 5, resources, were financial aid, living expenses, tuition, and administrative support.

### **Discrepant Cases**

In this study, I had to identify discrepant cases and address them. Discrepant cases according to Lodico et al. (2010) are defined as cases when sources provide conflicting information that the researcher should discuss associated with the conflicts and potential understandings associated with reasons for the conflicting information. During the analysis of the data, I cross checked the responses from the participants by reviewing their comments against the comments of other participants. There were no discrepant cases experienced throughout this interview process nor articulated during the data analysis.

### **Evidence of Quality**

The four criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility for my study, I worked with my knowledgeable and experienced doctoral committee to vet the interview questions and the overall process for collecting data. The doctoral committee membership subject matter expertise supported the establishment of study credibility and an assurance associated with the accuracy of data attained. To ensure the quality and accuracy of data during the interview, I listened intently and tried not to interrupt any participant during their responses to prompts and associated flow of thought, other than offer an occasional “okay” to reflect that I was engaged and intently listening to the participant.

After each participant completed the interview question responses, I paused for a few minutes to allow the participant time to reflect and potentially to add any additional information. Sometime this led to the participant adding to the original statements as communicated or reverting to an earlier comment by offering more insights and detail to their personal perspective and experience. Sometimes the participants would share examples associated with their experience and perspectives during the interview process.

At the end of each participant's interview, I informed the participant the interview had ended and offer them an opportunity to add any additional information or comments for clarification. Some of the participants added additional comments and some did not choose to extend their interview through additional comments. After the participant added additional comments, I tied the comments back to the interview question associated with the comments. If there were no comments, I did not add any additional information.

### ***Researcher Journal***

As relates to a researcher journal, I maintained post-interview reflections. Although I assigned each participant an alias where their identity was not known during the data collection and data analysis process, at the end of each interview I added my reflection of the interview in the researcher journal which included any personal bias or connections I may have had with the participant or the discussion topics that may have been brought forward, including any biases that may have arisen during the interview. As each interview convened, I noted in the researcher journal words or phrases a participant



would use. For example, during the interview with participant FT3 I recorded the phrases, are not aware of who to go to; will do whatever they can.

During the interview with participant PT4, I recorded the phrases, meet their needs; incorporate technology to help them stay engaged to capture their attention. During the interview with participant FT7, I recorded the phrases one on one with students; personal connection; identify resources for tuition to keep students in school; meeting students where he was. I also noted any excitement or concerns for each participant as they responded to the interview questions. Additionally, the researcher journal was used as well to compare the comments captured for the transcript for each participant. This allowed me to reflect on my thoughts and ideas related to the interviews so that I could present an unbiased data analysis. As I was identifying the patterns and relationships as they aligned with the research questions 1.0 and 2.0, I relied on the research journal by reviewing each participants comments to identify the words and phrases that were repeatedly stated during the interviews. After looking at the patterns, I discovered that there was an alignment between the six part-time participants and the seven full-time participants relationships whereby the codes were combined to create the relationships identified amongst the six-part-time and seven full-time participants.

This process allowed me to identify the patterns amongst the participants that led to the identification of relationships amongst the participants which then helped with the development of the themes. In this process, using the research journal, I was able to create a handwritten table that shared the participant patterns and relationships in a manner that

helped me to see just how embedded the data collected was. I used my notes as a guide to stay on task and worked to help keep my personal bias from influencing the data collection and analysis. The research journal allowed me to enhance my critical thinking skills, curtail researcher bias and emotions, address ethical issues, provided feedback relevant to my development as a scholar, practitioner, and emerging leader in the social change movement.

### ***Member Checking***

I used member checking to maintain accuracy and credibility whereby the participants were allowed, following an interview, to read over their transcripts about the accuracy of the report commenting on the interpretation and completeness of the data (Merriam, 2009). I sent each participant a secured copy of their transcript to review for accuracy and to ensure validity of the data (See Appendix B). The use of member checking was important to this study to ensure the comments shared by the participants reflect what they stated. The transcripts were sent within one day after the interview with each participant. Each participant was asked to respond to the email indicating their approval of the transcript and my ability to use the transcript. The approval email was then maintained in a secured file on my password protected laptop. I did not receive responses with changes as they all were determined accurate by the participants. For example, participant FT13 commented:

After reading this.....I have no changes. I hope you can get something out of my rambling. Participant FT3 responded: Approved, thank you!

Participant FT2 responded:

Hello Ms. Branch,

The transcript approved. Please feel free to edit any homophone words the recorder translated for example, "councilor instead of counselor." I have no questions at this time. Best of luck to you!

Participant FT1 responded:

Yes, everything was good on my end. No changes needed.

Participant FT3 responded:

I consent.

Participant PT8 responded:

Approved, thank you!

Upon completion of member checking, the transcripts were saved to my password protected laptop and a jump drive that remains in my possession. I identified codes from the research to help me classify the major themes from the transcripts (Levitt et al., 2018). I highlighted keywords that appeared in the data to develop a thematic plan for creating the analysis. I continued to review transcripts to strengthen and refine the overall study produced by the analysis.

### ***Transferability***

To address transferability, I provided descriptions of my study to include the setting, data collection practices, the limits of transferability within the design, and data analysis procedures. By being transparent in how I conducted my study, other researchers

will be able to review and determine if this research process I used was applicable to their setting (Al Ghriwati, Winter, Greenlee, & Thompson (2018). I attempted to use care at all precautions to protect the participants' identity and as well as their positions. With the information provided by the participants and analyzed by me to determine key themes, other researchers should be able to obtain/or create new and relevant knowledge from my study.

### ***Use of Technology for Accuracy***

Once a transcript was complete and reviewed for accuracy, I listened to the recording multiple times to double check for transcription accuracy, while stopping several times during the review due to a word or phrase that was not written verbatim. I listened to the transcripts from the Zoom recording feature on my password-protected laptop making sure the wording in the transcript matched with the wording on the transcript saved in the files that were created and saved to my flash drive. I adjusted any words within the word-processed transcription files for accuracy.

### **Summation of Outcomes**

In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies

to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The data analysis results were derived from two overarching research questions that guided the study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?

RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?

A specific interview protocol (See Appendix B) was utilized during each interview, to pull perspectives from each participant. I obtained the study's data analysis results outcomes through the development of the study's two research questions. I discovered the study's first three themes (student awareness, engagement, and social interaction) through the development of RQ1. I obtained the study's last two themes (communication and resources) through the development of RQ2. In the following two sections, I discuss the data analysis results outcomes as related to the problem and research questions, and the larger body of literature.

### ***Outcomes in Relation to the Research Question***

In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. Study findings indicated the part-time and full-time faculty perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies effectiveness were a

problem at the current university. The participants also discussed needed feedback addressing how best to engage with students when they start and signs to identify when a student may drop a course. The participants shared there was a need for more financial resources to assist students when they are having financial problems with paying tuition or other necessities. The participants also discussed the need for technological improvements. In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline.

As a result of RQ1, I discovered three themes and three strength subthemes and seven weaknesses subthemes. The three themes that derived from RQ1 were student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, and social interaction. I discovered three strength subthemes revealed by RQ1 were orientation program, instructor interaction, and relationships. I discovered seven weaknesses themes revealed by RQ1 were barriers, faculty awareness, one on one, administrator support, instructional support, technology, and student activities. The above themes and subthemes were built from the six-part-time faculty and seven full-time faculty participant responses to the interview questions. They indicated that there were barriers associated with faculty awareness of the current formal student retention strategies and the barriers students faced to remain in class.

The findings of RQ2, uncovered two themes and four subthemes. The two themes from RQ2 were communication and resources. I discovered four subthemes revealed by RQ2 were warning alerts, financial aid, living expenses, tuition, administrative support. The above themes and subthemes were built from the six-part-time and seven full-time faculty participant responses to the interview questions. The theme related to RQ2, communication, was built from the part-time and full-time participants who indicated Acoryn University could improve its warning alert system to support part-time faculty and full-time faculty more. The theme related to RQ2, resources, was built from the part-time and full-time participants who indicated Acoryn University could improve its financial aid support to struggling students, improve its living expenses support to students who are in need, and identify a way to increase administrative support to help with improving student retention. The five themes identified problems with the current formal student retention strategies discovered through analyzing the data. Data collected from the interview question identified five themes that related to the overarching research questions. A total of thirty-two keywords and five themes were identified in the data analysis.

### ***Outcomes in Relation to the Larger Body of Literature***

In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current

student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. There was consistent alignment between the archive literature used within the original literature review from Bollinger et al. (2019); Haverila (2020); Lerdpornkulrat et al. (2018); Li and Wong (2019); Mertes and Jankoviak (2017); Page and Scott-Clayton (2016); Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018); and Tinto (2013) that aligned with the five themes identified within the study. The five themes identified in Table 17 from the study findings aligned with the literature review conducted to examine the perceptions of the full-time and part-time faculty.

**Table 17**

*Alignment of Themes and Subthemes to the Larger Body of Literature*

RQ 1.0 and RQ 2.0	Themes -	Subthemes (Strengths)	Subthemes (Weaknesses)
RQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	Student Awareness	Orientation Program	Barriers, Faculty Awareness
	Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy	Instructor Interaction	One on one, Administration /Instructional Support
	Social Interaction Amongst Faculty and Others	Relationships	Technology, Student Activities
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student	Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	Warning Alerts	
	Resources	Financial Aid,	



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retention at Acoryn  
University?

Living  
Expenses,  
Tuition  
Admin. Support

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**Alignment With Theme 1.** The literature review aligned with the findings about the need for identifying ways to bring more awareness of the resources available to students at the university. Theme 1 identified the need for the university to introduce a more initiative-taking role in helping students find current information designed to support students.

Study findings aligned with the fact students face many challenges. Mertes and Jankoviak (2017) supported the argument that non-traditional students in career-based colleges face similar challenges such as student working schedules, dependent care issues, life balance, motivation, and college procedures. The study finding also noted the need for students to be continuously made aware of the resources available to assist them when challenges are present that potentially create a problem for them and with retention.

Study findings aligned with the fact students must be provided with as well as make aware of services designed to help them remain in a course. Haverila (2020)

supported the argument colleges and universities must provide support services that are designed to assist students with being retained inclusive of academic help, support services, and faculty engagement.

**Alignment With Theme 2.** The literature review aligned with the findings about the need for student engagement. Theme 2 identified the need for faculty to be more engaged with the student throughout a course. The participants felt it was imperative for students to be motivated by the faculty and the university to help them continue their career plan. Tinto (2013) supported this argument that sharing students will lose momentum and interest before they become fully engaged in the university setting and are thus a higher risk of dropping out of college.

Study findings aligned with the fact students face many challenges. Mertes and Jankoviak (2017) supported the argument that non-traditional students in career-based colleges face similar challenges such as student working schedules, dependent care issues, life balance, motivation, and college procedures. The study finding also noted the need for students to be continuously made aware of the resources available to assist them when challenges are present that potentially create a problem for them and with retention.

Study findings aligned with the need for institutions to provide environments that engage students to want to continue and not drop out of a course or to be retained. Lerdpornkulrat et al. (2018) supported this argument sharing student engagement lies not only with students but also it was necessary for institutions to provide environments, conditions, and opportunities that motivate students to want to persist in college.

Lerdpornkulrat et al. (2018) and Tinto (2020) agreed institutional engagement and modes of motivating students play a key role in how students are retained

**Alignment With Theme 3.** The literature review aligned with the findings about the need for increased faculty and student interactions. Theme 3 identified the need for more social activities that could improve upon the social interaction between faculty and students. Ertesvag (2019) supported the argument instructional support aligns teacher-student interaction in the areas of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support study findings aligned with the importance of faculty and student interactions for faculty and student interactions in building relationships. Bollinger et al. (2019) also supported the argument that relationships between faculty, students, and administration be effective in improving student retention.

Based on the theme that emerged, faculty shared the need for more social activities between the university and the students designed to improve upon their social interaction with students. Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018) supported this argument sharing positive interactions between faculty and students have been known to increase the probability of student retention and student success. Page and Scott-Clayton (2016) supported the argument that challenges students face during the transition in college as well as while in college tend to influence whether they remain in college or not to pursue a degree.

**Alignment With Theme 4.** The literature review aligned with the findings whereby the faculty agreed increased communication with the student was imperative.

Theme 4 identified the need for the university to meet the student where they are. Faculty felt there was a need for the university to do a better job in communicating more frequently with students what was available to them as well as identify ways to reach out to them when a retention issue arises.

Study findings aligned with the fact the university must improve upon its efforts to communicate needed information with the students. Haverila (2020) supported the argument colleges and universities must provide support services that are designed to assist students with being retained inclusive of academic help, support services, and faculty engagement.

**Alignment With Theme 5.** The literature review aligned with the findings about the awareness of and the availability of more resources for students designed to assist with staying in school. Theme 5 identified the need for the university to introduce a more initiative-taking role in helping students find current resource information designed to support students.

Based on the interviews with the participants, many shared a lot of time students were not aware of resources available to them to help support their effort to remain school as well as other support. Li and Wong (2019) supported the argument that financial and family issues can have an impact on why students will leave college. Haverila et al. (2020) supported the argument that ineffective support services can impact the retention of students negatively, or they can make it worse by doing nothing at all.

Study findings aligned with the fact students leave college for several reasons. Haverila (2020) supported the argument that students leave for medical reasons, transferring to another college, anxiety, and career indecisiveness. Villano et al. (2018) and Yu (2015) supported the argument that if a student's needs are not addressed, they will not persist and will create retention problems for the school.

The findings revealed five themes and sixteen subthemes (seven strengths and nine weaknesses) within the context the problem addressed, the research questions, and the data collected and analyzed. Theme and subtheme aligned with the conceptual framework and the literature. As a result, the project deliverable was a policy recommendation to include a professional developmental program. Section 3 provides a description, rationale, review of the literature, project evaluation, and project implications for the proposed project.

### ***Outcomes in Relation to the Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. I discovered that the study's conceptual framework on student retention (Tinto, 2013) proved to be relevant to this study's outcomes associated with the codes, patterns, relationships, and themes identified. The study's five major themes of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance needed align with Tinto's (2013) theory on student retention,

acknowledging student departure, and the support of student retention. I discovered that all five themes emerged throughout the course of my study. Participants all discussed their initial concerns with the current formal student retention strategies utilized sharing the need for improvements designed to help with retaining students in the classroom.

The research questions examined the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the existing formal student retention strategies, and faculty perceptions related to ways to improve student retention. As the instructional faculty serve as the primary and consistent contact with students, the faculty play a major role in student retention and the attainment process (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Gauthier, 2016; Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016); as such, faculty perceptions of student retention strategy effectiveness may support the development of a better understanding of the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016). During the interview with the participants, I waited for responses from the participants that aligned with Mertes and Jankoviak (2016), revealing truths about how the faculty felt about the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies.

Tinto's (2013) theory focus on the impact of academic involvement aligns with the findings from my research, where I identified three major outcomes that emerged from the study's participant interviews: Student Engagement, Faculty/Administrative Support, and Social Interaction. Faculty felt there was a need for the university to do a better job in

communicating more frequently with students what is available to them as well as identify ways to reach out to them when a retention issue arises.

Tinto's (2013) theory believed student retention while in college was built upon a student's experience aligns with the overarching results of the study that the six-part-time and seven full-time participants in this study responded with discomfoting statements sharing their concerns of the current formal student retentions strategies and possible ways to improve student awareness at the university about the resources available to students to help retain them in a course. Tinto's (2013) theory focused on the impact of academic and student involvement aligns with what many shared that a lot of time students were not aware of resources available to them to help support their effort to remain school as well as other support. The participants believed there was a need to make significant changes to the current formal student retentions strategies inclusive of adding administrative and instructional support.

### **Project Deliverable**

In 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current student retention program are falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. Archival data supplied by the director

(personal communication, May 4, 2020), aligned with the local statistics, and national statistics (ACICS, 2018). The descriptive data obtained via the part-time and full-time faculty participant interview aligned with the archival data. I identified three major outcomes that emerged from the study's participant interviews: Student Engagement, Faculty/Administrative Support, and Social Interaction. My analysis of the findings leads towards a discussion of the most appropriate project, based on the findings achieved. There were four project genres under consideration. The project genres under consideration include an evaluation report, a curriculum plan, professional development/training curriculum and materials, and a policy recommendation with details. As this study was not an evaluation study, the remaining project options available include three project genres: 1) a curriculum plan; 2) a professional developmental/training curriculum and materials; and 3) a policy recommendation with details.

