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Retention Strategies for Financial Stability in Community Colleges

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2007

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Tennessee education leaders must improve their student retention strategies to increase financial stability and enhance the state's ability to support businesses and jobs through a well-educated workforce. The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was on 6 Tennessee community colleges where leaders had demonstrated successful strategies for retaining students resulting in increased revenues and financial stability. The advocacy/participatory worldview provided a conceptual framework for identifying and comparing themes regarding Tennessee higher education leaders' retention strategies. Data collection included interviews and review of organizational retention reports on strategies as well as college, state, and federal findings on retention. Federal government websites contained information about Tennessee community colleges having the highest retention rates. Methodological triangulation provided the opportunity to identify similarities in retention strategies used by the community college leaders. Using the concept of classical data analysis, responses were categorized according to the program, activity, or initiative college administrators used to increase retention. Based on mind mapping of the clusters of information, findings revealed 3 primary themes: effects of retention on college revenues; challenges in retaining at-risk students; and strategies for retaining students, including new student orientation, counseling and advising, tutoring, and freshman seminars. The potential for social change includes the opportunity to increasing the college-educated workforce to provide more opportunities for local business leaders and find viable applicants to fill open positions and enhance the economic sustainability of local communities.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

President Obama has focused on higher education since entering office. His focus is for the United States to again have the highest percentage of college graduates in the world (Crellin, Kelly, & Prince, 2012). The number of U.S. college graduates peaked in 2009. Tennessee ranked near the bottom, both nationally and regionally, in the number of graduates produced by Tennessee colleges and universities. Effective methods to retain students need to be identified and replicated to increase the number of Tennessee graduates. The purpose of this study was to analyze government statistics and reports, and to interview college personnel responsible for their institutions' retention business processes, to identify ways to increase retention and revenue in Tennessee colleges. A decrease in student population decreases revenue and has an effect on the cost per degree.

Background of the Problem

Tennessee ranks 38th out of 50 states for college graduates, according to the 2008 State New Economy Index, and President Obama challenged educators to increase graduates (Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 2008). Enrollment at Tennessee colleges and universities has declined since peaking in 1993 (Making Opportunity Affordable, 2010). The inability to increase graduates is expected to hinder Tennessee administrators' ability to enhance a competitive workforce and to facilitate the transition from an agricultural and mechanical economy to a technology-based economy.

Tennessee's leadership must increase postsecondary graduates by 3.5% per year until 2025 (Making Opportunity Affordable, 2010). If Tennessee's leadership cannot meet this goal, the state will not be able to meet workforce needs or compete with other states (Making Opportunity Affordable, 2010), which would require Tennessee employers to depend on alternative populations to supply Tennessee employer's workforce needs. Other concerns include the loss of revenue, increased cost of technology, student services, and financial aid (Romano, 2012). In addition, low graduation rates increase the cost per degree (Romano, 2012). College and university employees are accepting more responsibilities with no increase in compensation. College administrators add responsibilities to employees hoping to compensate for the decrease in profits (Romano, 2012).

Colleges are businesses competing for customers (students) to increase revenue to become more financially sustainable. Business leaders split resources not only to attract new customers but also to retain the customers they currently have (Arnold, Fang, & Palmatier, 2012). Mohd Noor (2012) stated it cost companies five times more to attract new customers than it does to retain customers. It is more costly for college administrators to attract new students than to retain students.

Problem Statement

From 1985 to 2015, the average attrition rate in the United States for college students entering their second year was 30% to 40% (Gajewski & Mather, 2015). Morrow and Ackerman (2012) stated 35% of students leave for academic reasons; the other 65% leave voluntarily. Leaders of colleges and universities in the United States struggle with retention and it continues to be a priority of college leaders (Allen & Lester, 2012). The general business problem was identifying strategies for retaining students and increasing revenues for Tennessee colleges. The specific business problem was some

Tennessee college administrators have limited strategies to motivate students to stay in college and earn their degree or to attract new students to increase college revenues and maintain financial stability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this qualitative multiple case study was to identify strategies college administrators can employ to improve retention of students in Tennessee's community colleges, thereby increasing college revenues and maintaining financial stability. The participant sample included vice presidents, directors, and retention coordinators of six Tennessee community colleges with successful strategies for student retention. College administrators have become increasingly dependent on tuition and fees as a means of revenue (Hillman, 2012). Hoffman (2014) listed lack of sense of belonging, insufficient finances, diminished motivation, and lack of supportive environment as reasons students withdraw from college. Customer satisfaction, level of experience with the product or service, and other demographic characteristics are indicators of customer loyalty (Hoyt & Howell, 2011). Customer loyalty and retention are essential in maintaining and increasing revenues to cover the costs of operations, and to achieve the administrators' strategic goals.

This study was limited to postsecondary institutions and focused on community colleges. The data for the study came from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the National Center of Educational Statistics, and the Department of Education. Data collection included interviews with Tennessee college department personnel responsible for designing, implementing, and improving business processes for retaining students.

Retention and graduation rates of different college sectors and the ability of college leaders to meet the needs of students were factors for comparison and exploration. The inability of college leaders to meet the needs of students affects the ability to retain students, produce graduates, or attract new students. The social change implications of this study include an increase in educated workforce and improved economy for Tennessee.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative multiple case study was the most appropriate method to explore strategies to retain students and increase revenues. The qualitative method enables researchers to identify and define different groups' behaviors into an organized pattern (Berg & Lune, 2012). Berg encouraged the use of the qualitative research method when the researcher wishes to explore perceptions and subjective apprehensions. Exploratory case studies are useful when studying an organization or group (Berg & Lune, 2012). Qualitative researchers take a holistic approach, and take into account outside factors that cause a result (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Quantitative researchers use numerical and/or categorical data to examine the statistical effects, differences, and findings from a defined population. The mixed-method approach was not applicable because the data collection process consisted of interviews and archived data from government reports to identify colleges with high retention. The case study approach allowed me to collect and compare information from several colleges in a holistic manner (Yin, 2009). Evaluation of the different practices of college administrators assisted in identifying differences and similarities in practices, which may lead to increasing retention rates and revenues.

Research Question

The central research question was the following: What methods do leaders of Tennessee community colleges use to increase students' retention rates to increase revenues and maintain financial security? The following subquestions supported the central research question:

1. What organizational factors contribute to retention in community colleges?
2. What institutional factors affect student retention? Examples of institutional factors include adequate academic advising, available financial aid, student orientation, and counseling services.
3. What is the role of administrators in the retention program or process at the college?
4. What is the role of faculty in the retention program or process at the college?

Interview Questions

Interview questions are listed below and presented in Appendix A:

1. What role do you play in the retention activities at your college?
2. What types of retention data do you collect and at what stages in the student life cycle do you collect the data?
3. What types of programs or initiatives are offered at your institution geared to affect retention of students?
4. Describe your retention programs for your 2014-2015 school years.
5. What was your retention before implementing the program(s)?
6. What was the change in your retention since implementing this program?

7. Were other students in addition to freshmen students affected from the implementation of this program? If so what other students were impacted?
8. If you realized a retention improvement, how much time elapsed before you saw an improvement in retention?
9. What else could have affected either the retention at the school or the program, (i.e., event or initiative)?
10. Describe any other programs or initiatives used for increasing retention. What were the results?
11. What was the most significant thing that was done to increase retention, and how do you know?
12. What departments at your college or university were involved in the retention program or initiative?
13. What additional information do you feel is pertinent to this study that was not addressed in the interview questions?

Conceptual Framework

Leaders of colleges compete for students to increase revenues needed to address the strategic and operational goals of the colleges. Business leaders allocate resources not only to attract new customers but also to retain the customers they have (Arnold, et al., 2012), just as college leaders spend resources to attract and retain students. Mohd Noor (2012) stated it costs organizational leaders five times more to attract new customers than it does to retain customers.

Researchers have evaluated and compared different retention models for over 30 years (Gajewski & Mather, 2015). Tinto (2006) recognized the importance of retention efforts during the first year of higher education. Tinto posited that academic integration was connected to persistence of reaching graduation.

The United States ranked number 12 of 36 nations in the number of 24- to 35-year-olds with a college degree (Chen, 2014). The United States once led the world in the number of college graduates. Students leaving colleges and universities are a concern to college administrators in all facets of academia; funding patterns, facilities planning, and academic curricula are of particular concern (Heisserer & Parette, (2002). Administrators are looking for insights to develop an effective policy/practice that would enhance retention. Heisserer and Parette (2002) identified commonalities and trends that occur in colleges that show an increase in retention or a history of high retention of college students. Cherkowski (2012) credited instructors with retaining students, by creating value, quality, and satisfaction in their experiences.

The advocacy/participatory worldview conceptual framework was appropriate to examine changes in higher education and policies of colleges leadership to retain students. The advocacy/participatory worldview provided a closer viewpoint to a subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Student attrition affects tax paying citizens because the department of education contributes to college students' funding and disbursement from states' budgets and contributes to the basic operational costs of the college (Making Opportunity Affordable, 2010).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to clarify how the terms were used in the study.

At-risk students: Students who are ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged, disabled, of low socioeconomic status, or probationary (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Pell grants: The Federal Pell Grant Program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post-baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education. Grant amounts are dependent on the student's expected family contribution (EFC), the cost of attendance (as determined by the institution), the student's enrollment status (full-time or part-time), and whether the student attends for a full academic year or less (Rubin, 2011).

Retention Rate: The National Center of Educational Statistics defines retention rate as the number of students who return the following semester or year to continue their education ("The Condition of Education," 2012). The measure of the rate of students persisting in their education until they graduate is the retention rate of the institution (Cherry & Coleman, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The researcher's beliefs and life experiences influence the researcher's assumptions in a study (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). One assumption in this study was that data from the state and federal agencies were accurate. Although these data were collected, calculated, and entered manually, there was the possibility of human error.

Another assumption was that participants would honestly and accurately provide information for evaluation.

Limitations

Moustakas (1994) described limitations as the influences and conditions that the researcher cannot control. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) referred to limitations as potential weaknesses of the study. Although there were numerous studies on retention (e.g. Crellin et al., 2012; Post, 2013; Tinto 1997, 2006), I located no previous studies focused on colleges in Tennessee. The conclusions on efficacious student retention policies resulting from this study could be affected by the personal experiences and bias of the participants. Each participant was responsible for retention tracking and programs at their college.

Delimitations

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined delimitations as the items included and omitted from the study. I included colleges in Tennessee, which reported higher retention rates. I included reports generated by federal and state agencies to determine which schools had the highest retention rates. I examined both retention rates and interview data. The knowledge from studying these programs could benefit other college administrators in developing retention programs for their colleges. Colleges not reporting a higher retention were not included in this study. The use of enrollment numbers was only to distinguish the size of the schools.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Retention efforts are ongoing and becoming increasingly important to college and university administrators in the United States (Keiser & Hammer, 2015). Increasing retention increases revenue and helps maintain the financial stability of the college. College administrators are becoming increasingly dependent on student tuition to maintain financial stability. Tinto (2006) questioned whether educators could turn what was known about retention into action. Possessing a good action plan does not always ensure proper implementation. The effect of college students' socio-economic status has on student retention was also of interest (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012; Wehde-Roddiger et al., 2012).

Implications for Social Change

The ability to retain students and increase graduation rates could increase the college-educated workforce of Tennessee. Students who persist and complete college are more likely to repay their student loans, because they more likely to be gainfully employed upon graduation, unlike students who drop out. In addition, the longer students stay in college the more debt they incur. Students can graduate in a reasonable time due to effective retention strategies.

The benefits of having a college education are also an implication for social change. College graduates are more likely to be employed and have a higher median income ("Benefits in Higher Education," 2011). College graduates are not only more likely to have health insurance; they are more likely to live healthier lifestyles. College graduates are more active in their children's educational activities ("Benefits in Higher Education," 2011). McGlynn (2011) noted that the difference in unemployment rates between college graduates with a bachelor's degree and high school graduates increased to 5.1% in 2009.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore methods to retain students in Tennessee's colleges, which may allow college administrators to meet the needs of their students and attract new students, thereby increasing college revenues and maintaining financial stability.

There were 162 references in this study, of which 155 (95.68%) were peer reviewed, and 138 (85.19%) were published within the past 5 years. There were 106 references in the literature review, of which 96 (90.56%) are peer reviewed and 95 (89.62%) were published in the past 5 years. The central research question for this study was the following: What methods can leaders of Tennessee community colleges use to increase retention rates of their students to increase revenues and maintain financial security?

Articles were retrieved by searching Google Scholar, Educational Resource complete, Education for SAGE, and ProQuest. Key terms searched were benefits of higher education, student incentives, retention, customer service, and graduation rates. Government websites included the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the Tennessee Board of Regents, the National Center for Educational Statistics, and the

United States Census Bureau. Other websites included the Lumina Foundation, the Southern Educational Board, and the White House.

Leaders of the United States have an opportunity to reinvent the education system and standards, especially in higher education (“Four Steps to Finishing First,” 2011). The report focuses on areas of reform to produce graduates capable of contributing fully to their society and community. Higher education has been an instrument for opportunity and economic mobility. Higher education is the mechanism for producing a skilled workforce (“Four Steps to Finishing First,” 2011). Louw (2013) agreed that the educational system needs to be reinvented but identified the need for a learning environment that mirrors real-world problems.

Customer Service

Leaders of colleges and universities are diversifying the ways in which classes are offered to meet the demands of a changing population (Evirgen & Cengel, 2012). Correspondingly, business leaders are offering customers what they want, how they want it, and when they want it (Setia, Venkatesh, & Joglekar, 2013). The role of customer service is growing in today’s economy (Setia et al., 2013). The *sundown rule* implemented by Wachovia Bank ensures that bank employees make contact with unhappy customers the same day the complaint is made. Leaders from Best Buy, Continental Airlines, and Barclay increased their focus on customer service (Setia et al., 2013). Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012) agreed that combining sales and service increases revenue and increases retention rates.

Service quality is especially important in banks, a service business (Eysteinsson & Johannesdottir, 2013). Eyteinsson and Johannesdottir (2013) noted that values and image are important dimensions in service quality. Frontline employees play a vital role in customer service and are responsible for customer perceptions of service quality, satisfaction, and value (Halling, 2013). Customer satisfaction levels often relate to how customers perceive their needs being met (Lukas, Whitwell, & Heide, 2013). Customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty.

Putting the customer first not only helps differentiate a company from competitors but also builds strong brand value and increases sales and profits (Edmonds, 2013). Edmonds (2013) described the challenges of ordering a simple Internet installation. Edmonds (2013) questioned the possibilities of going to another company for the desired service when receiving poor customer service. Edmonds (2013) also noted that many utility companies have monopolies in an area and customers are at the mercy of the local utility company.

Customer service in health care is similar to customer service in educational facilities. Brander, Paterson, and Chan (2012) studied a group of mid-level supervisors who worked at a mid-size hospital in Southern Ontario. Mid-level leaders play an important role in communicating and working with others. The sharing of beliefs and setting examples was believed to be of utmost importance for good customer service and customer retention (Brander et al., 2012). Sharing beliefs and setting examples is important for teachers and department chairs in academic settings to retain students.

Customer satisfaction, level of experience with the product or service, and other demographic characteristics are indicators of customer loyalty (Hoyt & Howell, 2011). Hoyt and Howell (2011) connected customer loyalty to student retention. Students who were loyal to their college were more likely to recommend the school to other potential students, return to the school for additional degrees, join the alumni, and maintain contact with the faculty. One of the biggest contributors to student satisfaction was quality instruction in the classroom (Hoyt & Howell, 2011).

Customer Retention

Business leaders need to retain and attract new customers to be profitable. Tatiknoda (2013) suggested loyal customers produce larger profits than new customers. A 10% increase in customer retention increases profits 25% to 85% and increases customer value 30%, while a 10% increase in acquisition costs increases customer value less than 2% (Tatikonda, 2013). Business leaders allocate their marketing resources with part of their resources designated to attract new customers and part used to retain current customers (Arnold et al., 2012). Company leaders spend five times more to attract new customers than to retain customers (Mohd Noor, 2012).

Social influences have an effect on customer retention (Nitzan & Libai, 2011). Information about the product or service gained by seeing the product in use, word of mouth, or a third party knowing about the product gives the customer a sense of familiarity (Nitzan & Libai, 2011). Customers may be familiar with a product or service and believe there is minimal risk associated with the product. Customers may be loyal because of fees or level of service (Nitzan & Libai, 2011). Companies lose customers because of bad service and poor quality products (Nitzan & Libai, 2011).

Customer loyalty is the result of a high level of satisfaction. For each complaint, there are 26 unhappy customers the company does not know about (Tatikonda, 2013). There are six serious complaints of the 26 not heard from. Customers who complain and for whom the complaint is resolved quickly, are more likely to do business again with the company than a customer who does not complain (Tatikonda, 2013). Leaders of companies who satisfactorily resolve customer issues increase the likelihood of the customers returning by 54% to 75%, and up to 95% if the matter is handled quickly (Tatikonda, 2013).

Student Retention

Leaders of colleges are in the business of education. However, regardless of the type of institution, the leaders must ensure they have sufficient funds to cover the costs of operations in private, proprietary, or public institutions. College leaders must be able to pay salaries, utilities, and other business-related expenses. Colleges have changed over the years, and Scott (2012) noted the transformation of public intellect or subject experts once located at institutions of higher learning could now be found across academics, politics, and management consultants. State politics affects institutional outcomes for the state (Schuman, 2014). The increasing focus on ensuring diversity and the success of students with sufficient revenues continues to be a challenge for policymakers (Martin, 2015).

One of the largest obstacles college leaders face is the ability to retain students until graduation or until the student transfers to another institution (Chen, 2014). The challenge becomes complex when exploring the diversity of the student population. College administrators must include part-time, distance, online, adult, and mature students, and include the traditional student when addressing retention (Hewitt & Rose-Adams, 2013). Angulo-Ruiz and Pergelova (2013) agreed there is an increased pressure on college leaders to increase retention; however, there are many variables that can affect retention, such as family and social influences, quality of instruction, finances, and integration into college, to name a few. These variables interlink to form a complicated web.

Mullin (2012) suggested consideration of both the institution and the individual when discussing student success. Some institutional leaders count the number of degrees conferred in a year; however, some students can earn more than one degree concurrently (Mullin, 2012). Students transferring from one college to another are not always counted, especially transfers from community colleges, which are significantly underreported (Mullin, 2012). Derived metrics are often the standard in measuring student success, which require the college administrators to track the student. Tracking the student is difficult after the student leaves the college (Mullin, 2012). A method to measure student success in all colleges that accurately depicts student retention and success awaits development (Mullin, 2012).