The evaluation report genre was only focused upon an evaluation study, which this study does not reflect (Posavac, 2015). As such, this project genre was rejected outright. The site study focused on gathering perspectives of the full-time and part-time faculty concerning the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies. The curriculum plan would be an appropriate project outcome and would include a purpose, designate the level of learners, define the scope, and articulate the sequence of events (Lunenburg, 2011). Further the curriculum plan would include a description of the material, units of instruction, and associated lessons in detail that would be inclusive of objectives, activities, assessments, teacher notes, and appropriate evaluation plans. The



details of the curriculum plan are also provided, noting the minimum nine-week length of the curriculum plan. Based upon the data analysis and subsequent findings, my professional judgement leads me to reflect a recognition that a curriculum plan would not be the most appropriate project deliverable as an outcome of the results. The outcome of the results suggested the development of professional development or training event that would benefit the part-time and full-time faculty. As such, a curriculum plan would not be the best genre. The findings from this study did not suggest a curriculum plan. As such, curriculum plan would not be the best project.

The findings from this study suggest a professional development event such as a community of practice as founded by Wenger-Trayner (Johnson et al., 2019). The part-time and full-time faculty would be in places that would be able to benefit from the training sessions, a curriculum, and materials that would be made available during a three-day professional development workshop. The findings from this study could create a community of social learning in landscapes such as blackboards that are asynchronous, allowing the engagement and sharing of skills designed to enhance and strengthen a study topic within a study site. Additionally, should the findings from the research suggest the most appropriate project to be the professional development/training curriculum with associated materials, a minimum of three-day workshop would include a timeline, activities, trainer notes, an implementation plan, and an evaluation plan. Based on upon the data analysis and subsequent findings, my professional judgement leads me to suggest that the most appropriate project deliverable as an outcome of the results was a

professional development/training curriculum and materials genre. Although a professional development/training curriculum and materials genre appears to be the most appropriate and viable approach for the project, the inclusion of professional development as a policy change recommendation would ensure the development of a professional development or training event that would benefit the part-time and full-time faculty. As such, a professional development project alone without being a part of a policy recommendation would not be a viable project.

### ***Professional Development Training Curriculum and Materials***

A professional development/training curriculum and materials project should include a purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and a target audience (Ganapati & Ritchie, 2021). The project should include an outline as well as a timeline, activities, and notes. Materials should also include a slideshow presentation along with an assessment plan or evaluation plan (Ganapati & Ritchie, 2021). The project could include a detailed hour-by-hour plan with a minimum of three full days of training. In this study, I attempted to learn the perceptions part-time and full-time faculty had about student retention strategies effectiveness at a career-based college. I sought to gain a perspective to historical insights related to the study's topic. I collected data related to topics such as student engagement, social interaction, and faculty and administrative support. Based upon the depth of data analysis and resulting findings, I am led towards a recognition that a professional development that includes training curriculum and materials may be an appropriate project outcome. It would be appropriate to incorporate the historical archival

data, review of the literature, conceptual framework, participant interview data, and previous practices that existed at Acoryn University as the foundation to create positive change related to the study's problem and purpose statement.

### ***Policy Recommendation With Detail***

The policy recommendation includes the background of the existing policy/problem and a summary of analysis and findings (Ifenthaler & Yau, 2019). It also presents major evidence from both literature and research. An outline of recommendations may be provided that was connected to the evidence as it relates to the intended audience. The findings from this study may suggest a policy recommendation that outlines viable recommendations that are not only connected to the findings but are also related to the target audience in focus. Based upon the data analysis and subsequent findings, my professional judgement leads me to believe that a policy recommendation with detail could be a viable solution that includes a professional development component outcome such as discussed in the professional development genre. The outcome of the results suggested the development of professional development or training event that would benefit the part-time and full-time faculty. This would include the integration of a professional development project into the current formal policies and procedures at Acoryn University to improve or revise the current formal student retention strategies. As such, a policy recommendation with detail would be an appropriate project deliverable.

### Section 3. The Project

#### **Introduction**

Starting in 2008, faculty at Acoryn University implemented a set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the university's retention rate. Poor retention had been an issue for years, the campus director shared. The problem was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short and to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. I developed a policy recommendation report based on the study findings about student retention strategies that faculty perceive as effective.

The faculty participants attributed the university's student retention issues to a lack of awareness among students of resources available to them, the need for more interaction among faculty and students, and the need for more communication from the administration. I interviewed six part-time participants and seven full-time faculty. Based upon the study findings, I designed policy recommendations that call for development of the following programs and initiatives at Acoryn University: (a) a professional development program, (b) a robust notification system, (c) learning communities to improve student retention, and (d) an annual orientation for students. Implementation of these policy recommendations may address the study's thematic findings of barriers to faculty awareness; one-on-one with students; technology and student activities; and

financial aid, tuition, and administrative support. This study may promote positive social change by increasing awareness among part-time and full-time faculty of effective student retention strategies to support student retention.

### **Background of the Problem**

In 2008, faculty at Acoryn University implemented a set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the university's retention rate. The problem was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short. The study's 13 participants described their experience as part-time and full-time faculty at Acoryn University. The findings were aligned with the study's conceptual framework, Tinto's (2013) theory of student retention. Key themes were student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication among faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. The participants perceived Acoryn University as lacking effective policies and strategies to address retention.

### **Background of the Existing Policy**

The policy recommendation report is based on the study findings about the phenomenon of the effectiveness of student retention strategies feedback. A persistently declining student retention rate issue within a career-based university, despite the implementation of formal student retention strategies that were implemented as early as

2008 retention of students at the institution had been a problem for several years (Campus Director, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

Acoryn University mission statement states:

It is the policy of Acoryn University to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development.

Recently, Acoryn University hired a Dean of Student Services. In this role, the Dean of Student Services has begun to address areas associated with student recruitment, student retention, completion, and professional development.

The Dean of Student Services goal is to bring and support student focused initiatives at Acoryn University. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University. There was a total of thirteen interviews consisting of six part-time and seven full-time participants. The interviews led to study findings indicating five themes of: student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance.

### **Summary of Analysis and Findings and Recommendations**

There was a total of thirteen interviews consisting of six part-time and seven full-time participants. Thirteen faculty were recruited through purposeful sampling and provided insights to the research question through semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. The interviews led to study findings indicating five themes of: student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance (Clark & Veale, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Mertes et al., 2016).

The project was based was framed within the problem and purpose of the study. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. This policy recommendation paper genre is the most appropriate choice to provide guidance noting there was a problem where the institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline, and the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at the institution (Bolliger et al, 2018; Ifenthaler & Yau, 2019; Johnson et al., 2019; Lodico et al., 2010). Four policy recommendations naturally developed out of

the study findings, that aligned with the data analysis coding and thematic understanding.

The suggested four policy recommendations are: (a) develop a professional development program to improve student awareness and student interaction, (b) develop learning communities to improve student engagement, (c) develop a robust early alert system, and (d) develop annual orientations for students. The policy recommendations are strategic responses to the study findings, may be novel to the institution, and require stakeholders to think creatively to successfully implement the recommendations presented within this informative proposal (Creswell, 2017; Ifenthaler et al., 2019).

This study promoted social change by offering increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty perceptions associated with effective student retention strategies. As such, it follows that the policy recommendation supported the organization's mission, vision, and values of this forward learning organization. The mission of the institution was to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. With the implementation of policy recommendations presented in this policy recommendation report, the institution will be able uphold its mission of improving its workforce programs and services available to the part-time and full-time faculty as well as the services to enhance student success. The promoting of social change was important as it presents an opportunity to bring about needed changes that will affect the local campus overall.

### ***Student Awareness***



Theme 1 emerged from the analysis of RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? The mission of the institution was to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. This policy recommendation aligns with Acoryn University's mission, vision, and values because part of the institution's mission is to provide a cohesive education while also promoting services to help faculty and students succeed. In the study findings, the part-time and full-time faculty stated there was a gap in the process of helping faculty aware of student issues in a class as well as students being aware of resources available to them to succeed in class. According to Macalster.edu (2018), student challenges vary in a multitude of areas. Non-traditional students in career-based colleges face similar challenges such as student working schedules, dependent care issues, life balance, motivation, and college procedures (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2017).

### ***Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy***

Theme 2 emerged from the analysis of research question one, RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University. Tinto (2013) recognized that students will lose momentum and interest before they become fully engaged in the university setting and are thus a higher risk of dropping out of college. The mission of the institution was to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce

programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. This policy recommendation aligned with Acoryn University's mission, vision, and values because part of the institution's mission is to provide a cohesive education while also promoting services to help faculty and students succeed. In the study findings, the part-time and full-time faculty stated there was a gap in the process of helping faculty and student engage in class as well as ways for student to engage outside the classroom. The research question resulted in several different responses from the full-time and part-time faculty, but most of the faculty stated they did reach out to students and were very engaged with ensuring students remained in contact with them.

### ***Social Interaction***

Theme 3 emerged with the analysis of research question number 1, RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? According to Haverila (2020), students need to function effectively within an environment. The mission of the institution was to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. This policy recommendation aligned Acoryn University's mission, vision, and values because part of the institution's mission is to provide a cohesive education while also promoting services to help faculty and students succeed. In the study findings, the part-time and full-time faculty stated there was a gap in the process of helping faculty and students interact inside and outside of class at times.

The research question resulted in several similar responses from the full-time and part-time faculty, but the majority felt there was a need for more social activities that could improve upon the social interaction between faculty and students. Based on the theme that emerged, the full-time and part-time faculty shared the need for more social interaction between them and students as well as the need for the university to consider offering activities designed to improve upon the interaction when a student starts to the point of graduation.

### *Communication Amongst Faculty and Students*

Theme number 4 emerged from the analysis of research question number 2, RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? According to Perkins-Holtsclaw and Lampley (2018), positive interactions between faculty and students have been known to increase the probability of student retention and student success. The mission of the institution was to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. This policy recommendation aligned Acoryn University's mission, vision, and values because part of the institution's mission is to provide a cohesive education while also promoting services to help faculty and students succeed. In the study findings, the part-time and full-time faculty stated there was a gap in the process faculty and students communicated with one another which was a challenge. The research question resulted in similar responses from the full-time and part-time faculty whereby the faculty agreed communication with

the students was imperative. Meeting the students where they are was one comment 90% of the faculty agreed upon. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom.

### ***Resources to Assist with Attendance***

Theme 5 emerged from the analysis of research number 2, What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The mission of the institution is to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. This policy recommendation aligned with Acoryn University's mission, vision, and values because part of the institution's mission is to provide a cohesive education while also promoting services to help faculty and students succeed. In the study findings, the part-time and full-time faculty stated there was a gap in the process of helping faculty help students identify resources available to them to succeed in class. The research question resulted in several different responses from the faculty; however, the majority agreed resources need to be made available more readily to students to assist with remaining in a course or being retained. Many participants agreed the identification of resources such as food, transportation, technological assistance, affordable tuition, and financial aid were needed. Based on the interviews with the

participants, many shared a lot of time students were not aware of resources available to them to help support their effort to remain school as well as other support. As a result, sometimes students would just not return.

### **Major Evidence from Literature and Research**

I compiled major evidence from literature and research associated with the conceptual framework, as well as a review of the broader problem to address the multiple components associated with the topic of this study. The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. This project addressed the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. Additionally, I incorporated evidence from related literature to support the evidence related to the findings and policy recommendations. The purpose of this review of literature was to find evidence to support the study focus. The evidence was compiled from literature and research related to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution. Presented are the parallels between the part-time and full-time faculty and the literature that surrounds the effectiveness of student retention strategies at the institution. The literature and research discovered assisted the reader in better understanding the perceptions of the participants in this study at the institution. This evidence has been integrated within the policy recommendations presented below.

In this policy recommendation report, I intend to develop recommendations that will address the finding of this study that were student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources. In the development of the study findings, the thematic analysis of the findings suggested the need for the institution to develop practices to improve certain systems currently in place. The policy recommendation offered positive social change within the realm of the part-time and full-time participant feedback. The above study findings will be addressed through the policy recommendations that will suggest the development of a robust alert system to better monitor student attendance, the development of a professional development program, the development of learning communities to improve student engagement, and the development of annual orientations for students.

### **Recommendations Connected to the Evidence and Audience**

In formulating a policy recommendation paper based on the findings of this study, several recommended initiatives were considered for development at the institution. All recommendations presented in this section are to assist the institution in bringing awareness to improving the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies. Based on the findings of the study and literature, the following four recommendations are highlighted in this policy recommendation paper:

- Recommendation One: Student Awareness Professional Development Program

- Recommendation Two: Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
- Recommendation Three: Robust Early Alert System Process
- Recommendation Four: Annual Orientations for Students

The four policy recommendations aligned with the institution's mission, values, and strategic goals. The successful implementation of these policy recommendations will require the cooperation of the institution part-time and full-time faculty, the vice president of academic affairs and student services, student success coaches, and the dean of student services. In Table 18, I have presented the alignment of the four policy recommendations to the study's two research questions, and the findings of the study. The policy recommendations were developed to address the study's thematic analysis finding of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources.

**Table 18***Alignment of Research Questions and Findings to Policy Recommendations*

RQ 1.0 and RQ 2.0	Findings	Policy Recommendation
IRQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution?	Student Awareness	Develop a Professional Development Program
	Social Interaction Amongst Faculty and Others	Develop a Professional Development Program
	Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy	Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution?	Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	Develop a Robust Early Alert System
	Resources	Develop Annual Orientations for Students

**Recommendation One: Student Awareness Professional Development Program**

The first recommendation is to develop a professional development program to improve student awareness where faculty can learn to come together with students to share



information. Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Borowiec et al., 2022). The key is to ensure the training is relevant to the practice and the participants. Offering professional development activities as a mixed approach or both formal and informal methods offer more opportunities for faculty to grow. (Pham, 2021). Formal activities include taking formal courses online or face to face or attending conferences. Informal activities could consist of group sessions or personal research (Pham 2021). Most institutions participate in more conventional activities such as workshops to aid in career professional development (Pham, 2021). There will be one professional developmental workshop to address the issue of student awareness and student interaction. The participants will be required to attend either face to face on campus or virtually depending upon the time frame. This same professional developmental workshop could be offered to others as an option, but the intent to make this training mandatory for the participants addressed in the study.

Student awareness has become the focus of attention even more so than student retention (Tight, 2019). The responsibility of student retention and engagement has shifted from being the student's responsibility to that of the university or higher education institutions (Tight, 2019). Student engagement is a learning activity (Hekmat et al., 2022). It is evidenced in this study that student engagement is necessary as perceived by the participants. The development of student engagement is important in context where

students and faculty come together to share information in their quest for information (Hekmat et al., 2022).

**Connection to Evidence.** The first policy recommendation is aligned with RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution?

This recommendation will address the finding theme of student awareness at the institution. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported awareness as a challenge not only for the students but also for the faculty as well. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and engagement is necessary as perceived by the participants. The development of student engagement is important in context where students and faculty come together to share information in their quest for information (Hekmat et al., 2022).

***Faculty Professional Development.*** Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Pham, 2021). The key is to ensure the training is relevant to the practice and the participants. Most institutions participate in more conventional activities such as workshops to aid in career professional development (Pham, 2021). Offering professional development activities as a mixed approach or both formal and informal methods offer more opportunities for faculty to grow. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and

engagement is a must as perceived by the participants sharing the need for more insights on how to address student awareness and engagement (Borrowiec et al., 2022).

**Connection to Audience.** The first policy recommendation will require the dean of students to address the concerns pertaining to faculty and student awareness and engagement. This policy recommendation will aid in improving the challenge for faculty and students as perceived by the part-time and full-time faculty. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, any updates during the year will be shared via the Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Student Success Coaches. No formal evaluation of the faculty would be necessary.

### **Recommendation Two: Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement**

The second policy recommendation will be the creation of learning communities to help improve student engagement. Learning communities have been prominent throughout the course of higher education (Fink & Inkela, 2015). Learning communities encompass self-regulated learning (Azzaim, et al., 2022). Learning communities are designed to bring together students in smaller groups that are linked together for a particular term or course (Azzaim et al., 2022; McMahon, M., 2021). In this setting, it is hoped that students will engage with course material and support one another socially and academically, thereby increasing their chances of succeeding academically and ultimately graduating (Azzaim et al., 2022). It was evidenced in this study by some participants,

students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor. The creation of leaning communities can potentially improve student engagement as well as interactions between students in similar programs.

**Connection to Evidence.** Like the first policy recommendation, this policy recommendation also aligned with RQ1. It was evidenced in this study by some participants, students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor. This recommendation will address the finding theme student engagement as a retention strategy and student interaction amongst faculty and students at the institution. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported faculty and student engagement and interacting was a challenge in some cases.

**Student Engagement.** Student engagement is important to proactively addressing student retention while creating a campus wide lifelong bond with future graduates (Bolliger et al., 2018; Gay et al., 2020; Lerdpornkularat et al., 2018). When students are fully engaged, focused, and present they experience flow (Gay et al., 2020, Muljana & Lou, 2019).

High touch student engagement strategies connect students to the instructor and other students through course orientation, session announcements, group assignments, and discussion forums (Gay et al., 2022). The flipped classroom is a new innovative model

where presentations normally done in the classroom by the instructor are given to student as homework are done in the classroom where the instructor becomes the facilitator allowing the students to be actively engaged with lesson content (Yeboah, Ampadu, & Ahwireng, 2020).

***Social Integration.*** Mechanisms for integration are both formal (interactions with faculty and staff and other institutional experiences) and informal (extracurricular activities and peer group interactions, including study session) (Flores-Caballero, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system, but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. Student retention and integration has been associated with faculty support and interest in student success, but the lack of support from faculty can have a negative impact on students' motivation to successfully complete a course (Mitchell et al., 2019). Additionally, according to Bowman (2023) when students feel a sense of belonging, retention is likely to improve when students are made to feel a part of something or as belonging.

***Social Interaction.*** Communication and social interaction amongst students and between teachers and students represent a major factor in the decision to withdraw as well as technology issues (Flores-Caballero, 2020). Some participants shared that students sometimes would have technological issues and would drop a course without reaching out to the instructor. Personalized communication strategies encourage regular and ongoing

interaction with the instructor and student (Gay & Betts, 2020). Gay & Betts (2020) argued at the institution this would involve the faculty and students being involved and active in discussion forums, such as using the student's name when responding to post; providing customized feedback and having meetings or group via Zoom regarding assignments or as needed (Gay et al., 2020).

Providing creative feedback improves interaction between faculty and students; therefore, enhancing a student's written communication skills, while demonstrating to students that the instructor is interested in their success (Gay et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2018). It was stated by some participants that students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor.

**Connection to Audience.** The second policy recommendation, like the first will require the dean of students to address the concerns pertaining to student engagement. This policy recommendation will aid in improving the student engagement face by faculty and student as perceived by the part-time and full-time faculty. The development of learning communities will promote self-learning culture at the institution while also positively impacting the student body as having a sense of control over their future to succeed.

### **Recommendation Three: Develop a Robust Early Alert System**

The third policy recommendation is to improve the current early alert system that is designed to track students in online courses but also needed to track students who are attending face to face. With the assistance of the participants in this study, develop a robust early alert system. Early alert systems are designed to inform the campus community of several issues including academic issues, such as attendance and participation or social issues such as problems with family, friends, and work (Villano et al., 2018). An early alert system will target all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom.

**Connection to Evidence.** This recommendation is aligned with RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution? It was evidenced in this study that the early alert system could be improved with the inclusion of how to deal with students missing a course over a period or who just stopped coming. Early alert systems are designed to inform the campus community of several issues including academic issues, such as attendance and participation or social issues such as problems with family, friends, and work (Villano et al., 2018). This recommendation will address the finding theme communication amongst faculty and students. The goal of a robust early alert system would help increase awareness of resources available to students so they can get the assistance they need to be successful in a course (Villano et al., 2018). There are many solutions in the literature to review to help a student's concern to help put them on the path to succeed in a course.

Early alert systems and academic support can have a profound effect to help a student succeed. Flores-Caballero (2020) noted that if higher education institutions do not promote academic and social integration, retention will become unstable, and students may drop out.

***Early Alert Systems.*** An early alert system is a strategy for institutions to identify students who are struggling in their academic career so the university can intervene (Delmas & Childs, 2021; Villano et al., 2018). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students. The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. The interventions designed to capture students struggling vary depending on a student's need (Delmas et al., 2021). This could range from conversation with counselors to utilizing academic support or attending tutoring (Villano et al., 2018). The participants also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved. The goal is to increase student awareness of resources available to students so they may get the assistance needed (Harrison, Villano, Lynch, & Chen, 2021).

***Academic Support.*** The purpose of academic support is to complement the learning in a classroom (Matabane & Matabane, 2021). Based on the theme that emerged,



faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. Some programs are designed to provide peer to peer tutoring designed to provide support for students to work with another student to help integrate them socially into a university (Matabane et al., 2021). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students.

**Connection to Audience.** The third policy recommendation, like the first two will require the dean of students and other administrative support to address the concerns pertaining to improving the current early alert system. This policy recommendation will aid in improving notifications targeted to all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom. This recommendation will address the finding theme communication amongst faculty and students at the institution.

#### **Recommendation Four: Develop Annual Orientations for Students**

The fourth recommendation is to develop annual orientations for students to improve student awareness all year long where faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes at the institution. Student orientation is a set of activities and programs designed to help students adjust to college (Student Orientation in Higher Education

Institutions, 2021). Orientation activities can be conducted online or in face-to-face settings and are usually held on a course of a day or two (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). Most orientation programs are designed or focus on academic skills and information sharing that students need to be successful in the classroom (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021).

**Connection to Evidence.** This recommendation is also aligned with RQ2. Sometimes student orientation programs can be so preoccupied with practical and academic preparation that they tend to not include social orientation for students (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). Students are sometimes given incomplete information when it is shared by departments that are not as informed by an institution's student services staff (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). This is evidenced in this study as shared by some of the participants who commented that it was a challenge for faculty and students to remain informed or aware of services available to students. Most orientation programs are designed or focus on academic skills and information sharing that students need to be successful in the classroom (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). This recommendation will address the finding's theme resources amongst faculty and students at the institution making them more aware of changes throughout the year.

**Financial Resources.** According to the participants in the study, sometimes the students as well as faculty were not aware of the financial resources available to students.

Participants constantly expressed concerns with identifying ways to deal with cost as well as finding additional resources to assist students with staying in a course to keep from having to drop a course. Li and Wong (2019) supported the argument at the institution that financial and family issues can have an impact on why students leave college. Haverila et al. (2020) supported the same argument about the institution that ineffective support services can impact the retention of students negatively, or than can make things worse if nothing is done. The participants reported that student awareness was a challenge for the students as well as the faculty. Viallano et al. (2018) additionally supported the argument at the institution that if a student's needs are not addressed, they will not persist and will create retention problems for the school. The participant's also reported students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course.

**Connection to Audience.** The fourth policy recommendation, like the third policy recommendation will require the dean of students and other administrative support to address the concerns pertaining to providing timely resource information to students while also providing direction to faculty and staff how best to direct students in need of the resources. This policy recommendation will aid in ensuring faculty are abreast as well of all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom. This recommendation will address the finding's theme resources to assist the students at the institution.

### **Goals of the Proposed Project**

Offered are project goals within this section that align with the study's problem at the institution, was in 2008 the institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. Thematic Analysis of the findings revealed that the institution had issues with student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, student interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist students. The goal of this project was to address the needs of the institution that will create a positive impact on the campus of the institution. To address the study's findings, the following goals for this project are as follows:

1. Implement campus wide professional development workshops for the organization to improve student and faculty awareness of available resources and improve faculty and student interaction inside and outside the classroom.
2. The implementation of learning communities to improve student learning and engagement amongst each other.
3. Enhance the early alert system to target all students and not just students recently enrolled.
4. Make resources known to students on a continuous basis with annual student orientations.

***Goal One***

The first goal of this project is aligned with the issues of student awareness and social interaction amongst the part-time and full-time faculty at the institution. The participants reported that student awareness was a challenge for the students as well as the faculty. The participant's also reported students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course. Students would reach out to them, but the student found it hard to get current information or was unaware of who to go for help. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services along with collaborating with the Dean of Student Services and Student Success Coaches will work together to develop a professional developmental workshop reflection of the challenge shared in this finding to support and improve student awareness of the resources at the university as well as develop a workshop addressing faculty and student interaction with on another inside and outside the course room. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, any updates during the year will be shared via the Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Student Success Coaches. No formal evaluation of the faculty would be necessary.

***Goal Two***

The second goal of the project aligned with the issue of student engagement as a student retention strategy. The six part-time and seven full-time faculty reported students needed to feel a connection with other students as well as the instructor thereby increasing

their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than the instructor. About 90% of the participants' felt engagement was imperative to motivating students to continue their plan from the start to the end. Some participants acknowledged students would appreciate their support which would benefit the retention of students in their classroom. With the assistance of the Dean of Student Services, the Vice President of Academic Affairs will appoint a team to research the feasibility of creating learning communities for students who are struggling in a course. This team would consist of the Student Success Coaches for input. The learning communities will be designed in a manner to bring students together in groups linked to like courses for at least one term. The Student Success Coaches will be charged with connecting with an assigned learning community to monitor throughout the planned year or however the group is together. The goal is to see an improvement in student engagement and retention whereby students can support one another academically and socially.

### ***Goal Three***

The third goal of the project aligned with the issue of communication amongst faculty and students. The Vice-President of Academic Affairs will work with the Dean of Student Services to enhance the current early alert system that appears to be an issue for the institution. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating

with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. The participants also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved. The Dean of Student Services will work collaboratively with the Student Success Coaches to develop an improved alert system that will be designed to alert in various circumstances, for example, if a student needs to contact a professor, make a referral for tutoring, if a student appears to lack engagement in a class, a student is in danger of not passing a course, or if a student appears to need counseling. The Dean of Student Services will be responsible for ensuring the Student Success Coaches manage the alerts and they should be. An annual evaluation of the system's effectiveness will be performed by the Dean of Student Services.

#### ***Goal Four***

The fourth goal for this project aligned with the issue of resources for the students designed to help them remain in a course. The participants noted it was a challenge for faculty and students to remain informed or aware of services available. The Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will initiate the development of an orientation program twice throughout the year for all students. The intent of this initiative will be to ensure students know and have all the resources they need to remain in a course. The need to offer more financial aid to

support students and to help them be retained in class was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Part-time and full-time participants shared their concern for more financial support for students to help them remain in class. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will develop an informational workshop for faculty sharing information they can have handy to help direct students where to go for help at any point before dropping a class.

### **Rationale**

Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate in 2008. The problem that provided the focus of this study was that, despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The research questions developed were: 1) What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University? 2) What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University? The research questions examined the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the existing formal student retention strategies, and faculty perceptions related to ways to improve student retention. Thirteen faculty were recruited through purposeful sampling and provided insights to the research question through



semi-structured interviews. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University.

The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve the effectiveness of student retention strategies. I designed four policy recommendations based on Tinto's (2013) conceptual framework on student retention.

### **Addressing the Problem through the Content of the Project**

An updated policy recommendation that includes a professional developmental workshop to enhance and help improve the current formal student retention strategies effectiveness as perceived by the full-time and part-time faculty was because my participants stated the need for faculty and student awareness, student engagement with faculty and administration, social interaction with students, improved communication, and the availability and awareness of resources to help support and retain students at Acoryn University.

I identified students do not return or are hard to retain where there are financial, academic issues, life issues and social concerns. The full-time and part-time faculty stated these reasons during their interviews. A policy recommendation that includes the inclusion of a professional development workshop will help enhance the university current retention program with equipping the university full-time and part-time faculty with the skills need to implement solutions designed to increase student retention strategy effectiveness. The

solutions shared may lead to improving the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University.

The inclusion of a professional development workshop once or twice a year would address the current formal student retention strategies based on the themes identified in this study; student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance.

Part-time and full-time faculty were required to identify ways to manage retention in their classroom utilizing the current formal student retention strategies. In some cases, faculty were unaware how best to improve the process of helping improve student awareness as well as their own awareness of tools designed to help them retain their students in the classroom. The use of early alerts could be enhanced to identify students who are having retention problems early in a course so the part-time and full-time faculty could intervene to help the student to help them remain in a class if the faculty knows what is going on with a student. The interventions needed would vary depending on what the student needs are. The goal to improve the early alert system would be to increase the awareness of the resources available to faculty students for them to receive help (Habley et al., 2012). Improving faculty engagement with their students will help to ensure students are willing to persist with their studies. Study findings shared by the participants suggested the need for faculty to engage more with their students. My suggestion would be for Acoryn University to offer the part-time and full-time workshop design to help

improve practices in the classroom such as discussion concerning internships and learning communities. This would ensure the perceived perception by the students that the university and faculty are engaged in the student's success.

The part-time and full-time participants created their own techniques to interact with their students without any formal process design. My suggestion would be for Acoryn University to create formal opportunities for faculty to interact with students. The creation of peer group activities such as study groups, peer group activities could be created to help support student retention. The part-time and full-time participants noted the need for one-on-one sessions and group activities to improve student interactions with faculty and administration. and with one another. The creation of this workshop will enhance the part-time and full-time participant interactions with students socially.

Many of the participants noted communication between faculty and administration for students was a challenge when trying to reach out to students. A workshop component to improve the ongoing interaction between part-time and full-time faculty as well and the students would ensure procedures are in place to improve personalized communication. Study findings suggested Acoryn university did not have strategies consistently used and designed to improve communication with students. A professional development workshop could include training the faculty and administration in how to have meetings with students via Zoom, video feedback on assignments, and other personalized communication such as texting.

Study findings from the part-time and full-time participants suggested students as well as the faculty were a lot of times unaware of resources available to students and the resources designed to assist the part-time and full-time faculty with retaining students in the classroom. A workshop addressing targeted financial strategies for students in need would ensure students know the options available before dropping a class. The inclusion of an annual workshop addressing financial strategies and offerings would ensure the part-time and full-time faculty are aware of all the current resources available to the faculty and students designed to improve student retention in the classroom.

### **Review of the Literature**

I compiled major evidence from literature and research associated with the conceptual framework, as well as a review of the broader problem to address the multiple components associated with the topic of this study. The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. This project will address the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. Additionally, I incorporated evidence from related literature to support the evidence related to the findings and policy recommendations. The purpose of this review of literature was to find evidence to support the study focus. Evidence was compiled from literature and research related to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution. Presented are the parallels between the part-time and full-time faculty and the

literature that surrounds the effectiveness of student retention strategies at the institution.

The literature and research discovered will assist the reader in better understanding the perceptions of the participants in this study at the institution.

In Section 1, I provided a literature review regarding the relevant literature associated with the conceptual framework, as well as a review of the broader problem to address the multiple components associated with the topic of this study. I addressed literature that highlighted a representative critical analysis of the literature associated with the broader problem, representing a discussion related to faculty perceptions, student retention, student retention strategies, and student retention theories that support the main assertion of the problem statement that, in 2008, Acoryn University (pseudonym) implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study is that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline.

For this literature review, I focused on the genre of a policy recommendation paper. I first researched literature that specifically applied to the conceptual framework used for this study, breaking the solutions in to categories: academic integration solutions and social integration solutions with the inclusion of the categories: faculty engagement, resources, and professional development for full-time and part-time faculty and administrators. The first literature review below includes information about: (1) *academic integration*, (2) *early alert system* (3) *academic support*, (4) *social integration* (5) *social interaction*, (6) *student engagement*, (7) *financial resources*, and (8) *faculty professional*

*development.* For the second literature review in this section, I focused on the genre of a policy recommendation report along with their history and implications for social change. This includes a section focusing specifically on (a) the history of educational policy in the United States, (b) the purpose of a policy recommendation report, and (c) the implications of the policy recommendation report for positive social change.

### **Academic Integration Designed to Support Students**

There are many solutions in the literature to review to help a student's concern to help put them on the path to succeed in a course. Early alert systems and academic support can have a profound effect to help a student succeed. Flores-Caballero (2020) noted that if higher education institutions do not promote academic and social integration, retention will become unstable, and students may drop out.

#### ***Early Alert Systems***

An early alert system is a strategy for institutions to identify students who are struggling in their academic career so the university can intervene (Delmas & Childs, 2021; Villano et al., 2018). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students. The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. The interventions designed to capture students struggling vary depending on a student's need (Delmas et al., 2021). This could range from conversation with counselors to utilizing academic support or attending tutoring (Villano et al., 2018). The participants

also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved. The goal is to increase student awareness of resources available to students so they may get the assistance needed (Harrison, Villano, Lynch, & Chen, 2021).

### ***Academic Support***

The purpose of academic support is to complement the learning in a classroom (Matabane & Matabane, 2021). Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. Some programs are designed to provide peer to peer tutoring designed to provide support for students to work with another student to help integrate them socially into a university (Matabane et al., 2021). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students.

### **Social Integration Among Students**

Mechanisms for integration are both formal (interactions with faculty and staff and other institutional experiences) and informal (extracurricular activities and peer group interactions, including study session) (Flores-Caballero, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system, but indicated the need for

the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. Student retention and integration has been associated with faculty support and interest in student success, but the lack of support from faculty can have a negative impact on students' motivation to successfully completing a course (Lee, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019).

### ***Social Interaction***

Communication and social interaction amongst students and between teachers and students represent a major factor in the decision to withdraw as well as technology issues (Flores-Caballero, 2020). Some participants shared that students sometimes would have technological issues and would drop a course without reaching out to the instructor. Personalized communication strategies encourage regular and ongoing interaction with the instructor and student (Gay & Betts, 2019). Gay and Betts (2019) argued at Acoryn University this would involve the faculty and students being involved and active in discussion forums, such as using the student's name when responding to post; providing customized feedback and having meetings or group via Zoom regarding assignments or as needed (Gay et al., 2019).