Tinto (2006) studied retention in higher education for decades. Eckles and Stradley (2012) reviewed Tinto's theory that social and academic integration are key factors in retaining students and Bean's (1990) theory of how students decide to leave or remain at the institution. Demetriou and Powell (2014) supported Bean's theory of organizational integration and environmental pull, which is that students' backgrounds affect retention. Eckles and Stradley (2012) concluded that sociology ties the two theories together. Eckles and Stradley found that every friend of a student who left college made the student five times more likely to leave, but for each friend who stayed, students were 2.25 times more likely to stay. The integration of students in college networks increases the probability of students remaining in school (Eckles & Stradley, 2012). Fitzgerald, Bruns, Stevens, Furco, and Swanson (2012) argued that engagement is essential to effectively accomplish the purpose of colleges and universities. Korobova and Starboin (2015) concurred that engaging students is an important factor in retaining students.

Allen and Lester (2012) conducted a study regarding the potential benefit of students taking remedial mathematics classes to address retention issues at a two-year college in Georgia. Allen and Lester found the addition of remedial mathematics classes increased retention. The college added a success coach whose responsibilities included encouraging students to form connections with other students and college faculty. The success coach monitored academic progress, created a sense of accountability within the students, and helped students set goals that they could visualize (Allen & Lester, 2012).

The physical therapy department at the University of North Florida was experiencing retention below the national average for the program (Noonan, Lundy, Smith, & Livingston, 2012). The university implemented a student success program. The program identified four important concepts of an engaged-learning community: (a) engagement, (b) assessment, (c) identification, and (d) assistance (Noonan et al., 2012). The faculty realized the students had unique abilities, assets, and liabilities; faculty talked to students in small focus groups and identified campus resources to help the students (Noonan et al., 2012). During the orientation, student support services personnel were introduced to the new students. A peer-tutoring program was developed. The cohort who entered the first year had 100% retention after the first semester and at the end of the program 89.3% graduated (Noonan et al., 2010).

During the research phase for a freshmen orientation program, Brown (2012) found a direct correlation between college students who remained in college and the education level of their parents. Brown (2012) also found that students taking vocational programs were more likely to drop out of college than students whose goal was to gain knowledge and enter a professional career. The fit between a student and the institution is also a factor in retention (Martin, 2015). A student's sense of connection to the institution not only increases the student's satisfaction with the college but also decreases social isolation and increases the student's intent to persist to graduation (Martin, 2015). McEwan (2014) concurred that social network satisfaction is a factor in retaining students.

Students who drop out of college negatively impact the retention of colleges and universities. Costs incurred by the institutional leaders include (a) cost for student recruitment, (b) loss of tuition income, (c) financial aid, and (d) potential loss of faculty and staff (Smith, Therry, & Whale, (2012). At the 2010 American Association of Community Colleges Convention, community college leaders, faculty, and staff were asked to identify ways they can help students understand the value of an education and meet their academic goals (Chen, 2014). Understanding college retention and reasons students do not return to school is not a simple task. Larkin, Brasel, and Pines (2013) emphasized the complexity of the decisions and argued that (a) family backgrounds, (b) prior schooling, (c) skills and abilities, (d) intentions, and (e) personal goals affect the decision as do academic performance, extracurricular activities, and peer and faculty relationships.

Benefits of Higher Education

According to “Benefits in Higher Education” (2011), college graduates are most likely to be employed and college graduates also have a higher median income. College graduates not only are more likely to have health insurance, they also live healthier lifestyles. College graduates also are more active in their children’s educational activities (“Benefits in Higher Education,” 2011). According to Rissman, Carrington, and Bland (2013) benefits of higher education include lower levels of imprisonment, higher levels of health; wellbeing; personal income; community, political, and social engagement; payment of government taxes; confirming to vote; blood donation; and tolerance for others’ opinions. McGlynn (2011) noted the difference in unemployment rates between college graduates with a bachelor’s degree and high school graduates increased to 5.1% in 2009. McGlynn listed transformation of people’s lives by broadening their horizons, developing critical and analytical thinking skills, appreciation for diversity and ability to see multiple perspectives on issues. McGlynn also noted that people with college degrees have a higher job satisfaction rate.

In addition to the personal benefits of better job prospects, better health, and better social status, Hensley, Galilee-Belfer, & Lee (2013) linked education to social benefits for the community and nation by having lower national spending on health care and promotes a larger tax base. Hensley, Gailee-Belfer, and Lee posited that college graduates are active in their communities, often volunteering.

Educational Funding

The United States would need an additional $33 billion over the current budgeted amount to meet the needed increase of 23 million college graduates ("Four Steps to Finishing First," 2011). Taxpayers, students, or their families cannot afford this additional cost. A couple of different options were noted in the report as a new educational model was suggested. The first was to offer a more structured degree path with less course options, which would bring down the cost. The college administrators and faculty were grounded in the traditional ways of education and often did not take risk and seize opportunities to find new way to educate students (Nandan & Scott, 2013). Rich (2013) suggested academic departments were like cost centers and must justify their existence by revenue generation or acquire money from the government.

Institutional Funding

The first step in "Four Steps to Finishing First" (2011) report from the Lumina Foundation was performance funding. Most state officials budgeted and distributed funds according to enrollment without regard to the number of students graduating from the college. Just over 50% of students enrolled in a 4-year college earn a bachelor's degree in 6-years (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012) and only one-third of students in

Community Colleges earn a degree (Bremer, Center, Opsal, Medhanie, Jang, & Geise, 2012).

A unique finding was the United States was different from other countries. In the United States, private college entrance does not fluctuate with the economy (Reisz & Stock, 2012). The same was true of public universities. In Reisz and Stock's study, economic development did not lead to higher enrollment.

Funding for education is a complicated matrix of factors. Tennessee takes into consideration the number of students, the number of degrees conferred during the year, the number of students taking high school and college credits courses and the number of adults (25 years or older) and low-income students to fund their community colleges. Maintenance and operations costs, utilities, equipment repair, space used for education, and general space, and performance funding are also included in the state's funding equation (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2015). Community colleges can also earn an additional 5.45% for meeting annual targets related to learning engagement, access, and success (Tennessee Higher Commission, 2015).

Legislators and college administrators must work together to lower tuition (Tandberg, 2013). Tuition is the main tool to offset reduced state funding (Doyle, 2012). Federal financial aid is distributed similarly across the states; however, the structure of the state's higher education system and the economy of the state have an effect on tuition rates (Doyle, 2012). Finding the tuition rate that does not deter enrollment, yet retains current students, and accomplishes the main goal of creating sufficient revenue is a monumental task (Doyle, 2012). The budget forecast becomes increasingly important with the decrease of state allocations. Student tuition is calculated in the college-operating budget but when the student does not return for a second semester, the college loses that money (Conner, Daugherty, & Gilmore 2012). Schuman (2014) compared funding education as a *bottomless pit*; meaning regardless of how much is spent, higher education can never be overfunded as education is a continuous investment.

Endowments, tuition, annual and capital giving, government payments, athletics, and unrelated business income are sources of revenue for colleges and universities (Bienen, 2012). Annual and capital giving comes from donations from individuals, corporations, or foundations. Unrelated business sources income comes from technology transfers, such as the creation of a pharmaceutical product, but tech transfer offices functions generally lose money (Bienen, 2012). With the recent recession, almost all of these sources have been down except for tuition, which increased (Bienen, 2012).

Colleges and universities fight for the same federal and state funding as public safety, healthcare, and quality of life issues (Supplee, 2012). Funding varied throughout the different states and throughout the different nations (Murray, 2009). Denmark, Finland, and Greece funded greater than 96% of college funds, while Australia covered less than 50% (Murray, 2009). The lack of funding for a program can also affect retention.

Evaluating programs to determine what programs are in higher demand or if a program can be consolidated with another is one means of making the college more efficient. Taxpayers and policymakers are more willing to invest in colleges and universities that have leaders that are good stewards of public money and manage spending decisions well ("Four Steps to Finishing First," 2011). Institutional and state board leaders must work together to make efficient business decisions (Tandberg, 2013). Retention affects planning for facilities, funding, and the curricula offered at an institution. Retention also affects future labor markets, as students are unprepared and improperly trained for the expected roles and responsibilities of particular vocations (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

President Obama has recommended each citizen have at least 1 year of training after high school (Crellin et al., 2012). Community colleges and vocational programs have been forming alliances so students can go to a community college to earn their associates' degree after earning a certificate or diploma from a vocational program in high school (DeFoe, 2015). The ability to use credits earned in the vocational school decreases the amount of funding required to earn a degree and makes college more affordable.

Student Funding

Financial and family responsibilities and the idea of borrowing money is a deterrent from attending college (Johnson, 2012). Students are not getting the correct advice from high school counselors about attending college (Johnson, 2012). Many college students do not realize the impact outside responsibilities have on their academic performance (Faulk, Strinivasan, & Bingham, 2012). These students may not be able to find a balance for their family, work, and academic responsibilities, either because they do not realize the imbalance or they are unsure how to manage the responsibilities. Men leave college more often than women (Severiens & Dam, 2012). Stone and O'Shea

(2013) found men are more likely to leave school because of being the breadwinners, and women left college because of the overwhelming experience due to juggling life's responsibilities such as childcare, housework, and work.

Educating students about financial aid can reduce financial obstacles (King, 2012). This is especially true of students from low socioeconomic families (King, 2012). These students' parents often have not been to college and cannot guide their child through the process. King (2012) noted communication between the parents, student, and high school staff regarding the decision to go to college, applying for financial aid, and ACT/SAT preparation has the greatest effect on students' abilities when entering college. Leonard (2013) has demonstrated that students paying for their college education were more likely to complete their degree programs. The students had a vested interest in completing college or felt their money would be wasted.