Providing creative feedback improves interaction between faculty and students; therefore, enhancing a student's written communication skills, while demonstrating to students that the instructor is interested in their success (Gay et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2018). It was stated by some participants that students needed to feel a connection with other



students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor.

### **Student Engagement Strategies to Connect Students to a Course**

Student engagement is important to proactively addressing student retention while creating a campus wide lifelong bond with future graduates (Bolliger et al., 2018; Gay et al., 2020; Lerdpornkularat, et al., 2018). When students are fully engaged, focused, and present they experience flow (Gay et al., 2020, Muljana & Lou, 2019).

High touch student engagement strategies connect students to the instructor and other students through course orientation, session announcements, group assignments, and discussion forums (Gay et al., 2022). The flipped classroom is a new innovative model where presentations normally done in the classroom by the instructor are given to student as homework are done in the classroom where the instructor becomes the facilitator allowing the students to be actively engaged with lesson content (Yeboah, Ampadu, & Ahwireng, 2020).

### **Financial Resources to Support Students' Success**

According to the participants in the study, sometimes the students as well as faculty were not aware of the financial resources available to students. Participants constantly expressed concerns with identifying ways to deal with cost as well as finding additional resources to assist students with staying in a course to keep from having to drop a course. Li and Wong (2019) supported the argument at Acoryn University that financial

and family issues can have an impact on why students leave college. Haverila et al., (2020) supported the same argument about Acoryn University that ineffective support services can impact the retention of students negatively, or than can make things worse if nothing is done. The participants reported that student awareness was a challenge for the students as well as the faculty. Viallano et al., (2018) additionally supported the argument at Acoryn University that if a student's needs are not addressed, they will not persist and will create retention problems for the school. The participant's also reported students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course.

### **Faculty Professional Development**

Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Pham, 2021). The key is to ensure the training is relevant to the practice and the participants. Most institutions participate in more conventional activities such as workshops to aid in career professional development (Pham, 2021). Offering professional development activities as a mixed approach or both formal and informal methods offer more opportunities for faculty to grow. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and engagement is a must as perceived by the participants sharing the need for more insights on how to address student awareness and engagement (Borrowiec, Bopardikar, & Castle, 2022).

### **Rationale for a Policy Recommendation Report**

This policy recommendation paper has the potential to create positive social change within the organizational student retention strategies at Acoryn University. This

policy recommendation paper will assist in building upon Acoryn University mission values while remaining within realistic barriers. The 13 participants identified the following challenges at Acoryn University related to student awareness, administrative support, student interaction and integration, financial aid resources, and technological innovations. The policy recommendations may provide solutions and strategies for ongoing improvements to enhance the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn University.

The intention behind the policy recommendation paper is to address the challenge in practice as perceived by the participant in the study regarding faculty and student awareness, administrative support, student interaction and integration, financial aid resources, and technological innovation. This policy recommendation paper is appropriate to provide solutions related to the study's problem to address student retention strategies effectiveness at Acoryn University.

Within this policy recommendation paper genre, I provide the perspective of thirteen Acoryn University faculty with study findings and offer solutions to the gap in practice identified through the presented solutions. The policy recommendations address the problems identified within each theme and will result in social change for the improving the increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty perceptions associated with effective student retention strategies. The four policy recommendations are aligned with the four correlating subthemes between the six part-time and seven full-

time participants (see Table 17). The four correlating subthemes between the six part-time and seven full-time participants are faculty and student awareness, one-on-one and administrative support, financial aid resources, and technology.

The Acoryn University all play specific roles within this policy recommendation including the Vice President of Academic Affairs who will assist with the professional development of faculty and administrative support, Student Success Coaches, and the Dean of Student Services, who will assist with improving the effectiveness of the current student retention with implementing a more robust early alert system, the development of learning communities to improve student retention, and the implementation of an annual orientation program designed to inform student annually or throughout the year. The recommendations will be student success focused, which will improve the effectiveness of the student retention strategies. The policy recommendations developed in this project will incorporate Acoryn University's faculty and administrators that have provided insights on previous policy implementation. This project's policy recommendations originated through research of related peer reviewed literature, and analysis of the themes that emerged during my interviews with the six part-time and seven full-time participants. Davis and Fifolt (2018) cited that policy implementation in the college setting occurred after a face-to-face interview with the institution's personnel that is most familiar with the past processes associated with the current policy recommendation.

During this project, I learned that Acoryn University needed to incorporate a professional developmental component for the full-time and part-time faculty, inclusive of

administrative support. Policies shape businesses as well as higher educational institutions. The creation of policies requires a lot of quality data to fully understand how policies work and can function; however, the frontline workers who spend time implementing policies understand the policy making process.

The literature review highlights the positive and negative impact of policy formation. This included reviewing the history of policy making, the purpose of policy recommendations, and policy recommendation papers for positive social change. Gu, Sammons, and Chen (2018) communicated strong leaders are required to implement policies that harness the emotions and knowledge of staff to align with shared values and goals of the organization.

### ***History of Policy Recommendation Reports***

American policies such as the annexation of Texas from Mexico caused tensions between Mexico and America, leading to the Mexican American War (Fuquay, 2020). Tensions between Mexico and America persisted due to policies enacted by American leaders. In 2019, the Trump Administration reversed Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that protected newly arrived undocumented youth who had just arrived in America. However, policies such as the Open Door Policy allow for increased trade between America and China (Foglesong, 2019).

### ***Purpose and Importance of Policy Recommendation Report***

Petchko (2018) shared policy writing was, “a broad and interdisciplinary area of research that draws on such diverse disciplines as economics, political science, sociology,

education, public administration, law, psychology, and the behavioral sciences” (p. 20).

Policy recommendation reports promote new ideas and social values to enhance policies that are antiquated or situations that need improving. According to Robinson et al. (2017), there are three steps to write new policies: The first suggestion for writing policy is to know the target group and frontline staff responsible for implementing the policy and involve them early in cocreating new policies. The second policy suggestion is to include implementation issues during the policy creation process from the beginning. The third suggestion for writing new policies is to conduct regular follow-up assessments and continue to make policy improvements. These three steps were developed to help understand the importance of conducting checks after policy implementation to see if the policy needs to be changed or improved. Gu et al. (2018) communicated when leaders use policies as opportunities and offer new policy proposals in a purposeful and strategic manner, their staff is more likely to accept policy shifts with less hesitation. According to Winter (2020), policy recommendation papers should include research questions, analysis and recommendations, and an extensive literature review.

### ***Implications of a Policy Recommendation Report for Positive Social Change***

Policies are sometimes developed to promote positive social change. An example of this was in San Diego when Mayor Todd Gloria created policies to provide transparency in addressing the homeless situation on San Diego streets (DiBono, 2021). This created a positive social change that led to the development of permanent shelters and supportive services to reduce the trauma that homeless people face on the streets.

Positive social change has impacted worldwide issues due to successful policies. For example, the United Kingdom created a policy recommendation paper called Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to encourage environmental sustainability and create new bridges with partners for the farming industry (Arnott et al., 2021).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Key words implemented in the subsequent literature review were *academic integration, academic support, financial resources, student challenges, social integration, social interaction, student engagement, and faculty engagement*. The review consists of research articles from the past 5 years. The Walden University's library database including *ERIC* were used as well as Google Scholar and other resources I found. I focused on articles from 2017 to 2022. Reviewing literature from 2017 onwards allowed me to focus only on recent literature that aligned with the project genre. Articles about project development were found primarily using Google Scholar and EBSCO. Search terms and phrases used in Google Scholar were (a) *how to write policy recommendation papers, history of policy recommendation papers*, (b) *the purpose of a policy recommendation report*, (c) *the importance of a policy recommendation report*, and (d) *American policies*.

### **Interconnected Analysis of Theory and Research**

In Section 2, I presented a qualitative study I implemented to collect and analyze data. My thematic analysis of the data led to the findings of this study that were student awareness. Student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. I cross-referenced

these findings to formulate my own theory as to the needs of Acoryn University (Thomas & Smith, 2015). The results of the above analysis led to the development of four policy recommendations.

The first recommendation is to develop a professional development program to improve student awareness where faculty can learn to come together with students to share information. Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Borowiec et al., 2022). The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported awareness as a challenge not only for the students but also for the faculty as well. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and engagement is a must as perceived by the participants.

The second policy recommendation is the creation of learning communities to help improve student engagement. Learning communities have been prominent throughout the course of higher education (Fink, J. & Inkelas, K., 2015). Learning communities encompass self-regulated learning (Azzaim, T., Bates, M., & Fairris, D., 2022). It was evidenced in this study by some participants, students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported faculty and student engagement and interacting was a challenge in some cases.

Some participants shared that students sometimes would have technological issues and would drop a course without reaching out to the instructor. Personalized



communication strategies encourage regular and ongoing interaction with the instructor and student (Gay & Betts, 2020). The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system, but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. Student retention and integration has been associated with faculty support and interest in student success, but the lack of support from faculty can have a negative impact on students' motivation to successfully complete a course (Mitchell et al., 2019).

The third policy recommendation is to improve the current early alert system that is designed to track students in online courses but also needed to track students who are attending face to face. It was evidenced in this study by the participants that the early alert system could be improved with the inclusion of how to deal with students missing a course over a period or who just stopped coming. Early alert systems are designed to inform the campus community of several issues including academic issues, such as attendance and participation or social issues such as problems with family, friends, and work (Villano et al., 2018). Early alert systems and academic support can have a profound effect to help a student succeed. Flores-Caballero (2020) noted that if higher education institutions do not promote academic and social integration, retention will become unstable, and students may drop out.

The fourth recommendation is to develop annual orientations for students to improve student awareness all year long where faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes at the institution. Student orientation is a set of activities and programs

designed to help students adjust to college (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). This is evidenced in this study as shared by some of the participants who commented that it was a challenge for faculty and students to remain informed or aware of services available to students.

In the following section, I present the policy recommendations connected to the evidence and audience. The policy recommendations are aligned with Acoryn University's mission, values, and practices. The mission of the institution is to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development.

### **Project Description**

I identified that for this project to be successful, it will require support and allocation of resources from the Acoryn University community. Acoryn University possesses a support system that will assist in the successful development of this project. I also identified potential barriers that will inhibit this project from flourishing. In the following sections, I have detailed the existing resources, support, and barriers at Acoryn University. Lastly, I included potential solutions to the potential barriers for this project's success.

### **Allocation of Resources**

Acoryn University leadership consist of the vice president of academic studies and student services, academic advisor, dean of student services, and student success coaches. I would ask for a three-day conference to introduce and answer any questions about the

policies on day one, organize a meeting on the second at to address responsibilities and needed resources, and pitch the proposed recommendations to the president of Acoryn University on day three for approval to proceed further. I would create a slide presentation of the project deliverable that would address issues discovered in the study. The presentation would highlight the benefit of updating the Acoryn University policies to address the findings. Acoryn University would be responsible for approving any new policies while ensuring that they align with the university's mission and values. Acoryn University would then assign specific roles for each member to implement the recommendations. Once the Acoryn university leadership has discussed any concerns, the final approval would come from the president of the university to move forward.

### **Existing Supports**

The vice president of academic affairs and student services oversees the staff that is dedicated to academic success of the students enrolled at Acoryn University. The Dean of student services could collaborate with other support while also overseeing student engagement and the student success coaches to ensure students have a support team to help them succeed. The student support coaches could be a great help by being assigned to students to help them navigate the first year to ensure they are successful. The academic advisors could help students who declare a major to help them meet their career goals by helping them register for courses, interpret degree audits, track progress towards graduation, and identify needed resources. The project leaders could utilize all of resources mention to develop a professional development program for the part-time and

full-time faculty and administrator that would include a full assesses of the perceived effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University. The project originated from studying the perception of the part-time and full-time faculty at Acoryn University, and the project's policy recommendations will lead to improved student retention strategy effectiveness.

### **Potential Barriers**

One of the barriers to this project is the retainment of existing staff. I believe this project should consider the turnover of current student coaches, and the dean of student services. Another barrier could be the scheduling of the workshops for the faculty and administration inclusive of the administration staff participation and acceptance. Other barriers could include the cost of developing the professional development workshops as well as the cost allocation for upgrading existing systems such as the early alert system. The consideration to implementing this project could also include additional barriers associated with monetary allocations, staffing support, and time allocation. The timeline associated with the professional development workshops could be a barrier inclusive of pushback from faculty and other administrative staff feedback to the proposed policy recommendations. The administrative staff could also see the proposed policy recommendations as unnecessary policy changes.

### ***Potential Solutions to Barriers***

There are solutions to retaining existing staff who work with students. I would point out that student success coaches tend to move around a lot, and students tend to lose

connection when they are shifted from one coach after another. The solution to participation could be handled by surveying the stakeholders for time appropriate for them such as after a semester is over or during the off months to do workshops. To address the cost allocation could include a feasibility to address enhancing the existing early alert system as well as study to address turnover of student success coaches and the dean of student services. According to Rogers (2010), acceptability research is used to help identify how an innovation(s) should be positioned to increase its acceptability over time amongst a group. To address the acceptability of the policy recommendations could include the need to address the adaptability time frame to ensure the policy recommendations are accepted and implemented in a timely manner. The rate of adoption is the time it takes for members in a like group to accept a new idea (Rogers, 2010).

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The policy suggestions would be implemented over a six-to-twelve-month period beginning with the slide presentation I would conduct with the Acoryn University leadership. The goal would be to have the new policy recommendations and associated projects implemented within a 1-year period. Table 19 shows the proposed implementation timetable.

**Table 19***Proposal for Implementation Timetable*

Tasks and Policy to be Implemented	Month/Year of Implementation
Obtain President Approval	Immediate
Presentation to Administrative Faculty and Staff	Immediate
Begin to Develop a Professional Development Program to Address Student Awareness	September 2023
Develop a Professional Development Program to improve Social Interaction Amongst Faculty and Student	November 2023
Create and send survey and feedback form for Administrators, Faculty, and Staff	November 2023
Research and Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement	December 2023
Develop a Robust Early Alert System to Improve Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	January 2024
Develop Annual Orientation for Student to Improve Awareness of Resources	February 2024
Send survey and feedback form for the evaluation of learning communities, early alert system, and annual orientations enhancement.	March 2024
All suggested policy recommendations active	May 2024

This project seeks to begin in the fall of a school term with complete implementation in place by the following year. The development of the recommendations will begin in month one with a presentation to the leadership and with the approval from the president of the university to move forward. In months two through four, development of a professional development program will occur with each member of the Acoryn University playing a role. All training should be ready for implementation the following school year. In months five and six, work will begin with the development of enhancing the current early alert system and researching learning communities. The Acoryn University leadership identified will offer feedback on the feasibility of the learning communities in month five with the goal of implementing, if feasible, the learning communities at the beginning of the next school term. Lastly, I will introduce the concept of annual orientations in month six with the assistance of the assigned staff from the Dean of Student Services for feedback and with complete implementation at the beginning of the next school year. Throughout the year of development, feedback will be collected from the administrators, faculty and staff.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders**

In this project, I will include many roles and responsibilities for Acoryn University faculty and administrators. All responsibilities conducted by each of the parties are equally important to the success of the four project goals. Table 2 includes a description of the roles and responsibilities of the following stakeholders: (a) president, (b) vice

president of academic affairs and student services, (c) dean of student services, (d) student success coaches, and (e) faculty, adjunct instructors, and staff. Following Table 20 is a discussion of each stakeholder's role and responsibilities at Acoryn University as they relate to the project.

**Table 20**

*Roles and Responsibilities of Acoryn Leadership*

Stakeholders	Role and Responsibility
President	Monthly meeting with leadership to review the recommendations and offer approval to proceed.
Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services	Creation of the professional development workshop on ways to improve student awareness and interaction with faculty and administration.
Dean of Student Services	Collaborate with the VP of Academic Affairs and Student Services and Student Success Coaches in developing learning communities.
Student Success Coaches	Work with the Dean of Student Services and Academic Advisor.
Faculty, Adjunct instructors, and staff	Participation in the professional developmental workshop annually.

As the primary researcher for the project study and the data collection instrument for this qualitative study. I collected, analyzed, and hand coded the data from interviews. I developed a policy recommendation report entitled *Faculty Perceptions of Student*



*Retention Strategy Effectiveness at a Career-based University* which included: (a) develop a professional development program to improve student awareness and student interaction, (b) develop learning communities to improve student engagement, (c) develop a robust early alert system, and (d) develop annual orientations for students. After approval of my final paper by Walden University, it is my responsibility to seek permission from the president of Acoryn University, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services permission to present this study's findings and policy recommendations as requested by the administrative leadership and faculty leadership.

### ***President***

The president of Acoryn University oversees the local campus and will be responsible for the review and approval to proceed with this policy recommendation report. The president provided written approval and verbal support for me to conduct the study at Acoryn University. Once the final approval of my report is received from Walden University, the president and other administrators will meet to discuss the report finding. The meetings will be monthly until final approval is received to proceed with the policy recommendations.

### ***Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services***

Once I received Walden University IRB Approval, the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services as the gatekeeper, provided information need to contact part-time and full-time faculty members of Acoryn University. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services along with collaborating with the Dean of Student

Services and Student Success Coaches will work together to develop a professional developmental workshop reflection of the challenge shared in this finding to support and improve student awareness of the resources at the university as well as develop a workshop addressing faculty and student interaction with on another inside and outside the course room. With the assistance the Dean of Student Services, the Vice President of Academic Affairs will appoint a team to research the feasibility of creating learning communities for students who are struggling in a course. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will develop an informational workshop for faculty sharing information they can have handy to help direct students where to go for help at any point before dropping a class. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services mentioned the possibility of presenting my results in the future based on upcoming changes happening at Acoryn University. I am confident the Vice President of Academic Affairs will share this information with campus stakeholders.

### ***Dean of Student Services***

The Dean of Students is responsible for student success, retention, and ensuring services are available to assist students in charge of overseeing student life, student services and on-campus activities. Additionally, the Dean of Student addresses student issues, and new student orientation. The Dean of Student Services will work collaboratively with the Student Success Coaches to develop an improved alert system that will be designed to alert in various circumstances, for example, if a student needs to contact a professor, make a referral for tutoring, if a student appears to lack engagement in

a class, a student is in danger of not passing a course, or if a student appears to need counseling. The Dean of Student Services will be responsible for ensuring the Student Success Coaches manage the alerts and they should be. The Dean of Student Services will be responsible for ensuring the Student Success Coaches manage the alerts and they should be. An annual evaluation of the system's effectiveness will be performed by the Dean of Student Services. The Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will initiate the development of an orientation program twice throughout the year for all students.

### ***Student Success Coaches***

The Student Success Coaches provide social, emotional, and academic support at Acoryn University to help students succeed at Acoryn University. The Student Success Coaches will work with the Dean of Student Services to assist with the implementation of the learning community policy recommendation. The Student Success Coaches will be charged with connecting with an assigned learning community to monitor throughout the planned year or however the group is together.

### ***Faculty, Adjunct Instructors, and Staff***

Part-time and full-time faculty participated in this research study after receiving an email invitation from me. After being selected as a participant, a total of six part-time and seven full-time responded to 11 open-ended interview questions. The key role of the faculty, adjunct instructors, and staff will be to attend the professional development workshops planned according to the schedule developed by the Vice President of

Academic Affairs and Students Services in collaboration with the Dean of Student Services. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, the faculty, adjunct instructors and staff will be asked to complete an evaluation following each professional development. and to share any concerns during the year will with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

I will use an outcomes-based evaluation plan to evaluate the project. In the section below, I include the justification for the evaluation process selected, goals for the evaluation, and the overall goals of outcome measures that will be derived from an outcome-based evaluation. Projects that use the outcomes-based approach are described as having expected outcomes that include learning new skills, professional abilities, and a better understanding of content (Hammanmi, 2020).

An outcome-based evaluation will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project's four policy recommendations. This process will allow me to compare study data, the feedback from the participants and the Acoryn University campus community. The feedback will allow me to determine the effectiveness of the policy recommendations implemented because of the project. Ansari and Usmani (2019) noted outcomes-based evaluations played a significant role in organizational change with educational settings. According to Hammami (2020) projects that use outcomes-based evaluations are best described as having expected outcomes that include learning new skills, attitudes,

professional abilities, and a better understanding of content of content. The analysis of the results from the four outcome-based evaluations will help determine the direction for future issues to address the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, student interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist students.

### **Justification for an Outcomes-Based Evaluation**

The goal of an outcomes-based evaluation focused on collecting data is to determine if the program was relevant, significant, well-timed, and organized. The use of the outcomes-based evaluation will help me to determine if the outcomes for each policy recommendation are aligned with the study's literature that Acoryn University could benefit by improving the effectiveness of its existing student retention strategies.

An outcomes-based evaluation for policy recommendation one is fitting because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at Acoryn University should mirror best practices shaped by Acoryn University faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation two because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at Acoryn University should mirror best practices shaped by Acoryn University faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation three because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at Acoryn University should mirror best practices shaped by Acoryn University faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation four because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the

study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at Acoryn University should mirror best practices shaped by Acoryn University faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals**

The outcome-based evaluation procedures for the project's four policy recommendations will be instrumental to understanding the objectives of the project's goals to ensure success. The outcome-based evaluation for the project's four policy recommendations will provide information that will present the effectiveness of the project's four policy recommendations. The stakeholders associated with the implementation of policy recommendations will be responsible for creating the evaluation instrument. The Likert Scale is used to present strongly agree to strongly disagree measurements that help with an organization's process towards improvements (Creswell, 2012). A hard copy of the evaluation will be made available to the stakeholders. An electronic copy will be sent via campus email. Survey Money will be the platform used to email an invitation to the stakeholders to complete the evaluation via the Survey Money website. Once the evaluation data is analyzed, the produced report will be shared with the Acoryn University administrators, faculty and staff via an email, and then saved for two years by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services.

The goals of this project's policy recommendations are to address the themes of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, student interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist students through new and improved policies intended to enhance the academic and social environment of Acoryn University faculty, administration and students and to find solutions within the Acoryn University program while also offering professional development opportunities to the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty. Furthermore, the results of the outcome-based evaluation for each policy recommendation will provide the Acoryn University leadership with the necessary qualitative data needed to deal with the problems at Acoryn University.

The first goal will be to meet with the campus president and leadership to discuss the project plans. The faculty assigned to work with this policy recommendation will be responsible for creating the outcome-based evaluation instrument. Time and the allocation of resources will need to be assessed to make this project policy recommendation a reality. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services along with collaborating with the Dean of Student Services and Student Success Coaches will work together to develop a professional developmental workshop reflection of the challenge shared in this finding to support and improve student awareness of the resources at the university as well as develop a workshop addressing faculty and student interaction with one another inside and outside the course room. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, any updates during the year will be



shared via the Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Student Success Coaches. No formal evaluation of the faculty would be necessary. The first goal will be measured by the successful approval of the policy recommendation as implemented by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. After the implementation of policy recommendation number one, within 30 days, an evaluation via email will be distributed to the stakeholders to assess: (a) the amount of time it took to implement the recommendations, (b) the project's successes and challenges, and (c) the opportunities for improvement.

The second goal will require the collaboration of the Dean of Student Services, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Student Success Coaches. The faculty assigned to work with this policy recommendation will be responsible for creating the outcome-based evaluation instrument. Time and the allocation of resources will need to be assessed to make this project policy recommendation a reality. With the assistance of the Dean of Student Services, the Vice President of Academic Affairs will appoint a team to research the feasibility of creating learning communities for students who are struggling in a course. This team would consist of the Student Success Coaches for input. The learning communities will be designed in a manner to bring students together in groups linked to like courses for at least one term. The Student Success Coaches will be charged with connecting with an assigned learning community to monitor throughout the planned year or however the group is together. The goal is to see an improvement in student engagement and retention whereby students can support one another academically and

socially. The second goal will be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Dean of Student Services, and the Student Success Coaches. After the implementation of this policy recommendation, within 30-60 days, an evaluation should be distributed to the stakeholders to assess: (a) the amount of time it took to implement the recommendations, (b) the project's successes and challenges, and (c) the opportunities for improvement.

The third goal will require the collaboration of the Dean of Student Services, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Student Success Coaches. The faculty assigned to work with this policy recommendation will be responsible for creating the outcome-based evaluation instrument. Time and the allocation of resources will need to be assessed to make this project policy recommendation a reality. The Vice-President of Academic Affairs will work with the Dean of Student Services to enhance the current early alert system that appears to be an issue for the institution. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. The participants also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved. The Dean of Student Services will work collaboratively with the Student Success Coaches to develop an improved alert system

that will be designed to alert in various circumstances, for example, if a student needs to contact a professor, make a referral for tutoring, if a student appears to lack engagement in a class, a student is in danger of not passing a course, or if a student appears to need counseling. The Dean of Student Services will be responsible for ensuring the Student Success Coaches manage the alerts and they should be. An annual evaluation of the system's effectiveness will be performed by the Dean of Student Services. The third goal will be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. After the implementation of this policy recommendation, within 30-60 days, an evaluation will be distributed to the stakeholders to assess: (a) the amount of time it took to implement the recommendations, (b) the project's successes and challenges, and (c) the opportunities for improvement.

The fourth goal will require the collaboration of the Dean of Student Services, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Student Success Coaches. The faculty assigned to work with this policy recommendation will be responsible for creating the outcome-based evaluation instrument. Time and the allocation of resources will need to be assessed to make this project policy recommendation a reality. The Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will initiate the development of an orientation program twice throughout the year for all students. The intent of this initiative will be to ensure students know and have all the resources they need to remain in a course. The need to offer more financial aid to support students and to help them be retained in class was a shared perspective amongst the part-

time and full-time faculty members. Part-time and full-time participants shared their concern for more financial support for students to help them remain in class. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will develop an informational workshop for faculty sharing information they can have handy to help direct students where to go for help at any point before dropping a class.

The fourth goal will be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. After the implementation of this policy recommendation, within 30-60 days, an evaluation will be distributed to the stakeholders to assess: (a) the amount of time it took to implement the recommendations, (b) the project's successes and challenges, and (c) the opportunities for improvement.

### **Overall Measures**

An outcomes-based evaluation will assess the four policy recommendations of: (a) student awareness professional Development Program; (b) learning communities to improve student engagement; (c) robust early alert system process; (d) annual orientations for students. The first goal will be measured by the successful approval of the policy recommendation as implemented by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. The second goal will be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Dean of Student Services, and the Student Success Coaches. The third goal will

be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. The fourth goal will be measured by the successful implementation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Dean of Student Services. All four goals will be assessed on a routine basis to gain feedback from the stakeholders associated with each of the project's policy recommendation goals. The feedback will be utilized to assess any needed improvements related to the evaluation goals.

### **Project Implications**

There are five themes identified within this study as problems that could be solved with the development of the updated policy recommendations suggestions. I have presented information addressing social change implications at Acoryn University, and in the larger context. Additionally, I provided detailed discussion of the importance of the project to the local stakeholders.

### **Social Change Implications for Acoryn University**

The social changes outlined in this study aligned with the intention to understand the problems identified as perceived by the participants in the study and with the themes identified within the findings that address the specific issues identified. The interviews assisted with identifying five specific themes in the findings. The policy recommendations will help ensure the Acoryn University student retention effectiveness is improved and address the issues identified. The policy recommendations will help create positive change offering part-time and full-time faculty increased awareness associated with the

effectiveness of student retention strategies to support student retention. The policy recommendations presented will be beneficial to Acoryn University as well as other higher educational institutions by offering ways to improve the effectiveness of their student retention strategies.

The results of an outcome-based evaluation will provide me with insights into the perceived effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty. I received feedback for the thirteen participants who did not know about the perceived effectiveness of the student retention strategies as reported by other colleagues at Acoryn University. All policy recommendations align with the themes identified in the study and will give the part-time and full-time faculty and administrators quality feedback, and awareness, a theme identified as a problem at Acoryn University. The first policy recommendation is to develop a professional development program to improve student awareness where faculty can learn to come together with students to share information. The second policy recommendation will be the creation of learning communities to help improve student engagement. The third policy recommendation is to improve the current early alert system that is designed to track students in online courses but also needed to track students who are attending face to face. The fourth recommendation is to develop annual orientations for students to improve student awareness all year long where faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes at the institution. My colleagues will be able to review this study with the intention of offering solutions at other career-based colleges dealing

with student retention issues. The social change implications are aligned in the last sentence of the Abstract section of this study. This study will promote social change by offering increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty perceptions associated with effective student retention strategies. As such, it follows that the policy recommendation will support the organization's mission, vision, and values of this forward learning organization. The mission of the institution is to provide quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development. With the implementation of policy recommendations presented in this policy recommendation report, the institution will be able uphold its mission of improving its workforce programs and services available to the part-time and full-time faculty as well as the services to enhance student success. The promoting of social change is important as it presents an opportunity to bring about needed changes that will affect the local campus overall.

### **Social Change Implications in the Larger Context**

This study will promote social change by offering the increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty perceptions associated with effective student retention strategies. I conducted a thorough review of the peer reviewed literature that validated the study findings. The study findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention of students, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance aligned with the literature of student retention effectiveness. The findings from this study and the policy recommendations will help

expand upon the peer reviewed literature on faculty perceptions about the effectiveness of student retention strategies at a career-based college. As such, this study will promote social change by offering part-time and full-time faculty increased awareness associated with the effectiveness of student retention strategies to support student retention.

### **Importance of the Project to the Local Stakeholders**

Acoryn University is in the southeastern region (College Navigator, 2018). The local campus is comprised of 125 faculty. The project could benefit stakeholders with the university by offering policies that positively impact change throughout the local campus. This study began by recognizing a problem at the local campus whereby in 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The findings from this study revealed there were five themes that pinpointed issues during the feedback from the participants: student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources.

The goals of the suggested policy recommendations may be helpful in enhancing Acoryn University efforts to improve the effectiveness of student retention strategies at



the university. The administrative stakeholders will benefit from policies that incorporate an evaluation tool designed by the leadership in charge. The survey monkey form will allow Acoryn University leadership an opportunity to remain abreast of academic and social problems at Acoryn University. The professional development program will help address problems and solution that would allow for future policy changes as identified. The faculty will no longer have to feel unengaged with their students and unaware of how to communicate and assist students with where to go to get help before dropping out of a course. The stakeholders that will benefit by these policy recommendations include: president, vice president of academic affairs and student services, dean of student services, student success coaches, and faculty, adjunct instructors, and staff.

### **Importance of the Project in the Larger Context**

In this project study, I focused on the perceived effectiveness of student retention strategies of part-time and full-time faculty at Acoryn University. The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention. I discovered Tinto's (2013) framework was a widely recognized framework that brought forth the experiences associated with student retention, specifically, academic, and social integration (Tinto, 2021). This project could be the first of its kind at Acoryn University. Acoryn University can be the forefront to social change in the career-based higher educational landscape on a topic that seeks to add the effectiveness of student retention based on the perceptions of faculty at a career-based institution. I passionately believe this project will improve many of the issues at Acoryn University. The project will produce

initiatives that will improve the campus environment as well as improve Acoryn University's efforts to retain students.

### *Acoryn University Campus*

In this study, I discovered the findings of this study will have a positive effect on the Acoryn University campus. The policy recommendation will allow Acoryn leadership to implement policy recommendations that will bring the institution's stakeholders in a collaborative setting to create positive social change. As shared in the previous section, the project's goals will have an impact for the Acoryn University faculty and other stakeholders. The first goal of this project aligned with the issues with student awareness and social interaction amongst the part-time and full-time faculty at the institution. The second goal of the project aligned with the issue of student engagement as a student retention strategy. The third goal of the project aligned with the issue of communication amongst faculty and students. The Vice-President of Academic Affairs will work with the Dean of Student Services to enhance the current early alert system that appears to be an issue for the institution. The fourth goal for this project aligned with the issue of resources for the students designed to help them remain in a course. The Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will be able to develop an orientation program twice throughout the year for all students. In this study, I considered the impact of the policy recommendations will have on the campus community. I addressed the perceptions of part-time and full-time faculty effectiveness of student retention strategies through the lens of six part-time and seven full-time faculty

participants. The goals suggested by the policy recommendations will be helpful in enhancing Acoryn University in areas that need to be improved upon.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

I implemented a qualitative study to research the problem. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in Acoryn University's efforts to improve student retention. I used open-ended interview questions to collect data from six part-time and seven full-time faculty members.

Because my focused was on student retention, I used Tinto's (2013) theory of student retention as the conceptual framework. Tinto suggested that for student retention to have a secure and stable platform, there must be motivated and committed personnel who are equipped to assist students. Because instructional faculty have primary and consistent contact with students, they play a major role in student retention and degree attainment (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Gauthier, 2016; Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016). As such, faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of an institution's student retention strategy may be helpful (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016). According to Tinto (2015), perceptions of the quality and relevance of a curriculum intertwine a variety of issues including faculty teaching methods, perceived institutional quality, and student learning style preferences. Student retention intervention, related to known factors, have an impact on improving retention (Tinto, 2015). The effectiveness of student retention strategies continues to be an area of interest for researchers (Tinto, 2015).