One of the biggest deterrents of high school graduates going to college is the money to pay for it (Supplee, 2012). Parents often begin saving for college when a child is born. The cost of attending college continues to grow and is predicted to continue to rise (Supplee, 2012). Students use a variety of ways to fund their education including their personal savings and earnings, parental support, employer tuition reimbursements, scholarships, grants, and loans (Faulk, Strinivasan, & Bingham, 2012). The 529 Plan or Qualified Tuition Plan is available in all 50 states, including the District of Columbia, and depending on the state, it is either a prepaid tuition plan or a college savings plan (Nam, Kim, Clancy, Zaga, & Sherraden, 2013).

Financial obligations for Black and Latino students may be a greater obstacle than for other college students, as they may come from a lower socio-economic background and have the burden of paying for their own college education (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Vega, Moore, and Miranda (2015) attributed poverty, poor attendance in high school, poor quality schools, and exposure to violence as barriers to successfully graduating college.

In many colleges and universities around the world, students are not completing their programs in four years for bachelor's degrees (Garibaldi, Giavazzi, Ichino, & Rettore, 2012). The average time of completion is 6 years. In many instances, the tuition decreases when it takes longer to complete (Garibaldi et al., 2012). In the study with data collected from Bocconi University in Milan, Italy, Garibaldi et al., (2012) found the speed of graduation was related to tuition. Garibaldi et al., found an increase of tuition would encourage students to graduate in a timely manner but would not increase the dropout rate.

Findings from a study of a south Texas university reported that 27.5% of first year students who did not return for their second semester did so because of finances (Bain, Gandy, & Golightly, 2012). There were many reasons for student financial issues but the most prominent was funding his or her education and what assistance was available for him or her. Funding for higher education varied across states. South Dakota did not provide any state financial aid (Doyle, 2012). The state's level of funding and the degree of involvement had a direct effect on the policy on tuition and financial aid (Doyle, 2012).

Student Preparation

Forty percent of freshmen college students leave college because of the adjustments to college life (Wehde-Roddiger, Trevino, Anderson, Arrambide, O'Connor, & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Students misjudge their academic and social abilities prior to entering college. The student's self-esteem, ethnic identity, support from parents and peers contribute to students withdrawing from school (Wehde-Roddiger et al., 2012). One-third of students identify academic work as the reason for not returning to college (Wehde-Roddiger et al., 2012).

Colleges and universities have responded to the departure rate of students by developing a variety of retention programs. The main purpose of new student seminars was to increase retention rates (Ito, 2014). These programs included orientation programs, introductory courses for freshmen, support groups, and a variety of other programs to keep students in college. Colleges and universities have been accustomed to well-prepared and self-sufficient students. However, there is an increase in nontraditional, ill-prepared students (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013).

Confidence, diligence, resourcefulness, and self-awareness are traits that college students should possess and leads to self-efficacy (Raelin, Bailey, Hamann, Pendleton, Reisberg & Whitman, 2014). Self-efficacy has a huge impact on academic performance and persistence (Raelin et al., 2014). Self-efficacy developed in academia continues into work and career paths (Raelin et al., 2014). Research by Carroll, Ng, and Birch (2013) concurred that students' ability to balance their personal lives and their academic lives were more career goal oriented and believed their studies would help them achieve their goals.

Higher education institutions should focus on student success and predictors of student retention (Hammonds & Mariano, 2015). Sparkman, Maulding, and Roberts (2012) noted only 25% of the time a student's college performance was reflected by his or her high school GPA and emotional intelligence was a better indicator. Integration of curriculum development and extracurricular activities to encourage student growth in emotional intelligence would help retention (Sparkman et al, 2012).

Inequality in resources both at home and at school result in differences in learning materials and experiences. Lowered self-esteem of students in the early years of education has an effect on their confidence in academic potential and performance when entering college. They may believe that they do not fit in or belong to the campus community and may not have been able to adjust to academic challenges of college resulting in poor academic performance and possibly dropping out of college. Many college students do not enter college with the commitment to complete their degree (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Tinto (2006) agrees and includes students' experiences in high school and family context as effecting persistence in college.

Family incomes, level of parent education, and ethnicity have a significant impact on student success in college (King, 2012; Strick, 2012). This is truer for four-year colleges and universities than for two-year colleges and universities (Strick, 2012). Students with a family income of $92,000 or more are two times more likely to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in 6 years than students with a family income of $32,000 or lower (Strick, 2012). Students' parents who earned a Bachelor's degree or higher are three times more likely to earn a Bachelor's degree (Strick, 2012).

First generation students accounted for 30% to 50% of undergraduate students in 2007 (Tsai, 2012; McKinney, Mukherjee, Wade, Shefman, & Breed, 2015). Studies of first generation students' motivation, integration, adjustment, persistence, and academic performance began in the 2000s. Tsai (2012) suggested a library course to familiarize students with the various resources as students only used the library when they were required to. The development of a parent program helped parents better understand the college process. This program enables parents to be more involved and better support the student (Tsai, 2012).

A substantial amount of college students have only basic literacy in academic skills and this is insufficient to be successful in higher education (Mamiseishvili, & Deggs, 2013). Thirty percent of freshmen students enter college with the need to take remedial classes, which affects financial aid. Students use borrowed money for living expenses (Wehde-Roddiger, Trevino, Anderson, Arrambide, O'Connor, & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Bahr (2013) presents one reason for the lack of progression to graduation of students who take remedial classes is the increased steps to progress.

A stigma was often attached to students taking remedial classes (Current Challenges and Controversies for Learning Assistance, 2010). Regardless of what the classes were called, remedial, academic preparatory or learning assistance, it often left the perception of a negative stigma. Mandatory enrollment, new student placed in cohorts that identify them of being an academic risk, the term at-risk student, the perception of the student were academically underprepared, and previous experiences at other schools were all reasons for the negative stigma and raised the question of remedial classes being a violation of the students' civil rights ("Current Challenges and Controversies for Learning Assistance," 2010). Some believed that students needing remedial classes should enter college by way of a community college so students could take their remedial classes at the community college ("Current Challenges and Controversies for Learning Assistance," 2010).

Social promotion and minimum grading practices are a means of passing students without students achieving the level of academic knowledge to continue to the next grade. Social promotion in elementary, middle, and high school also play a part in the preparation for college. While social promotion is valuable to students in the terms of personal behavior, self-esteem and serves as a deterrent from dropping out of school, it is not always academically valuable (Lynch, 2014). Lynch contended that social promotion was seldom a benefit for the student in the future. Studies have shown that in many instances the students who received social promotion did not do as well as other promoted students (Lynch, 2014). Another negative view of social promotion was that some educators may not teach as intensely if students were low performing (Lowe & Tanner, 2012). Lynch believed that instructors who saw a student repeat a grade, often form a bias toward that student. The main goal should been to academically motivate, encourage, and instill self-control in students to help them be successful in future endeavors (Martin, 2014).

Diversity brings challenges for the institutions regarding retention as first-generation, and minority students have historically had greater difficulty completing their degree (Considine, Mihalick, Mogi-Hein, Penick-Parks, & Van Auken, 2014). College retention rates for African American students are significantly lower than for other students (Wilson, 2014). While diversity is believed to be improving in the United States, Ghosh (2012) found that the increase was more immigrants that were mobile rather than American-born African Americans or Hispanics.

Differences in culture, language, and socio-economic status contributed to student’s attitudes toward academic ability and funding their education per a study of a south Texas University, which the student body was primarily Hispanic (Bain et al., 2012). Many college students were nontraditional students whose literacy levels were not adequate to perform the basic tasks of life and were not sufficient for an academic environment (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013). Many of these students failed irrespective of how hard they worked or how well they were taught without some type of support (Mamiseishvili & Deggs, 2013).

Latinos, the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, accounts for 14% of the total population but less than 11% of Latinos hold a bachelor’s degree (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012). Latinos face several challenges including lower expectations from teachers and peers, being first-generation college students, and the cultural environment of college (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012). The Latino Educational Equity Project (LEEP) was designed to provide peer support and modeling and to increase awareness of the unique cultural and political influences of Latinos in college (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012). LEEP helped build a community to improve social adjustments to college, cultural similarities between the student's home and college environment, and an understanding of what it meant to be a Latino in higher education (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012).

Motivation often enters the conversation when student retention is discussed. Wilson (2014) believed that social support was a predictor of academic motivation and academic success. Wilson (2014) found perceived social support and students with parents who had attended college were predictors of motivation in African Americans students. African American and Hispanic students are less likely to enroll in college and to remain after they enroll (Considine, Mihalick, Mogi-Hein, Penick-Parks, & Van Auken, 2014). The use of mentors in education, whether it is in courses or in programs, can be an effective means of retaining students and making the programs more valuable (Crossan, Mazuthis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013).

Students with disabilities face more challenges when trying to obtain an education. The University of Massachusetts Lowell sought to attract minority students for their nursing program because of the lack of minority students in the nursing field (Melillo, Dowling, Abdallah, Findeisen, & Knight, 2013). The initiative was to promote nursing as a career for minorities and disadvantaged students. These students are generally at-risk students. Success of the program was linked to the personal involvement of the faculty and staff. Students met with coordinators to discuss student support services, including tutoring, counseling, and study groups (Melillo et al., 2013). The enthusiasm that began this program did not waiver throughout the program, which continued to contribute to the program's success (Melillo et al., 2013).