I conducted the study at a local career-based college in the state of Virginia. I identified that there were issues with current formal student retention strategies at this

institution. The findings led me to develop a policy recommendation report that would address Acoryn University's challenges with student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. In this section, I include details about the strengths and limitations of the project study, and I reflect on what I discovered about my own strengths and weaknesses as a researcher through this process. I will also explain how I developed as a professional educator and project leader while developing this project. I then discuss alternative approaches to project development and evaluation. Last, I consider the project study's implications for positive social change, and I offer recommendations for future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

In this section, I will explain the strengths and limitations. To formulate this discussion, I spent a considerable amount of time analyzing the project deliverables. As I discuss, the project reflects academic research guidelines.

#### **Project Strengths**

In this section, I discuss the project strengths while addressing the project deliverables. I detail the project's four strengths. The strengths for this project were discovered after careful analysis of the project deliverables. Suggested solutions include the development of professional development workshops to address student awareness, the implementation of learning communities, an improved robust early alert system, and measures to improve awareness of resources among faculty and students.

### ***Potential Increases in Faculty and Student Interactions***

Professional development workshops incorporate large or small groups to enhance learning (Hirsch et al., 2021). One of the strengths of this project is the provision of professional development workshops to allow the faculty to learn and participate in conversation about a topic and learn from one another. The professional development session supports the need for conversation among faculty (see Hirsch et al., 2021). This policy recommendation may provide insight on how faculty can learn together with students to share information to address any problems they may be having in the course and improve student awareness about resources available to them. This continued learning through professional development may continuously renew and upgrade faculty skills (Borowiec et al., 2021).

Professional development focuses on practical and engaging strategies that are needed to communicate ideas (Hirsch et al., 2021). I introduced this project involving the development of professional development workshops to help Acoryn University improve student awareness and social interaction amongst faculty and students. The strength of this policy recommendation to include professional development workshops creates an opportunity to promote social change that facilitates the exchange of ideas and learning strategies (Hirsch et al., 2021). When faculty and staff have more discussions, they are encouraged to help make significant changes (Hirsch et al., 2021). The sharing of new ideas challenges the participants to think critically about their approaches to instruction to retain students (Hirsch et al., 2021).

### ***Potentially Higher Student Engagement***

Learning communities are designed to bring students together with other students (Azzam et al., 2022). The result of this project will improve student engagement as well as interactions between students in similar programs. According to Fink et al., (2015) some colleges and universities have implemented and embraced the learning community as part of their general education program. The strength of this project is that it will address the gap in Acoryn University students' need to feel connected to one another. Through this recommendation, other higher educational institutions will be able to implement an opportunity to help students struggling with staying in a course.

### ***A Potentially More Robust Early Alert System***

The strength of this project is that it will target all students and not just students enrolled for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in the classroom. A robust early alert system has a focus on ensuring students are identified needing help to retain them in a course. This policy recommendation can be transferred to other organizations within the higher educational system. Another strength of this project is it will be an improvement to the current system introducing a policy recommendation that will introduce an improved process to cover a population of all students being identified with in the early alert system whether online or face to face. Through this policy recommendation, any organization will benefit will be able to implement a system that can be expanded into its usage in a wide array of opportunities designed to help manage student retention.

### ***A Potentially Improved Orientation Process for Students***

The strength of this project will improve orientation to students when they first start as well as updates shared with students all year long where faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes. This policy recommendation can be utilized to help improve an identified deficiency in the university. The results of this project will aid in ensuring faculty and students are made abreast of changes throughout the year designed to help students remain in the classroom versus only providing orientation when students are first enrolled. This policy recommendation will provide an evidence based opportunity designed to keep students and faculty informed throughout the entire year.

### **Project Limitations**

I discovered the project limitations by carefully analyzing the project deliverable. In this section, I present information addressing the projects four limitations of a policy recommendation to include the development of professional development workshops to address student awareness, the implementation of learning communities, an improved robust early alert system, and an improved awareness of resources for faculty and students.

### ***Challenges to the Development of Successful Professional Development Workshops***

The goal of this project is to address issues with faculty and student awareness and social interaction amongst the students at the institution. One limitation of this project is the identification of what exactly the faculty needs to be aware of to assist their students without crossing over into the role of an advisor. Another limitation is Acoryn



University's acceptance to develop a professional development workshop and the length of time and how often to do an effective professional development workshop to engage faculty to share feedback, support and be mentored for improvement (Hirsch et al., 2021). If Acoryn University is receptive to this policy recommendation, the ability to provide ongoing learning and support to faculty will improve their ability to help retain their students in the classroom.

### ***Potentially Low Student Participation in Learning Communities***

The goal of this project is to establish a way to improve student engagement. Learning communities are designed to bring students together. One limitation I identified was the number of students who may benefit from a learning community setting. If there is one student in a program, this would be a problem. Another limitation would be the availability of student success coaches available to manage the program. This may require the institution to hire more student success coaches as well as manage any turnover issues. Azzam et al., (2019) contended learning communities are self-regulated. Another limitation would be if students would be willing to participate or if once in the program should decide to drop. This could impact other students in the program desire to continue.

### ***Potential Lack of Buy-in for a Robust Early Alert System***

The goal of this project is to improve the current early alert system designed to track students that are struggling in a course. One limitation of this project is that the administration might view the policy recommendation an indication the institution does

not understand the varied benefits of improving the current early alert system to not only use it to track online student but to use it to also track face to face students. Another limitation could be the lack of participation of faculty to utilize the system in a way to ensure the warning sign of losing a student is addressed or discussed with others.

### ***Potential Lack of Buy-in for Ongoing Student Orientations***

The goal of this project is to develop orientation for students to improve student awareness all year long so faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes at the institution. One limitation of this project is that the organization leaders may not be receptive to offering ongoing annual orientations. This could lead to ineffective services being shared to help faculty retain students in the classroom. Another limitation could be the faculty and students becoming interested in the need for continued updates the university may not be willing to do. Another limitation could be the repetitive effort to provide annual orientations, maybe an area the university may decide to eliminate and revert to the old way. Another limitation of this project is that the institution may feel they are doing enough to make students aware of the current process that is in place.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. The project study focused on the issues identified leading to policy recommendations that can enhance the issues identified within the process from the

findings. I created policy recommendations that included the development of a professional developmental program. Initially, the professional development program was the only approach, but my chair recommended I include a professional development program designed by the institution.

In this study, I used a qualitative approach as I did not want nor felt the need for a quantitative study although a survey could have been used to gather more perspectives to impact the findings. Surveying more participants would have provided a greater number of perspectives about the effectiveness of student retention strategies. The faulty insights, part-time and full-time, would provide a greater impact instead of a smaller number as used in this qualitative study. A survey could be distributed to every instructor on the local campus as a component to obtaining other perspectives. A survey presents an opportunity for more participants need in a study of this kind to voice their opinions and concerns in an area that research continues to address.

### **Alternative Solutions to the Local Problem**

Instead of presenting four policy recommendations without the inclusion of a professional development program, another alternative solution would have been a 3-day professional development recommendation, I could have created a 3-day professional development program designed to address each of the issues identified in the findings. The 3-day professional developmental program could have covered each of the issues addressing student awareness, social interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and enhanced early alert system, and a

refined annual orientation program to address the availability of resources to students to help them be retained in a course. The recommendations were based on the response received from the participants' perspective and were offered to address the local problem. This type of endeavor will require the collaboration of faculty members who possess the knowledge and skills to implement such an endeavor.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

In this section, I identify how this project study has helped me develop from a student to a practicing scholar. I present my journey in understanding the project study development. Lastly, I offer details about my leadership skills I intend to use to encourage social change within higher education addressing the effectiveness of student retention strategies.

#### **Scholarship**

When I began my journey to pursue a doctorate it was initially a PhD in general business at another institution. In 2013, is when that journey ended in disappointment, and I took a two-year gap to regroup. In 2015, It became clear to me higher education was my second passion although I had excelled in the financial industry after 25 years.

I felt challenges throughout this entire doctoral process. I had no idea what quantitative or qualitative research nor what APA was. I have always had an ease with writing; however, my writing through this coursework and project study process, I now feel I am an even better writer and now focused on the process. I have taught for over 25 years as an adjunct professor, while in the doctoral program. I continue to teach as an

adjunct professor, so I have learned to add lots of detail, preciseness, and my opinion to my writing. This journey has enhanced this entirely, Over the last seven years at Walden University, it seemed like forever to get my prospectus approved, two years exact. I had to learn to be precise during that process. I have done so much research using the Walden library, google scholar, and leaning on other colleagues on the same track as I for support. The research process was daunting, but now I understand the need to produce unbiased research, and the importance of explaining perspectives clearer. One of my chair's favorite quotes was "dumb it down" as this was a constant comment from her. As a scholar, I have learned a lot while gaining the ability to conduct research and analyze data using tools to develop solutions to issues identified in my project study.

Through this study, I identified issues within the institution. I obtained IRB approval from Walden and the institution and interviewed a total of six part-time and seven full-time participants. I learned to listen to my participant's conversations while pausing for additional comments from them. I learned how to dissect the data collected and to find themes within a study and develop them into an outline. This process was truly a test of my patience; however, now that I am at the end, it was well worth realizing I was able to complete it.

### **Project Development**

The development of this project was not as taxing as the research. Once I am done with this project, it will have taken seven and half years of my life that involved two years of coursework at Walden as well as one extended year due to a lag in gathering

participants. In the beginning, I struggled with developing the prospectus that was due to me either thinking too far ahead on the results from the study and not be specific. I was told I was a good writer; however, my chair always wanted me to “dumb things down” as she would say to make my writing clearer. I was never challenged with the research as much as being challenged to give my chair what he expected. Frustration set in so many times, yet I pushed myself to get this done which was required. I conducted my research through peer-reviewed journals, articles, and books to create four policy recommendations that will assist with the perceived effectiveness of student retention strategies at Acoryn University.

To create a project of this kind, a researcher should identify the problems or problems that may arise with implementation. Throughout the course of this journey, I had to ask “what or how” questions to help guide my understanding of the issues at Acoryn University that were identified. From this process, I was able to develop the two research questions for the study. A doctoral study requires the research questions to align with every phase of the project which requires alignment to the following areas: the prospectus, proposal, IRB application, data collection, data analysis, the outcomes, and the final development of the project along with the opportunity for the project to create social change.

In summary, I never intended to attempt a quantitative project study because I understood the time it would take to do such a study and I was not strong skilled for that. I wanted to get as close to the full description of what the qualitative research could do

along with a proper data analysis. I value the strong rich detail obtained in the interview process with the study participants.

### **Leadership and Change**

I have been an adjunct educator for over 25 years while working in the banking industry. Since 2015, my interest shifted to higher education with a desire to address the retention of students in higher educational institutions. Higher education is forever changing and will evolve from scholars and practitioners offering new literature to create social change. The doctoral process has allowed me to grow tremendously and learn about conducting research to address the needs on a local campus. I have developed more skills in doing research, using data collected, and the understanding of aligning it all. My writing skills have developed to be more detailed and precise as well as concrete in my delivery. The contributions from my study can be transferred to other higher educational institutions where positive change is the goal. In summary, I now understand because of this journey that began in 2015, that in order to create positive change one must have developed an understanding of all factors that could be a barrier to social change from occurring.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

This project will impact the way Acoryn University views the perceptions of the faculty and the needed improvements to its existing current formal student retention strategies. designed to retain students in the classroom. The outcomes of this study, student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction,

communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance will be positively impacted by the policy recommendations associated with this project study.

Throughout this doctoral process, my belief about faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of student retention strategies has been confirmed. I believe faculty, who have direct contact with students, perceptions to be the most important consideration when faculty are the ones who know what is really happening within the classroom and with their students. The investigation of archival data collected provided me with knowledge to address the gap in the problem at Acoryn University, which was in 2008, Acoryn University implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provides the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention has continued to decline. The investigation of scholarly literature about student retention strategies and the analysis of archival data is an initial step toward affecting change at Acoryn University or any study site that is being investigated by a researcher. My policy recommendations from this study will provide Acoryn University's leadership and other administrative support the evidence-based research to create institutional changes as it related to addressing the effectiveness of their student retention strategies in the near future.

This work is important because it can be used to positively impact faculty and student satisfaction as it relates to student retention strategy effectiveness. This project will contribute to the peer reviewed literature that has studied the experiences of faculty associated with student retention strategy effectiveness. This project offered policy



recommendations that can be used at other higher educational institutions alike. Finally, this project can be emulated at other higher educational institutions whether career based or not. This project offered solutions to addressing the effectiveness of student retention strategies based on faculty perceptions. Faculty want to provide instruction, be engaged with their students, and be there for their students, and are concerned about the success of their students enough to want to see them graduate. However, higher educational institutions must take part in the process (Tinto, 2017).

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

In this study, I present pertinent data and research that will add to the scholarly literature summarizing the perceptions of the effectiveness of student retention strategies at a career-based higher educational institution. I provided Acoryn University with a project timeline that can be used to create a positive impact at Acoryn University. In the following section, I provide the detailed implications, applications, and directions for future research that this study presents.

#### **Implications**

National statistics presented data that student retention rates at Acoryn University fell well below the national retention rates (nces.ed.gov, 2019). This data aligned with the literature reviewed and archival data collected during my data collection (personal communication, May 2020). These implications have presented evidence that Acoryn University had issues with the effectiveness of the student retention strategies. The above implications suggest that Acoryn University will need a system that will provide

consistent professional development. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. Throughout the study, I researched and reviewed a vast amount of evidence. I designed policy recommendations to include a professional developmental program developed by Acoryn University for the faculty and administration.

### **Applications**

The study of six part-time and seven full-time participants brought forth evidence that suggests Acoryn University needs to improve its current student retention strategies based on the consistent perspectives of the part-time and full-time participants. The findings of this study were student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. This study possessed thematic analysis within the data collected. Acoryn University stakeholders will benefit from the suggested steps to address the study problem of the effectiveness of student retention strategies at Acoryn University.

### **Directions for Future Research**

After reflecting about this study, another direction for research would be a qualitative study that not only focuses on part-time and full-time faculty perceptions by the entire organization to gain a broader set of perceptions of those faculty who have direct contact with students whether face to face or online. Looking at different

perspectives brings new insights to current issues dealing with the effectiveness of student retention strategies. New perspectives are good for an organization and could provide different insights that would add to the policy recommendations of a professional development program on an ongoing basis while also the creation of a study to research student perspectives of the effectiveness of student retention strategies designed to retain them in course. This study can be duplicated at another institution as well as other career-based institutions. Student retention continues to be a problem at higher educational institutions (Tinto, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

I have evolved as a scholar practitioner because of the seven and a half years doctoral journey. My development in this process has afforded me the opportunity to gain as well as improve upon analytical skills to address problems in higher education, and society. I began this research with the intention to identify an understanding of the perceptions of part-time and full-time faculty about the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies at Acoryn university. The review of the literature and research offered evidence that my research topic was worthy of further investigation and research. The supported documents supported my problem statement. My focus throughout this journey for seven and a half long years was focused on how I could create positive change at Acoryn University and throughout the higher educational system. My data led me to results that was consistent with past research that indicated the need to improve upon the effectiveness of student retention strategies constantly along with professional

developmental programs for faculty to help them understand student retention effectiveness to help retain students.

I have learned a great deal about scholarly methods of identifying a problem, and the development of research questions that will lead to the collection of worthy data and the analysis of that data because of this study. I have expanded my knowledge as a scholar practitioner in an area I am blessed now to be. After all the hard work, and frustration outburst with the process to get to this point, I am now confident in knowing I could create positive change at Acoryn University. Furthermore, I possess the research skills that will enable me to conduct further research in the field of higher education. My development of more research on the effectiveness of student retention will allow me to connect with other colleagues who have an interest in studying this topic like mine. I have over 25 years of adjunct teaching experience in higher education. However, my experience and understanding of student retention increased with the desire to want to understand the effectiveness of student retention strategies based on faculty perceptions that would make one wonder why the student retention rate at Acoryn University continued to decline despite their efforts with student retention strategies that were supposed to improve student retention.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at Acoryn University. Gaining the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty was

imperative in identifying the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at Acoryn University which led to the discovery of issues with Acoryn University which assisted in offering four policy recommendations inclusive of a professional development program. The literature review supported the evidence in developing the solutions shared with in the policy recommendations for the project study. The policy recommendations within this study were based upon scholarly research and findings from interviews that identified the themes of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. The goals of the project study policy recommendations are included in Appendix A. The policy recommendations presented will provide Acoryn University with solutions to address student retention effectiveness while also offering tools to engage the administrators, faculty, staff, and stakeholders to assist with improving themselves and to ensuring the success of the implemented recommendations designed to also support and improve student retention and student success.

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## Appendix A: The Project

Sheila Williamson-Branch

Doctoral Candidate, Walden University

Dear Administrators,

I am presenting the results of my study, titled *Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention Strategies at a Career-based University*, to the college community as an opportunity for review and an enrichment of potential discussion towards opportunities associated with social change and academic enhancement. The goal is to offer the college community the study findings for consideration, as well as to present policy recommendations that may create positive change, based upon part-time and full-time faculty engagement in efforts towards student success. This may equally support organizational leadership within the larger higher education landscape.

Throughout this policy recommendation, I will present the findings of the qualitative study that guided the development of the policy recommendation strategic guidance. I am available to provide presentations and associated discussions related to this study's findings and policy recommendations as requested by the administrative leadership and faculty leadership. The policy recommendation document reflects the intent towards supporting the organization's mission, vision, and values of this forward-learning organization.

I reflect my professional appreciation for providing access to the institution's faculty and administrators, resulting in this policy recommendation report. I look forward

to opportunities to present this information throughout the campus community and stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Sheila Williamson-Branch.

**Policy Recommendations Report**

Walden University

A Policy Recommendation Paper with Detail

by

Sheila Williamson-Branch



## Executive Summary

I identified that for this project to be successful, it will require support and allocation of resources from the institution. The institution possesses a support system that will assist in the successful development of this project. In the following, I share to whom the recommendations are being made to and their role in taking action to ensuring the implementation of the recommendations presented.

The vice president of academic affairs and student services oversees the staff that is dedicated to academic success of the students enrolled at the institution. The Dean of student services could collaborate with other support while also overseeing student engagement and the student success coaches to ensure students have a support team to help them succeed. The student support coaches could be a great help by being assigned to students to help them navigate the first year to ensure they are successful. The academic advisors could help students who declare a major to help them meet their career goals by helping them register for courses, interpret degree audits, track progress towards graduation, and identify needed resources. The project leaders could utilize all of resources mention to develop a professional development program for the part-time and full-time faculty and administrator that would include a full assesses of the perceived effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution. The project originated from studying the perception of the part-time and full-time faculty at the institution, and the project's policy recommendations will lead to improved student retention strategy effectiveness.

The problem was that at the institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The institution implemented a set of student retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the university retention rate.

The institution's mission is:

It is the policy of the institution to provide a quality cohesive higher education and workforce programs and services to promote student success and to enhance business and community development.

In September 2021, the institution hired a Dean of Student Services. In this role, the Dean of Student Services has begun to address areas associated with student recruitment, student retention, completion, and professional development. The Dean of Student Services' goal is to bring and support student focused initiatives at the institution. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at the institution. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. There was a total of 13 interviews consisting of six part-time and seven full-time participants. The interviews led to study findings indicating five themes of: student awareness, student

engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance.

I offer the four policy recommendations:

- Recommendation One: Professional Development Program for Part-time and Full-Time Faculty focused on Student Awareness.
- Recommendation Two: Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
- Recommendation Three: Robust Early Alert System Process
- Recommendation Four: Annual Orientations for Students

In the following section, the policy recommendation report will follow based on the findings of the study, titled *Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention Strategy Effectiveness at a Career-based University*.

## **Policy Recommendation Report**

### **Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention Strategy Effectiveness at a Career-Based University**

#### **Background of Existing Problem**

The institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The policy recommendation report is based on the study findings about the phenomenon of the effectiveness of student retention strategies feedback. A persistently declining student retention rate issue within a career-based university, despite the implementation of formal student retention strategies that were implemented as early as 2008 retention of students at the institution had been a problem for several years (Campus Director, personal communication, May 4, 2020).

#### **Rationale**

The institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate in 2008. The problem that provided the focus of this study was that, despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at the institution. The research questions developed

were: 1) What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution? 2) What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution? The research questions examined the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the existing formal student retention strategies, and faculty perceptions related to ways to improve student retention. Thirteen faculty were recruited through purposeful sampling and provided insights to the research question through semi-structured interviews. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution.

The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) conceptual framework on student retention promoting momentum to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve the effectiveness of student retention strategies. I designed four policy recommendations based on Tinto's (2013) conceptual framework on student retention.

### **Study Focus and Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at the institution. The research questions developed were: 1) What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current

formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution? 2) What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution? The research questions examined the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the existing formal student retention strategies, and faculty perceptions related to ways to improve student retention (Merriam, 2009).

### **Summary of Analysis and Findings**

There was a total of 13 interviews consisting of six part-time and seven full-time participants. Thirteen faculty were recruited through purposeful sampling and provided insights to the research question through semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. The interviews led to study findings indicating five themes of: student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance (Clark & Veale, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Mertes et al., 2016).

The project was based was framed within the problem and purpose of the study. I interviewed six part-time and seven full-time participants about their perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. This policy recommendation paper genre is the most appropriate choice to provide guidance noting there was a problem where the institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the

focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline, and the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the existing student retention program were falling short in the university's efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention at the institution (Bolliger et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2019; Ifenthaler & Yau, 2019; Lodico et al., 2010). Four policy recommendations naturally developed out of the study findings, that aligned with the data analysis coding and thematic understanding. The suggested four policy recommendations are: (a) develop a professional development program to improve student awareness and student interaction, (b) develop learning communities to improve student engagement, (c) develop a robust early alert system, and (d) develop annual orientations for students. The policy recommendations are strategic responses to the study findings, may be novel to the institution, and require stakeholders to think creatively to successfully implement the recommendations presented within this informative proposal (Creswell, 2017; Ifenthaler et al., 2019).

This study will promote social change by offering the increased awareness of part-time and full-time faculty perceptions associated with effective student retention strategies. As such, it follows that the policy recommendation will support the organization's mission, vision, and values of this forward learning organization.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The study outcome focused upon four policy recommendations that aligned with the codes and themes presented within the data analysis:

- Recommendation One: Professional Development Program for Part-time and Full-Time Faculty focused on Student Awareness
- Recommendation Two: Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
- Recommendation Three: Robust Early Alert System Process
- Recommendation Four: Annual Orientations for Students

This study may enhance positive change by offering part-time and full-time faculty increased awareness associated with the effectiveness of student retention strategies to support student retention.

This policy recommendation paper has the potential to create positive social change within the organizational student retention strategies at the institution. This policy recommendation paper will assist in building upon the institution's mission values while remaining within realistic barriers. The thirteen participants identified the following challenges at the institution related to student awareness, administrative support, student interaction and integration, financial aid resources, and technological innovations. The policy recommendations may provide solutions and strategies for ongoing improvements to enhance the current formal student retention strategies at the institution.

The intention behind the policy recommendation paper is to address the challenge in practice as perceived by the participant in the study regarding faculty and student awareness, administrative support, student interaction and integration, financial aid resources, and technological innovation. This the policy recommendation paper is



appropriate to provide solutions related to the study's problem to address student retention strategies effectiveness at the institution.

Within this policy recommendation paper genre, I provide the perspective of thirteen the institution faculty with study findings and offer solutions to the gap in practice identified through the presented solutions. The policy recommendations address the problem identified within each theme and will result in social change for the improving the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution. The four policy recommendations are aligned with the four correlating subthemes between the six part-time and seven full-time participants (See Table 17). The four correlating subthemes between the six part-time and seven full-time participants are faculty and student awareness, one-on-one and administrative support, financial aid resources, and technology. The faculty at the institution all play specific roles within this policy recommendation including the Vice President of Academic Affairs who will assist with the professional development of faculty and administrative support, and the Dean of Student Services, who will assist with improving the effectiveness of the current student retention with implementing a more robust early alert system, the development of learning communities to improve student retention, and the implementation of an annual orientation program designed to inform student annually or throughout the year. The Student Success Coaches and Academic Advisor who will also assist with improving the effectiveness of the current student retention with implementing a more robust early alert system, the development of learning communities to improve student retention, and the

implementation of an annual orientation program designed to inform student annually or throughout the year. The recommendations will be student success focused, which will improve the effectiveness of the student retention strategies.

### **Major Evidence from Literature and Research**

I compiled major evidence from literature and research associated with the conceptual framework, as well as a review of the broader problem to address the multiple components associated with the topic of this study. The conceptual framework used for this study was Tinto's (2013) theoretical framework on student retention to support the examination of the perceptions of faculty to improve student retention. This project will address the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. Additionally, I incorporated evidence from related literature to support the evidence related to the findings and policy recommendations. The purpose of this review of literature was to find evidence to support the study focus. The evidence was compiled from literature and research related to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution. Presented are the parallels between the part-time and full-time faculty and the literature that surrounds the effectiveness of student retention strategies at the institution. The literature and research discovered will assist the reader in better understanding the perceptions of the participants in this study at the institution. This evidence has been integrated within the policy recommendations presented below.

In this policy recommendation report, I intend to develop recommendations that will address the finding of this study that were student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources. In the development of the study findings, the thematic analysis of the findings suggested the need for the institution to develop practices to improve certain systems currently in place. The policy recommendation will offer positive social change within the realm of the part-time and full-time participant feedback. The above study findings will be addressed through the policy recommendations that will suggest the development of a robust alert system to better monitor student attendance, the development of a professional development program, the development of learning communities to improve student engagement, and the development of annual orientations for students.

In formulating a policy recommendation paper based on the findings of this study, several recommended initiatives were considered for development at the institution. All recommendations presented in this section are to assist the institution in bringing awareness to improving the effectiveness of the current formal student retention strategies. Based on the findings of the study and literature, the following four recommendations are highlighted in this policy recommendation paper:

- Recommendation One: Student Awareness Professional Development Program
- Recommendation Two: Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
- Recommendation Three: Robust Early Alert System Process

- Recommendation Four: Annual Orientations for Students

The four policy recommendations aligned with the institution's mission, values, and strategic goals. The successful implementation of these policy recommendations will require the cooperation of the institution part-time and full-time faculty, the vice president of academic affairs and student services, student success coaches, and the dean of student services. In Table A1, I have presented the alignment of the four policy recommendations to the study's two research questions, and the findings of the study. The policy recommendations were developed to address the study's thematic analysis finding of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction amongst faculty and others, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources.

**Table A1***Alignment of Research Questions to Policy Recommendations*

RQ 1.0 and RQ 2.0	Findings	Policy Recommendation
IRQ1 What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution?	Student Awareness	Develop a Professional Development Program
	Social Interaction Amongst Faculty and Others	Develop a Professional Development Program
	Student Engagement as a Retention Strategy	Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement
RQ2 What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution?	Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	Develop a Robust Notification System
	Resources	Develop Annual Orientations for Students

**Recommendation One: Student Awareness Professional Development Program**

The first recommendation is to develop a professional development program to improve student awareness where faculty can learn to come together with students to share information. Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Borowiec et al., 2022). The key is to ensure the training is relevant to the practice and the participants. Offering professional development activities as a mixed approach or both formal and informal methods offer more opportunities for faculty to grow. (Pham, 2021). Formal activities include taking formal courses online or face to face or attending conferences. Informal activities could consist of group sessions or personal research (Pham 2021). Most institutions participate in more conventional activities such as workshops to aid in career professional development (Pham, 2021). There will be one professional developmental workshop to address the issue of student awareness and student interaction. The participants will be required to attend either face to face on campus or virtually depending upon the time frame. This same professional developmental workshop could be offered to others as an option, but the intent to make this training mandatory for the participants addressed in the study.

Student awareness has become the focus of attention even more so than student retention (Tight, 2019). The responsibility of student retention and engagement has shifted from being the student's responsibility to that of the university or higher education institutions (Tight, 2019). Student engagement is a learning activity (Hekmat, Roghmal,

Yaqubi, & Kamal, 2022). It is evidenced in this study that student engagement is necessary as perceived by the participants. The development of student engagement is important in context where students and faculty come together to share information in their quest for information (Hekmat et al., 2022).

**Connection to Evidence.** The first policy recommendation is aligned with RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at the institution?

This recommendation will address the finding theme of student awareness at the institution. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported awareness as a challenge not only for the students but also for the faculty as well. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and engagement is necessary as perceived by the participants. The development of student engagement is important in context where students and faculty come together to share information in their quest for information (Hekmat et al., 2022).

**Faculty Professional Development.** Continued learning through professional development renews and upgrades the skills of professionals in any discipline (Pham, 2021). The key is to ensure the training is relevant to the practice and the participants. Most institutions participate in more conventional activities such as workshops to aid in career professional development (Pham, 2021). Offering professional development activities as a mixed approach or both formal and informal methods offer more

opportunities for faculty to grow. It is evidenced in this study that student awareness and engagement is necessary as perceived by the participants sharing the need for more insights on how to address student awareness and engagement (Borrowiec, Bopardikar, & Castle, 2022).

**Connection to Audience.** The first policy recommendation will require the dean of students to address the concerns pertaining to faculty and student awareness and engagement. This policy recommendation will aid in improving the challenge for faculty and student as perceived by the part-time and full-time faculty. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, any updates during the year will be shared via the Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Student Success Coaches. No formal evaluation of the faculty would be necessary.

### **Recommendation Two: Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement**

The second policy recommendation will be the creation of learning communities to help improve student engagement. Learning communities have been prominent throughout the course of higher education (Fink, & Inkelas, 2015). Learning communities encompass self-regulated learning (Azzaim, Bates, & Fairris, 2022). Learning communities are designed to bring together students in smaller groups that are linked together for a particular term or course (Azzaim et al., 2022; McMahon, 2021). In this setting, it is hoped that students will engage with course material and support one another socially and academically, thereby increasing their chances of succeeding academically



and ultimately graduating (Azzaim et al., 2022). It was evidenced in this study by some participants, students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor. The creation of leaning communities can potentially improve student engagement as well as interactions between students in similar programs.

**Connection to Evidence.** Like the first policy recommendation, this policy recommendation also aligned with RQ1. It was evidenced in this study by some participants, students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor. This recommendation will address the finding theme student engagement as a retention strategy and student interaction amongst faculty and students at the institution. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported faculty and student engagement and interacting was a challenge in some cases.

**Student Engagement.** Student engagement is important to proactively addressing student retention while creating a campus wide lifelong bond with future graduates (Bolliger et al., 2018; Gay et al., 2020; Lerdpornkularat, et al., 2018). When students are fully engaged, focused, and present they experience flow (Gay et al., 2020, Muljana & Lou, 2019).

High touch student engagement strategies connect students to the instructor and other students through course orientation, session announcements, group assignments, and discussion forums (Gay et al., 2022). The flipped classroom is a new innovative model

where presentations normally done in the classroom by the instructor are given to student as homework are done in the classroom where the instructor becomes the facilitator allowing the students to be actively engaged with lesson content (Yeboah, Ampadu, & Ahwireng, 2020).

***Social Integration.*** Mechanisms for integration are both formal (interactions with faculty and staff and other institutional experiences) and informal (extracurricular activities and peer group interactions, including study session) (Flores-Caballero, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system, but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. Student retention and integration has been associated with faculty support and interest in student success, but the lack of support from faculty can have a negative impact on students' motivation to successfully completing a course (Mitchell et al., 2019).

***Social Interaction.*** Communication and social interaction amongst students and between teachers and students represent a major factor in the decision to withdraw as well as technology issues (Flores-Caballero, 2020). Some participants shared that students sometimes would have technological issues and would drop a course without reaching out to the instructor. Personalized communication strategies encourage regular and ongoing interaction with the instructor and student (Gay & Betts, 2020). Gay & Betts (2020) argued at the institution this would involve the faculty and students being involved and active in discussion forums, such as using the student's name when responding to post;

providing customized feedback and having meetings or group via Zoom regarding assignments or as needed (Gay et al., 2020).

Providing creative feedback improves interaction between faculty and students; therefore, enhancing a student's written communication skills, while demonstrating to students that the instructor is interested in their success (Gay et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2018). It was stated by some participants that students needed to feel a connection with other students thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than their instructor.

**Connection to Audience.** The second policy recommendation, like the first will require the dean of students to address the concerns pertaining to student engagement. This policy recommendation will aid in improving the student engagement face by faculty and student as perceived by the part-time and full-time faculty. The development of learning communities will promote self-learning culture at the institution while also positively impacting the student body as having a sense of control over their future to succeed.

### **Recommendation Three: Develop a Robust Early Alert System**

The third policy recommendation is to improve the current early alert system that is designed to track students in online courses but also needed to track students who are attending face to face. With the assistance of the participants in this study, develop a robust early alert system. Early alert systems are designed to inform the campus community of several issues including academic issues, such as attendance and

participation or social issues such as problems with family, friends, and work (Villano et al., 2018). An early alert system will target all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom.

**Connection to Evidence.** This recommendation is aligned with RQ2: What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at the institution? It was evidenced in this study that the early alert system could be improved with the inclusion of how to deal with students missing a course over a period or who just stopped coming. Early alert systems are designed to inform the campus community of several issues including academic issues, such as attendance and participation or social issues such as problems with family, friends, and work (Villano et al., 2018). This recommendation will address the finding theme communication amongst faculty and students. The goal of a robust early alert system would help increase awareness of resources available to students so they can get the assistance they need to be successful in a course (Villano et al., 2018). . There are many solutions in the literature to review to help a student's concern to help put them on the path to succeed in a course. Early alert systems and academic support can have a profound effect to help a student succeed. Flores-Caballero (2020) noted that if higher education institutions do not promote academic and social integration, retention will become unstable, and students may drop out.