Other Challenges

A college degree offers many benefits to individuals who hold one. The scarcity of education comes because higher education has traditionally favored people who had time to come to classes on campus or take the classes online and who could afford to pay for the classes (Smith, 2011). This scarcity favored some learners over others. It is up to policy makers to implement the needed changes for college to be available for all (Smith, 2011).

College students are generally thought of as between the ages of 18-24 but enrollment of students age 25 and above is increasing. College students range from just out of high school to students who want to learn new skills to advance or change careers (Debb & Debb, 2012). These students bring with them a new challenge to college administrators. College staff are still trying to engage these adult learners, but with methods used for the younger students (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). The adult learners come with many qualities not realized by their younger counterpoints, including prior work experience, knowledge, maturity, and values as well as different learning goals (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). These students are serious, highly focused, and more motivated than traditional college students (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). These students are more likely to ask questions and rarely come to class unprepared. Jameson and Fusco noted the adult learner was more likely to form relationships with their instructors. Jameson and Fusco discussed that adult learners also experienced lower self-confidence and felt more unprepared for college than traditional college students.

Students' satisfaction with the courses and instruction are important indicators to whether the student will return or drop out of college. Wood and Vazquez-Urias (2012) compared community colleges and proprietary schools, finding that satisfaction rates for minority males were higher at community colleges, particularly in areas of course of study, quality of their education, and the cost-effectiveness. Proprietary school had better retention and graduation rates but students paid more for their education (Wood & Vazquez Urias, 2012).

Students often will not ask for help as they see this is an admission of failure; however, they gladly accept and appreciate help when offered by an instructor. Another type of assistance for underprepared students is narrative career counseling. Underprepared students can be helped with narrative career counseling. Hughes, Gibbons, and Mynatt (2013) found narrative career counseling aided the student to identify issues and develop goals to overcome the issues, while planning their careers. A student's interest, strengths, and personal history are taken into consideration during the counseling. Counselors guide the student in their career path and serve as an advocate for the student (Hughes et al., 2013).

Student Incentives for College Retention

Offering dynamic pricing policies can encourage students to complete their degrees on time ("Four Steps to Finishing First," 2011). Offering well-publicized incentives to complete full course loads, degree programs, or training for credentials. According to research of average students capable of graduating, financial incentives make the greatest difference for students at risk for dropping out for financial reasons

("Four Steps to Finishing First," 2011). With President Obama's encouragement to increase the number of graduates, one incentive is tax refunds. Post (2013) argued tax breaks and other tax benefits should concentrate on low- and middle-income families.

Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) believed the motivation of the student to complete the degree depended on setting clear goals. Motivated students, who believed they were going to earn their degree, had a much greater chance of completing; however, different groups of students had different motivations (Martin, et al., 2014). With a mere 18% of college students completing a bachelor's degree in 4 years, 14 states have introduced a large-scale merit-based college scholarship program (Scott-Clayton, 2011). West Virginia offers free tuition and fees at any state public institution for qualified students (Scott-Clayton, 2011). The program allows student to study more by reducing the need for student employment and allows students who cannot complete a bachelor's degree to attend more than they ordinarily would (Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Learning Communities

Tinto (1997) has long suggested that student retention would improve if students were part of a learning community. Participation in the community allowed for the development of a network of supportive peers (Tinto, 1997; Tinto 2006). A study done by Marshall, Zhou, Gervan, and Wiebe (2012) in Canada agreed with Tinto that students needed a sense of belonging. Eckles and Stradley (2012) agreed that integrating students in college networks helped retention. It allowed students more exposure to students who stayed in college, thereby increasing their likelihood of remaining in school (Eckles & Stradley, 2012). Faculty members participating in the learning communities gained a greater empathy for student’s needs upon entering college (Jackson, Stebleton, & Laanan, 2013).

Academic achievement, integration to college, college retention rates, and well-being among college students were related to positive relationships among peers in college (Allen & Lester, 2012). Relationships with college instructors also played a part in retaining students (Cherkowski, 2012). Relationship building played a critical role in the student integration into college. Student engagement and academic success were factors in student retention (Alan & Lester, 2012). Students, who leave college early, were less engaged than students who stayed in college (Alan & Lester, 2012).

Distance education design, course relevance, student support systems, student orientation programs, and responsiveness of faculty were obstacles Carroll et al. (2013) identified. A lack of study time because of family and work responsibilities was a factor in students staying in school (Carroll et al., 2013). Students are more likely to continue in college if they believe the course work will lead to better career opportunities or enhance their current employment situation (Carroll et al., 2013).

Service-learning is a teaching tool to foster connections with the community and the university (Becket, Refaei, & Skutar, 2012). Service-learning is a valuable tool for the student, the university and the community. Students during service-learning not only gain a better understanding of the class material but also gain a deeper sense of civic responsibility (Becket et al., 2012). Through the students’ service, the students gain a sense of community issues. Service-learning is a valuable source of professional development (Bracket et al., 2012).

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is a type of college-readiness program that provides consistent academic support (Bernhardt, 2013). AVID programs build a strong sense of community in the school. The programs provide encouragement for students who would typically not go to college to be college students (Bernhardt, 2013). The primary goal of the program is to involve the family for support of the student through the college process (Bernhardt, 2013). This program can begin as early as middle school.

Distance Education and Technology

Today's college students are a part of Generation Y, born from the early 1980's to the early 2000's, and grew up with technology, which has shaped their environment (Faour & Heinze, 2013). While technology is a major part of their lives, it does not mean that the use of technology is conducive to learning. Gros, Garcia, and Escofet (2012) identify a difference between living technologies and learning technologies (Gros et al., 2012). The teaching model used is the basis for learning (Gros et al., 2012). While Gros et al. (2012) found students wanted to keep their personal life from their academic activities, thus they did not want to integrate Facebook with their academics.

While many college students have grown up in a technological age, many cannot incorporate technology and academics. College students often take distance education classes to have more flexibility and many educators encourage a more global education opportunity (Evirgen & Cengel, 2012), however, the dropout rate for distance education students is 50% (Gravel, 2012). In a recent study, Evirgen and Cengel (2012) found students' feelings about the technology and the ease of use of the portal had a direct effect on the student's achievement and learning satisfaction. Carroll et al. (2013) caution distance education students have a higher attrition rate than traditional on-campus students. This could be due to the lack of connection to other students at the university or a lack of academic support. Baxter (2012) suggests the lack of connection may be a greater reason than academic difficulty for a student to withdraw from college.

Distance educators may be the only connection between the student and the college. Malik (2013) believes educators should possess multiple skills. Distance educators must be able to counsel, motivate the student, and teach the class (Malik, 2013). In a study by Russo-Gleicher (2013), which conducted semistructured, in-depth interviews with 16 online faculty members, found that online faculty did not refer distance education students to student support services. Some members of this study were unaware of the variety of support services offered by the college or that support services had advisors. Many did not know the different things the advisors did to support the student. A common perception of the faculty was college students should take responsibility for themselves. Some professors did not believe that college professors should make referrals; one professor thought the college students were babied too much (Russo-Gleicher, 2013). This is unfortunate because the faculty could have been an important instrument in retention. Faculty identified student behaviors that indicated the student was at risk (Russo-Gleicher, 2013). These behaviors include not posting during the first week of class, missing two discussion board postings in a row, not submitting assignments, difficulty following written directions, changes in the quality of work submitted, and students who did not respond to emails (Russo-Gleicher, 2013).

Distance education classes are increasing but these students still need and want the same type of interaction with the faculty and staff (Gravel, 2012) and access to student services is critical (Hardy & Meyer-Griffith, 2012). This increase in distance education courses requires a need for personalization and timely response to student needs (Smith, Lange, & Houston, 2012). Edwards and Bone (2012) suggested an integration of different teaching methods used in online courses.

In a study of distance education, students at a private nonprofit university in New England, the students felt they received a moderately low level of personalization in their education; however, they felt that the assistance they received in making decisions on their academics was a high level of interaction (Gravel, 2012). An online portal was suggested by Gravel (2012) to give students access to answers to questions that do not need dialogue. Admissions, orientation course registration, financial aid, tutoring, and students serve as areas that frequently asked questions could be posted (Gravel, 2012).

Distance learning students face many obstacles in their path to success. Motivation, academic competency, social characteristics, financial issues, family obligations, and employment are all obstacles for the distance learner (Hillstock & Havice, 2013). The typical distance learner is older than the traditional student (Hillstock & Havice, 2013) which can result in lower computer skills. Students taking distance education courses, especially ill-prepared students, must have a minimal basic level of skills and understanding to be successful in an online class (Arinto, 2013).

In a time of social medial, communication methods have changed significantly. Social media is often used in education and has become our preferred way to communicate (Berge, 2013). Innovations made in communication and the educators' abilities to overcome language and cultural barriers have a major impact on distance education students (Berge, 2013). A course developed in one country and may be taught in another. Students, who speak English as a second language, often fear misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Students miss the personal interaction including the personal communication in distance education, especially if there is a gap in time from high school to college (Anitha & Harsha, 2013; Aydin, 2012). Students report feelings of isolation, confusion, anxiety and anxiousness when taking distance education courses (Berge, 2013). As the cost of distance education delivery decreases, the more complex the challenges faced by distance education students become (Berg, 2013).

Transition and Summary

My intent for this study was to identify and explore methods to retain students in colleges especially, in Tennessee. The purpose of Section 2 was to provide information on the method used in conducting the research, identify the population interviewed, and how the data was analyzed. Section 3 describes the findings from the study.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify methods to retain students in Tennessee colleges, allowing college administrators to meet student needs and attract new students to increase college revenues. Using a multiple case study design for studying the different methods or programs that Tennessee colleges use to retain their students provided a holistic understanding of the different methods. Section 2 includes in-depth description of the methods used in the study. Section 2 also contains an explanation of the population and sample size, including the rationale for the sample size. Further, Section 2 contains an explanation of the security of the data and the procedures used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Section 3 contains the study's findings and how they are applicable to business, social change, and recommendations to improve retention.

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this qualitative multiple case study was to identify strategies college administrators can employ to improve retention of students in Tennessee's community colleges, thereby increasing college revenues and maintaining financial stability. The participant sample included vice presidents, directors, and retention coordinators of six Tennessee community colleges with successful strategies for student retention. College administrators have become increasingly dependent on tuition and fees as a means of revenue (Hillman, 2012). Hoffman (2014) listed lack of sense of belonging, insufficient finances, diminished motivation, and lack of supportive environment as reasons students withdraw from college. Customer satisfaction, level of experience with the product or service, and other demographic characteristics are indicators of customer loyalty (Hoyt & Howell, 2011). Customer loyalty and retention are essential in maintaining and increasing revenues to cover the costs of operations, and to achieve the administrators' strategic goals.

This study was limited to postsecondary institutions and focused on community colleges. The data for the study came from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the National Center of Educational Statistics, and the Department of Education. Data collection included interviews with Tennessee college department personnel responsible for designing, implementing, and improving business processes for retaining students. Retention and graduation rates of different college sectors and the ability of college leaders to meet the needs of students were factors for comparison and exploration. The inability of college leaders to meet the needs of students affects the ability to retain students, produce graduates, or attract new students. The social change implications of this study include a better-educated workforce and a better economy for Tennessee.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to collect data and evaluate the information honestly and accurately. Though employed by a college, I was unbiased and had no financial interest in the outcome of the study (Gall et al., 2007). Exclusion of personnel from my college ensured there was no connection between myself and any of the interview participants. I also adhered to the ethical guidelines of respect of individuals, beneficence toward participants, and providing just and equal treatment to participants as set forth by the Belmont report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

Confidentiality of the participants and organizations must be protected (Berg & Lune, 2012). To protect participants' confidentiality, I coded each participating college according to the size and type of college. I conducted the interviews of college associates responsible for retention programs at colleges with self-generated interview questions. The interviews were conducted in private and only I knew the interviewee's identity. Reports generated from the National Center for Educational Data aided in identifying colleges administrators reporting the highest and lowest retention rates for students.

Participants

Administrators or associates of colleges responsible for or actively involved with developing, implementing, and improving retention strategies and processes of the leaders of colleges participated in interviews. Data from organizational retention reports and publications from the Department of Education, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the National Center of Educational Statistics identified community colleges with high retention rates. The purpose of identifying community colleges with higher retention rates was to study the practices and policies used in retaining their students. The sample consisted of a minimum of one associate from six colleges with the highest retention according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. Participants included the vice president of institutional effectiveness, vice president of institutional research, vice president of student affairs, director of student services, and retention coordinator. Yin (2009) encouraged a sample size that would yield a high degree of replication but did not state a percentage or specific number. Yin (2012) further noted that a case study can include one or more cases bound by time and location. Francis et al.

(2010) noted an adequate sample is at least 10 interviews with no new themes emerging in the next three interviews to achieve sufficiency and saturation from the sample.

I used e-mail to contact selected college administrators and employees to set a time to conduct the in-person, Skype, or phone interviews. Each participant signed a confidentiality/consent form prior to the interview. After the interview, I typed the transcript of the interview and emailed the transcript to the interviewee for their review. Each participant verified the transcript was accurate.

Research Method and Design

Shah and Corley (2006) suggested that a qualitative study allows participants to speak freely and to influence the direction of the study. Qualitative research methods allow for the use of induction to analyze data and to generalize case findings to identify similar cases (Gall et al., 2007).

Research Method

There are three methods of research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. I used a qualitative method to address the research question and purpose of this study. The qualitative method enables the researcher to group different behaviors into an organized pattern (Berg & Lune, 2012). Berg and Lune encouraged the use of the qualitative method when the researcher will explore participants' experiences and perceptions. Qualitative research takes a holistic approach and takes into account outside factors that cause a result (Gall et al., 2007; Janesick, 2012). Quantitative and mixed-methods research requires the use of numerical and statistical data (Gall et al., 2007). These approaches were eliminated because of the necessity of identifying similarities in processes; numerical data was not used other than identifying colleges with high retention and graduation percentages.

Research Design

The mulitple case study approach was used because this approach allowed me to collect and compare information from several colleges in a holistic manner (Yin, 2009). The case study design allows the researcher to retain the meaningful characteristics of life events (Yin, 2009). Evaluating retention methods used by a variety of colleges allows the researcher to identify similarities. Case studies provide an understanding of phenomenon, event, group, or organization (Berg & Lune, 2012).

A phenomenological design was not applicable because phenomenologists seek to describe the lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Grounded theory was not appropriate because the data were used to identify practices for retention, not to develop a theory (Clark, 2005). Because I did not seek to explore a cultural group in this study, the ethnographic design was not relevant (O'Brien & Varley, 2010).

Population and Sampling

The population for this study was student services representatives of 13 community colleges in Tennessee ("Outcomes Based Funding," 2015). I continued to interview participants until no new information resulted from the interviews indicating data saturation. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics identified colleges in Tennessee that had high retention rates or exhibited an increase in retention or graduation rates. The sample for this study included one student services representative at each of the Tennessee colleges ranking highest of the 13 community colleges in retention.

The study included two-year colleges from the National Center for Educational Statistics database. The purposive sample was appropriate to identify colleges with a certain attribute, in this case high and low retention (Berg & Lune, 2012; Mammen & Sano, 2012; Olsen, Orr, Bell, & Stuart, 2013). Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling methods (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). The purposive sample for this study consisted of employees from 46% of the community colleges in Tennessee. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics identified college administrations with increased and decreased retention, in addition to the population of the college. College employees dealing directly with student retention from the public sectors participated in the interviews. Participants included the vice president of institutional effectiveness, vice president of institutional research, vice president of student affairs, director of student services, and retention coordinator. The variety of community colleges represented in the study provided a sufficient basis for addressing the purpose of this study.

Ethical Research

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that research is done responsibly, with integrity and care, and that the research is presented in both an objective and virtuous manner (Tabensky, 2014). Appropriate safeguards should be in place to protect participants, who should be participating voluntarily (McDonald & Kidney, 2012). Walden University's Institutional Review Board provided approval for this study. The IRB approval number for this study is 07-15-15-0269557.

Participants and their colleges will remain confidential. The participants signed a consent form, which they received via e-mail. The consent form detailed the expectations of the researcher, what was expected of the participants, and how participants could withdraw from the study. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time without repercussions. A participant who wished to withdraw could simply send an email stating he or she no longer want to participate. I offered potential participants no compensation or incentives.

I will use a locked home safe, to which only I have access, to secure the data for 5 years after completion of the study. After 5 years, data destruction will occur by incinerating papers and erasing all electronic files.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, and quality depends on the researcher's skills of interviewing (Janesick, 2012). Prior to the interviews, I reviewed appropriate books and articles on interviewing skills and practiced these skills (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Jacobs and Furgerson (2012) suggested a protocol for the interview process to include a script prior to and after the interview. The interview protocol and the constituent scripts are located in Appendix A along with the interview questions. The prior interview script explains the importance of participation and the utilization of the information. The script reiterated confidentiality. The post interview script thanked participants for their participation and informed them to expect a transcript of their interview to verify.

The data collection protocol consisted of semistructured interviews interviews, that allowed for the identification of experiences, ideas, and comments during the interview process (Kol, 2012). The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses. The semistructured interviews took place by phone, Skype, or in person.

I provided an e-mail address for participants to e-mail their consent to participate in the study and acknowledge receipt of the consent form. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants did not receive any incentives for participating in the study. Participants could withdraw at any time, without repercussions, by notifying me by e-mail, Skype, or phone.

Presentation of interview data did not include individual names or names of colleges. I used Excel in the coding of data collected. Each participating institution had a participation number for identification and confidentiality. Data coding included the size and type of the institution. For example, a university coded 10KPU. The PU represented a public institution, with 10K designating the size of the population.

A phone call or Skype call prior to the interview ensured the interviewee was at ease and had an understanding of the organization of the interview, and allowed for any cultural adjustments to be made. After the interview, I emailed a copy of the interview transcript to the interviewee for review. The interviewee's review was expected to ensure the accuracy of the transcript and the data. I will preserve data in a locked safe containing all interview transcripts, consent forms, thumb drives, and audio recordings for 5 years after completion of the study.

Data Collection Technique

Appendix A includes the open-ended interview questions for data collection from the employees and the administrators of the community colleges who agreed to participate in the study. Using open-ended interview questions allows more elaboration from the participants (Ruso, 2012). Data collection using the semistructured interview format allows for the determination of experiences, attitudes, ideas, comments, and reactions during the interview process (Kol, 2012). Semistructured interviews allow for data collection in targeted areas but also allows for probing for additional information (Rabionet, 2011). The interviews were either in person or Skype. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Using the concept of a classical data analysis method, I categorized responses according to the program, activity, or initiative college administrators used to increase retention. Based on mind mapping of the clusters of information, I developed an analysis of the responses that I provided to the participants for member checking to ensure my analysis was accurate.