**Early Alert Systems.** An early alert system is a strategy for institutions to identify students who are struggling in their academic career so the university can intervene

(Delmas & Childs, 2021; Villano et al., 2018). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students. The thirteen participants recognized the use of the early alert system but indicated the need for the same system with tracking face to face students who would not return to class leaving the faculty clueless. The interventions designed to capture students struggling vary depending on a student's need (Delmas et al., 2021). This could range from conversation with counselors to utilizing academic support or attending tutoring (Villano et al., 2018). The participants also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved. The goal is to increase student awareness of resources available to students so they may get the assistance needed (Harrison, Villano, Lynch, & Chen, 2021).

*Academic Support.* The purpose of academic support is to complement the learning in a classroom (Matabane & Matabane. 2021). Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. Some programs are designed to provide peer to peer tutoring designed to provide support for students to work with another student to help integrate them socially into a university (Matabane et al.,

2021). The thirteen participants reported the use of an early alert system; however, its use was used for tracking online students.

**Connection to Audience.** The third policy recommendation, like the first two will require the dean of students and other administrative support to address the concerns pertaining to improving the current early alert system. This policy recommendation will aid in improving notifications targeted to all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom. This recommendation will address the finding theme communication amongst faculty and students at the institution.

#### **Recommendation Four: Develop Annual Orientations for Students**

The fourth recommendation is to develop annual orientations for students to improve student awareness all year long where faculty and students can remain abreast of current changes at the institution. Student orientation is a set of activities and programs designed to help students adjust to college (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). Orientation activities can be conducted online or in face-to-face settings and are usually held on a course of a day or two (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). Most orientation programs are designed or focus on academic skills and information sharing that students need to be successful in the classroom (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021).

**Connection to Evidence.** This recommendation is also aligned with RQ2. Sometimes student orientation programs can be so preoccupied with practical and

academic preparation that they tend to not include social orientation for students (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). Students are sometimes given incomplete information when it is shared by departments that are not as informed by an institution's student services staff (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). This is evidenced in this study as shared by some of the participants who commented that it was a challenge for faculty and students to remain informed or aware of services available to students. Most orientation programs are designed or focus on academic skills and information sharing that students need to be successful in the classroom (Student Orientation in Higher Education Institutions, 2021). This recommendation will address finding these resources amongst faculty and students at the institution, making them more aware of changes throughout the year.

***Financial Resources.*** According to the participants in the study, sometimes the students as well as faculty were not aware of the financial resources available to students. Participants constantly expressed concerns with identifying ways to deal with cost as well as finding additional resources to assist students with staying in a course to keep from having to drop a course. Li and Wong (2019) supported the argument at the institution that financial and family issues can have an impact on why students leave college. Haverila et al., (2020) supported the same argument about the institution that ineffective support services can impact the retention of students negatively, or than can make things worse if nothing is done. The participants reported that student awareness was a challenge for the students as well as the faculty. Viallano et al., (2018) additionally supported the argument

at the institution that if a student's needs are not addressed, they will not persist and will create retention problems for the school. The participant's also reported students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course.

**Connection to Audience.** The fourth policy recommendation, like the third policy recommendation will require the dean of students and other administrative support to address the concerns pertaining to providing timely resource information to students while also providing direction to faculty and staff how best to direct students in need of the resources. This policy recommendation will aid in ensuring faculty are abreast as well as all students and not just students enrolling for the first time or those perceived to be having issues in and outside the classroom. This recommendation will address the finding's theme resources to assist the students at the institution.

### **Goals of the Proposed Project**

Offered are project goals within this section that align with the study's problem at the institution, was in 2008 the institution implemented a faculty-led set of retention strategies designed to address a steady decline in the University's retention rate; the problem that provided the focus of this study was that despite the implementation of this program, retention had continued to decline. Thematic Analysis of the findings revealed that the institution had issues with student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, student interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist students. The goal of this project was to address the



needs of the institution that will create a positive impact on the campus of the institution.

To address the study's findings, the following goals for this project are as follows:

1. Implement campus wide professional development workshops for the organization to improve student and faculty awareness of available resources and improve faculty and student interaction inside and outside the classroom.
2. The implementation of learning communities to improve student learning and engagement amongst each other.
3. Enhance the early alert system to target all students and not just students recently enrolled.
4. Make resources known to students on a continuous basis with annual student orientations.

### **Goal One**

The first goal of this project aligned with the issues with student awareness and social interaction amongst the part-time and full-time faculty at the institution. The participants reported that student awareness was a challenge for the students as well as the faculty. The participant's also reported students are not aware of the resources available to them to help them to be able to remain in a course. Students would reach out to them, but the student found it hard to get current information or was unaware of who to go for help. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services along with

collaborating with the Dean of Student Services and Student Success Coaches will work together to develop a professional developmental workshop reflection of the challenge shared in this finding to support and improve student awareness of the resources at the university as well as develop a workshop addressing faculty and student interaction with on another inside and outside the course room. Faculty participation will be required annually with a certificate of completion provided. Additionally, any updates during the year will be shared via the Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Student Success Coaches. No formal evaluation of the faculty would be necessary.

### **Goal Two**

The second goal of the project aligned with the issue of student engagement as a student retention strategy. The six part-time and seven full-time faculty reported students needed to feel a connection with other students as well as the instructor thereby increasing their chances of remaining in a course if there was other support present other than the instructor. About 90% of the participants' felt engagement was imperative to motivating students to continue their plan from the start to the end. Some participants acknowledged students would appreciate their support which would benefit the retention of students in their classroom. With the assistance of the Dean of Student Services, the Vice President of Academic Affairs will appoint a team to research the feasibility of creating learning communities for students who are struggling in a course. This team would consist of the Student Success Coaches for input. The learning communities will be designed in a manner to bring students together in groups linked to like courses for at least one term.

The Student Success Coaches will be charged with connecting with an assigned learning community to monitor throughout the planned year or however the group is together. The goal is to see an improvement in student engagement and retention whereby students can support one another academically and socially.

### **Goal Three**

The third goal of the project aligned with the issue of communication amongst faculty and students. The Vice-President of Academic Affairs will work with the Dean of Student Services to enhance the current early alert system that appears to be an issue for the institution. Based on the theme that emerged, faculty expressed a lot of difficulty with communicating with students as well as the need for the university to communicate more frequently with students concerning what was available to them while also communicating with them to find out what was going on in their world that may be creating retention issues in the classroom. The participants also discussed the frustration with the current system as sometimes they would know if a student had dropped out of a course until the student just stopped coming to the class. The participants felt the system could be improved.

The Dean of Student Services will work collaboratively with the Student Success Coaches to develop an improved alert system that will be designed to alert in various circumstances, for example, if a student needs to contact a professor, make a referral for tutoring, if a student appears to lack engagement in a class, a student is in danger of not passing a course, or if a student appears to need counseling. The Dean of Student Services

will be responsible for ensuring the Student Success Coaches manage the alerts and they should be. An annual evaluation of the system's effectiveness will be performed by the Dean of Student Services.

#### **Goal Four**

The fourth goal for this project aligned with the issue of resources for the students designed to help them remain in a course. The participants noted it was a challenge for faculty and students to remain informed or aware of services available. The Dean of Student Services in collaboration with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will initiate the development of an orientation program twice throughout the year for all students. The intent of this initiative will be to ensure students know and have all the resources they need to remain in a course. The need to offer more financial aid to support students and to help them be retained in class was a shared perspective amongst the part-time and full-time faculty members. Part-time and full-time participants shared their concern for more financial support for students to help them remain in class. The Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services will develop an informational workshop for faculty sharing information they can have handy to help direct students where to go for help at any point before dropping a class.

#### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The policy suggestions would be implemented over a six-to-twelve-month period beginning with the slide presentation I would conduct with the institution's leadership (see

Table A2). The goal would be to have the new policy recommendations and associated projects implemented within a one-year period.

**Table A21***Proposal for Implementation Timetable*

Tasks and Policy to be Implemented	Month/Year of Implementation
Obtain President Approval	Immediate
Presentation to Administrative Faculty and Staff	Immediate
Begin to Develop a Professional Development Program to Address Student Awareness	September 2023
Develop a Professional Development Program to improve Social Interaction Amongst Faculty and Student	November 2023
Create and send survey and feedback form for Administrators, Faculty, and Staff	November 2023
Research and Develop Learning Communities to Improve Student Engagement	December 2023
Develop a Robust Early Alert System to Improve Communication Amongst Faculty and Students	January 2024
Develop Annual Orientation for Student to Improve Awareness of Resources	February 2024
Send survey and feedback form for the evaluation of learning communities, early alert system, and annual orientations enhancement.	March 2024
All suggested policy recommendations active	May 2024

This project seeks to begin in the fall of a school term with complete implementation in place by the following year. The development of the recommendations will begin in month one with a presentation to the leadership and with the approval from the president of the university to move forward. In months two through four, development of a professional development program will occur with each member of the institution playing a role. All training should be ready for implementation the following school year. In months five and six, work will begin with the development of enhancing the current early alert system and researching learning communities. The institution leadership identified will offer feedback on the feasibility of the learning communities in month five with the goal of implementing, if feasible, the learning communities at the beginning of the next school term. Lastly, I will introduce the concept of annual orientations in month six with the assistance of the assigned staff from the Dean of Student Services for feedback and with complete implementation at the beginning of the next school year. Throughout the year of development, feedback will be collected from the administrators, faculty, and staff.

### **Outcomes-Based Evaluation**

An outcome-based evaluation will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project's four policy recommendations. This process will allow me to compare study data, the feedback from the participants and the institution community. The feedback will allow me to determine the effectiveness of the policy recommendations implemented because of the project. Ansari and Usmani (2019) noted outcomes-based evaluations

played a significant role in organizational change with educational settings. According to Hammami (2020) projects that use outcomes-based evaluations are best described as having expected outcomes that include learning new skills, attitudes, professional abilities, and a better understanding of content of content. The analysis of the results from the four outcome-based evaluations will help determine the direction for future issues to address the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, student interaction amongst faculty and students, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist students.

### **Justification of an Outcomes-Based Evaluation**

The goal of an outcomes-based evaluation focused on collecting data is to determine if the program was relevant, significant, well-timed, and organized. The use of the outcomes-based evaluation will help me to determine if the outcomes for each policy recommendation are aligned with the study's literature that institution University could benefit by improving the effectiveness of its existing student retention strategies.

An outcomes-based evaluation for policy recommendation one is fitting because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at the institution should mirror best practices shaped by the institution faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide



me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation two because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at the institution should mirror best practices shaped by the institution faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation three because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at the institution University should mirror best practices shaped by the institution faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting for policy recommendation four because the approach is authentic, requires organized supervision, and faculty participation to be successful (Lqbal et al., 2020). An outcomes-based evaluation is fitting because the study's intention was to address the perceptions of the part-time and full-time faculty that was already identified. Policies developed at the institution should mirror best practices shaped by the institution faculty to support the faculty and administration and students (Paolucci & Jennings, 2017). The results of an outcome-based evaluation could provide me with insights to the effectiveness of the student retention strategies at the institution as reported by the six part-time and seven part-time faculty.

### **Summary of the Policy Recommendation Report**

In this project, I will address the study's findings of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance. The six part-time and seven full-time participants reported on the current formal student retention strategies at the institution. In this policy recommendation paper, I address policy changes that will offer solutions to the findings identified within the study. Solutions included (a) develop a professional development program to help improve student awareness and student interaction, (b) develop learning communities to improve student engagement, (c) develop a robust early alert system, and (d) develop annual orientations for students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of the part-time and full-time participants feedback process. This qualitative

study allowed me to present evidence as to the perception of the effectiveness of the formal student retention strategies of part-time and full-time faculty at the institution.

The policy recommendations in this section were developed through the lens of the study's conceptual framework, Tinto's (2013) theory on student retention strategies. The data collected indicated the institution had challenges related to faculty and student awareness, administrative support, student interaction and integration, financial aid resources, and technological innovation as perceived by the six part-time and seven full-time participants. The policy recommendations within this study were based upon scholarly research and findings from interviews that identified the themes of student awareness, student engagement as a retention strategy, social interaction, communication amongst faculty and students, and resources to assist with attendance.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview # \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Interview Protocols:

**Interview Script, prior to interview:**

Hello, my name is Sheila Williamson-Branch and I thank you for agreeing to participate in this project study. Your input is greatly appreciated and will be valuable to this study. I received permission from the university for your participation in this study. This interview will be confidential, and a coding system will be utilized to ensure the confidentiality of the identity of the participants and the university. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting my study as a part of the degree requirements.

I am requesting your permission to record this interview so I may accurately capture your responses. If during this interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview, feel free to let me know. I am the principal researcher, confirming your participation in this study.

Again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. A two-hour time frame has been allotted for this interview and will consist of 11 questions regarding faculty perceptions associated with student retention strategies. Please feel free to let me know if you need to take a break or stop. You may withdraw your participation at any time. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If not, with your permission I

will cut on the recording and begin the interview. Please state your name and your position.

### Research and Interview Questions

Icebreaker:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?

1. What can you tell me about the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?
2. What are your perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies?
3. In your view, what are the strengths of the current formal student retention strategies?
4. In your view, what are the weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies?
5. In your view, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies utilized have helped improve retention at the university?
6. In your opinion, which of the formal student retention strategies are most effective?

RQ2. What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?

1. What role do you play in helping retain students?

2. In your opinion, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies in place do you think the students are benefiting from?
3. Can you suggest some ways that the university can improve its current retention strategies?
4. Are you aware of any other strategies used by your peers that seem to improve retention in their courses?
  - 10 (a) Can you describe these for me?
  - 10 (b) How could these strategies be utilized in other courses to improve the retention efforts at Acoryn University?
5. Can you share what strategies you are using that are not in the institutional playbook per se, but are a part of your personal teaching practice to help improve retention at Acoryn University?

Interviewer: This concludes my interview questions with you. Is there anything else you would like to clarify or add to this interview?

### **Member Checking**

Once the interview has been transcribed, I will share with you a copy of the transcript. You will then have an opportunity to review the document for accuracy (member check), to make sure what you stated was transcribed correctly, to get your approval of the transcription.

Thank you for your participation in this discussion.

## Appendix C: Participation Email

Good afternoon!

I invite you to participate in my project study about faculty perceptions regarding student retention strategies. I am interested in learning your perceptions regarding the current student retention program and identifying strategies to improve student retention. I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am requesting your assistance as I work to complete my project study. I have received permission from the Danville Community College campus to conduct my research.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty and part-time faculty regarding what aspects of the current retention program are falling short in the colleges efforts to identify strategies to improve student retention and to identify strategies to improve student retention. The benefit of participating creates an opportunity to provide insights that may lead to improving the college's student retention rate.

Your involvement in the study will require not more than one hour of your time. All participants will be asked a series of 11 questions. These questions will be shared prior to the interview. Once the interview is complete, you will be requested to review your transcribed responses to ensure accuracy.

I would like to begin these interviews the week of April 11, 2022.

Thank you for your consideration and have a wonderful day.

## Appendix D: Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
<b>RQ 1.0</b>	
What are the perceptions of full-time and part-time faculty regarding strengths and weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?	1) What can you tell me about the current formal student retention strategies implemented at Acoryn University?
	2) What are your perceptions of the current formal student retention strategies?
	3) In your view, what are the strengths of the current formal student retention strategies?
	4) In your view, what are the weaknesses of the current formal student retention strategies?
	5) In your view, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies utilized have helped improve retention at the university?
	6) In your opinion which of the formal student retention strategies are most effective?
<b>RQ 2.0</b>	
What are full-time faculty and part-time faculty member perceptions of ways to improve student retention at Acoryn University?	1) What role do you play in helping retain students?
	2) In your opinion, what aspects of the current formal student retention strategies in place do you think students are benefiting from?
	3) Can you suggest some ways that the university can improve its current retention strategies?



	4) Are you aware of any other strategies used by your peers that seem to improve retention in their courses?
	4a) Can you describe these to me?
	4b) How could these strategies be utilized in other courses to improve the retention efforts at Acoryn University?
	5) Can you share what strategies you are using that are not in the institutional playbook per se, but are a part of your personal teaching practice to help improve retention at Acoryn University?

## Appendix E: Current Formal Retention Strategies at Acoryn University

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Current Formal Student Retention Strategy</b>
Strategy 1	Tutoring Assistance
Strategy 2	Increased Faculty Awareness of their Role
Strategy 3	Active Re-Entry Campaign