Data Organization Technique

I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize data and to distinguish between interviews from smaller or larger community colleges' interviewees. The use of the spreadsheet also allowed for the identification of similar practices (Yin, 2012). Each interviewee reviewed my analysis of the responses for accuracy, which Reilly (2013) refers to as member checking. Using member checking helps ensure accuracy of the information gathered in the interview. To protect the identity of the college and participant, I gave each college a code. Wahyuni (2012) referred to this coding process as document cleansing. I secured data in a locked safe to which only I had access. Destruction of research material by shredding physical documents and erasing thumb drives and audio recordings will occur 5 years after completion of the study.

Data Analysis

The data collection process included responses to open-ended interview questions and review of organizational documents on college retention strategies as well as college, state, and federal reports on retention. There are four types of triangulation case study researchers employ to assure findings' validity: (a) investigator triangulation, (b) theory triangulation, (c) methodological triangulation, and (d) data triangulations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using the interview transcripts, information from college websites, and reported information on state and federal websites, I was able to verify retention rates and strategies. Through using the data from interviews, achieved reports, state publications, state and federal websites, interview notes and transcripts, I used methodological triangulation to analyze data identifying similarities in retention strategies.

Using the concept of a classical data analysis method, I categorized responses according to the program, activity, or initiative college administrators used to increase retention. Based on mind mapping of the clusters of information, I developed an analysis of the responses that I provided to the participants for member checking to ensure my analysis was accurate. Interview questions are listed below and in Appendix A. Interviewees verified transcripts from their interview for accuracy and clarification. Participant and a number represent a college and the data collected from the participant about the college. For example, Participant 1 represents data collected from one college and Participant 2 the data from the next college and so forth. To distinguish further differences among the colleges, the use of 10K for a student body of at least 10,000, 15K for a student body of at least 15,000 distinguishes the size of college as does the use of PU to denote a public community college. For example, Participant 1-10KPU denotes data from a public community college with a student body of at least 10,000 students enrolled.

The collection of data was consistent with the advocacy/participatory worldview conceptual framework. I perused the data to compare methods or programs used by associates at colleges with high retention rates. The findings and conclusions stemming from the analysis of the data may be helpful to other higher education institutions' leaders and managers to improve retention. The multiple case study method allowed data on retention initiatives, retention rates, and student progress from several colleges to be collected and compared in a holistic manner (Yin, 2009; Janesick, 2012). The case study design allowed the researcher to retain the meaningful characteristics of life events (Yin, 2009). Evaluating retention methods used by a variety of college leaders gave insight to identifying similarities and differences. Findings from case studies can provide an understanding of phenomenon, event, group or organization (Berg & Lune, 2012). Findings from this multiple case study are expected to identify common strategies and processes of community college leaders for retaining undergraduate students until graduation.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Yin (2009) suggested the use of pattern matching to determine reliability of the study. Matching patterns of the colleges listed as having high retention assists in the identification of processes or programs similar to high retention. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted that consistency ensures reliability. A study has dependability if another researcher can replicate the initial study and the design can be duplicated with similar results (Kahn, Hucke, Bradley, Flinaki, & Malak, 2012). The purpose for this qualitative multiple case study was to identify methods to allow Tennessee colleges administrators to meet the needs of their students and increase revenues by attracting new students and retaining their current population until graduation. Exploration of processes shared by institutions, which have high retention rates and comparing these processes with similar institutions with low-retention rates is expected to help identify processes to retain students and meet students' needs; thereby increasing revenues. Identifying Tennessee colleges through the National Center of Education Statistics with high-retention allowed me to research and develop comparisons of the processes for retaining students. The semistructured interviews allowed identification and exploration of the programs and processes at the colleges associated with student retention. The sample for this study contained one staff member from each of the six colleges participating in this study. Each staff member participated in the interviews supplying information on their practices and process to retain students, which enabled me to identify common themes (Francis et al., 2010).

Validity

Yin (2012) noted that credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability were the primary concerns in qualitative research. Verifying and reconfirming data accuracy throughout the research process ensures the validity of qualitative data (Yin, 2012). Member checking is another means for ensuring the validity of qualitative studies. Yin (2012) suggested participants check their interview transcript for accuracy. I audio taped the interview and took notes during the interview. I transcribed the interview immediately after the interview, using the audio tape and notes from the interview. After transcribing the interview, I immediately emailed the transcript to the participant, who checked for accuracy and gave any additional feedback. Using the concept of a classical data analysis method, I categorized responses according to the program, activity, or initiative college administrators used to increase retention. Based on mind mapping of the clusters of information, I developed an analysis of the responses that I provided to the participants for member checking to ensure my analysis was accurate.

Why and how one event leads to a second event is not included within the scope of this study. Case study data should represent an exploration of how practices or processes by the associates of the college are similar and if similar practices are adaptable at other community colleges to retain students. Applying effective case study protocols and analysis allows studies to be conducted in a manner that would allow others to determine if the findings of studies would be transferable to their organization or research (Yin, 2009). I provided the basis for transferability by ensuring consistency in interviews and documents analysis with transcript review and member checking process, and a classic analysis method that should help others determine transferability of my findings.

Confirmation of the transcripts by the interviewee ensured accuracy of the transcripts through transcript review process. The interviewee verified the content of the interview to clarify that the verbiage and meaning was correct ensuring validity of the information. Reilly (2013) addressed how member checking of a researcher's analysis of participants responses would enhance validity. Through the process of member checking, I provided participants my analysis of the responses to ensure my analysis was accurate. To ensure study validity, I used methodological triangulation, to compare the interview data with archived reports, state publications, state and federal websites, and interview notes and transcripts. Using more than one method of data collection assures data reliability and validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using methodological triangulation enabled me to verify findings through analysis of multiple sources of data collection.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of Section 2 was to describe the methods and design for addressing the principle research question: What methods do leaders of Tennessee community colleges use to increase students' retention rates to increase revenues and maintain financial security? I used a multiple case study design to identify policies, processes, and practices of college administrators who have high undergraduate retention rates. Section 3 describes data collection and analysis of the findings, including recommendations for programs for college leaders to increase retention, and enable design and development of program and practices to increase retention. Increased retention and student progression will lead to increased revenues and funding for the college. Section 3 also describes recommendations for future research in retaining students in Tennessee colleges.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify methods to retain students in Tennessee colleges, allowing college administrators to meet student needs and attract new students to increase college revenues. In the United States, community colleges accounted for 26% of full-time enrollment and 64% of part-time enrollment in 2010 (Lundberg, 2014). Community colleges serve a larger percentage of underserved students compared to four-year colleges. A majority of the students in community colleges are considered at-risk, including low-incomes and minority students (Lundberg, 2014). In Section 3, I describe the data collection process and the findings of the study.

Data were obtained in interviews with representatives from six Tennessee community colleges. Each representative was either responsible for retention efforts at his or her college or participated in these efforts. While the Tennessee Board of Regents governed each of the schools, each school administration had different approaches to retention. Several administrators used the same types of efforts, but implemented them in different ways.

The Tennessee Board of Regents offers grants to colleges for various reasons including retention. Several of the college administrators took advantage of these grants to implement various programs. The Tennessee Board of Regents also implemented several statewide initiatives for retaining students in state colleges and universities in Tennessee. Participants reviewed a transcript of their interview responses for accuracy of the information and I evaluated the data by looking for similarities in practices and initiatives to retain students.

Many of the college administrators used the same initiatives. New student orientation, student alerts, tutoring, mentoring, and connecting with students were some of the major commonalities throughout the schools. The common belief of all of the participants was that retaining students was everyone's responsibility. Representatives from all departments were involved in the processes from the development to the implementation of the program to the everyday processes involving working with the students.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question was the following: What methods do leaders of Tennessee community colleges use to increase students' retention rates to increase revenues and maintain financial security?

Participants were administrators or representatives of the community colleges with the highest graduation rates in Tennessee according to the 2013 Integrated of Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) records. Participants' titles included vice president institutional effectiveness planning and research, director of retention, director of student success, retention coordinator, and vice president of student affairs. The participants' duties were primarily to oversee and assist in retaining students. Duties included obtaining and summarizing data; evaluating data; and developing, implementing, and overseeing initiatives to retain students. The types of data evaluated varied. The primary times of evaluation were fall to spring and fall to fall. Tracking included first-time students, minorities, adult learners, low-income students and students in programs implemented for retention initiatives. Retention administrators tracked students who started in the fall semester of one year to see if he or she continued in college the following spring and fall semesters. The summer semester was not included in the data collection efforts. Each college had an administrative person or people whose main responsibility was to increase retention. The employment of retention personnel supports earlier research by Arnold et al., (2012) for businesses or colleges to allocate resources (salaries) to retain customers, or in this case students.

Leaders of colleges compete for students to increase revenues needed to address the strategic and operational goals for their colleges. Business leaders allocate resources to attract new customers and retain current customers (Arnold et al., 2012), just as college leaders use resources to attract and retain students. Each of the participating community colleges had a program or group of programs to retain students, and specific programs to aid academically challenged and ill-prepared students. Programs were available to students who were weak in specific content. Students were able to get immediate assistance if they were considering a change in major or if they needed to see how many classes were left to complete for graduation. Immediate tutoring assistance was also available. In-depth orientations were provided to prepare students for college life. Assistance was readily available to students if they asked for it. Counselors and coaches reached out to students when alerted that the student may need assistance. Leaders of community colleges in Tennessee were reaching out to students to increase retention. Tinto (2006) recognized the importance of retention efforts during the first year of higher education. Tinto posited that academic integration was associated with increased persistence in reaching graduation.

Three main themes emerged in this study. The first theme was the effects of retention on college revenues. Community colleges depend on students paying tuition to fund the college. Retention is also important to Tennessee colleges' revenues because Tennessee officials use an outcome-based formula to determine the amount of state funding the college receives. The second theme that emerged was the need to understand challenges college students encountered that prevented them from continuing in school. Certain groups of students had a larger chance of dropping out of college than others. The third theme that emerged was the different strategies that college leaders used to retain these students.

Effects of Retention on College Revenues

Many public colleges are funded using tax dollars and are in budget competition with other government departments. Crookston and Hooks (2012) suggested that state employment trends, which are affected by the federal economic and political situation, have an effect on funding community colleges. Crookston and Hooks (2012) also argued that the shifting of responsibility from the federal level to the state level has affected college funding and state governments have scaled back in recent decades. Serna (2013) noted that the cost of providing higher education was often overlooked. Serna also suggested that during economic downturns, other government programs are considered more important to fund than higher education. College revenues come from six major sources: (a) student/parent funds, (b) state and federal financial aid, (c) federal grants and appropriations, (d) state allocations, (e) private gifts or fund raising, and (f) auxiliary enterprises (Serna, 2013). Pell Grant changes that took effect in 2012 reduced students' maximum lifetime eligibility from 18 semesters to 12 semesters (Hicks, West, Amos, & Maheshwari, 2014). Students were in danger of losing their financial aid in their final two semesters before graduation. Hicks et al.'s (2014) study showed a dramatic effect on graduation rates and enrollment. Graduation rates were reduced by 13% and enrollment reduced by 7% resulting in a 4% reduction in tuition generated.

Tennessee pioneered the performance-based funding model for higher education in 1979 but restructured the funding model in 2010 (Hermes, 2012). Tennessee funds their public colleges based on an outcomes formula. The formula does not consider student enrollment but benchmarks in students' education. Outcomes include progression or completion of 12, 24, or 36 credit hours, dual enrollment, associate and certificate degrees, job placement, remedial and developmental education, student transfer, and workforce training. The most recent three years of data for the college was submitted to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and an average was calculated. Premiums were awarded for successful outcomes in certain populations at the college, for instance the number of adult learners and students from low-income families who progressed toward graduation and hit the 12, 24, or 36 credit hour milestones. The formula continues to include faculty salaries and fixed costs for the amount the institution is awarded.

Retaining students and promoting their progression to graduation is vital to the public colleges. The outcomes-based funding had a major effect on college administrators' concerns and attention for retaining students and enhancing student success. Based on the formula for Tennessee, the more students progress toward graduation, the greater the amount of funding the college receives from the state and the more tuition the college generates.

The Tennessee Promise scholarship offered by the state put a burden on colleges, especially community colleges, with a dramatic increase in freshmen enrollments. Romano (2012) showed that rising enrollments causes a greater need for revenue. This often leads to increased tuition for the student, which can hinder students from being able to enroll in college.

Challenges in Retaining At-Risk Students

College administrators are concerned about at-risk students, who are more likely to withdraw before completing their programs of study. At-risk students are more likely to drop out of school prior to meeting the school's progression points in the outcomes-based formula for funding Tennessee community colleges. Students who drop out of college prior to completing progression points cost the college tuition and operating costs normally received if the students had progressed through school.

The participants in the study discussed several groups they termed at-risk students. Among these groups were first-generation students from families in which neither parent earned a bachelor's degree (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). First-generation students had no one to advise them on what to expect from college life. Often, neither the student nor the family had sufficient experience with financing college education or obtaining financial aid. Many first-generation students become overwhelmed and leave college. At the participating colleges' new student orientations, orientation planners scheduled a time for the student and his or her parents to meet with financial aid representatives. Three of the participating college orientations offered seminars to discuss financial aid to enable the student and his or her family gain an understanding of financial aid.

Another at-risk group was adult learners, who are students who graduated from high school and went immediately into the workforce. The student later needed additional training for advancement for his or her job or to change careers. The adult learner has a family and has incurred personal debt by purchasing a home, car, and requisite living expenses. Often the student is working a full-time job. These students can be overwhelmed with going to school and trying to maintain their normal life. College administrators are looking for ways to help adult learners. Offering different schedules and offering classes on the same night each week are some of the changes for helping adult learners.

The adult population was a challenge for all of the community colleges in the study. During the recession, colleges saw an influx in the adult population, but when the economy improved, students were able to find jobs so some dropped out of school. All of the community colleges were working on ways to retain this demographic of students. Participant 3-5KPU was working on developing a schedule better suited for adult students with block schedules, more available classes in the evening, and curriculum maps. Curriculum maps allow students to see what is required to complete their program so they are not just registering for courses but are entering a program and following the best path to completion. To attract adult students back to college, some colleges offered credit for life and work experience and evaluated credits already earned and applied them to credits for a degree. The Tennessee Board of Regents sent the community colleges a list of potential students who had 40 or more credits already earned in an initiative to bring back students who had dropped out of school.

The Federal TRIO Program (TRIO) is a federally funded program that usually starts with students in high school. TRIO is a support system for low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities. Participant 1-10KPU and Participant 6-5KPU participated in TRIO. The TRIO student support office plays a part in retention by overseeing tutoring, mentoring workshops, test anxiety workshops, resume writing, cultural events, and public events. All of the participants acknowledged that they tracked first-generation college students, low-income students, and minorities.

Funding a college education is a challenge for many students. Students entering college must have a means to pay for their education, and for many students funding is through Title IV. Title IV funding is available at each of the colleges in the study. Four of the participants mentioned working with financial aid as part of retention initiatives. The regulations in financial aid are rigid and difficult for students to comprehend. One participant noted it was hard for students to attend school without having money to pay for classes.

Participant 3-5KPU developed a financial aid plan with each student. The financial plan deals with how soon the student needs to complete his or her studies. The financial plan helps students determine whether they need to start with a certificate and continue with a degree after they begin to work, whether they should be a full-time or part-time student, and how to avoid having to apply for student loans. Many of these students had not considered these options, and when difficulties arose, the students dropped out. With planning, many of these students can continue school and earn their degree. Student financial plans support King's (2012) findings related to relieving financial obstacles by educating new students about financial aid.

A feeling of guidance is especially important for at-risk students including the first-generation college student. There are many challenges at-risk students must confront, from the financial aid process to the newfound freedoms of college. College students who just completed high school have a newfound freedom of living on their own, getting themselves to class, enjoying a new set of friends, and facing new challenges in life. There is a moment when the student realizes the college experience meets or does not meet his or her expectations of college life (Pleitz, MacDougall, Terry, Buckley, & Campbell, 2015).

Strategies for Retaining Students

The representatives from the community colleges discussed their strategies for retaining students. The retention strategies were early alerts, new student orientation, freshmen success classes, student advising, counseling, and tutoring. Many of the strategies were common to all community colleges in the study. However, the implementation of the strategy differed.

Early alerts. Students often will not ask for help, as they perceive seeking assistance as an admission of failure. However, students gladly accept and appreciate help when offered. Early alerts are one way to help students. Four of the six community college representatives stated they used some sort of an early alert program. Faculty members sent an alert to any student the instructor felt was at risk. Alerts could be in any area including: (a) attendance concern, (b) behavioral concerns, (c) danger of failing the class, (d) lack of engagement or participation in the class, (e) failed the first exam in the class, or (f) lack of organizational skills. Faculty members sent alerts if a student (a) should be referred to the math or writing lab, (b) needed services from counseling and testing or (c) student support services, (d) if they needed to contact the instructor, and (e) for Kudos to acknowledge their good work and other recognition. Student success or student retention representatives monitored and followed up on alerts, and department directors tracked the trends in the data. Faculty members could issue alerts at any time during the semester.

Faculty members at Participant 5-7KPU were encouraged to report on each student the first 2 weeks of the semester and again at week 6 of the semester so that students would know prior to Fall break and prior to the last day to withdraw. The early alert allows students to have a plan of action and not make an impulsive decision. This initiative helped not only the first-time freshmen but the entire student body. The participant at this college believed early alerts were single-handedly the most significant initiative effecting retention. At the time of the interview, the retention department had received over 6000 alerts and they still had over half a semester to go. Six thousand alerts was a record for alerts, especially since the alerts were not mandatory at the college. The buy-in from the faculty was a contributing factor to the success and the participant noted more faculty members were sending alerts. Boateng, Plopper, and Keith (2015) named faculty as a key to student retention. Retention counselors followed student alerts to see if the student stayed in the class, what the student's final grade was, and if the student persisted in the class. Tracking the persistence of students who received alerts helped evaluate the initiatives in place.

Faculty at participant 6-5KPU were encouraged to send the alerts at the third and fourth weeks of the semester. This initiative developed over the past 2 years. This alert process is mainly a tracking system to coordinate efforts of the different departments of the college toward retaining students. The alert goes to the student's faculty advisor and the student. After the sixth alert, the retention coordinators receive notification of the student's alerts. Alerts can be for late assignments, low test scores attendance concerns, behavioral concerns, lack or participation, and danger of failing. Students can also receive an alert for doing well. College administrators recommend instructors give a test or method of evaluation during the third or fourth week of class. These tests or evaluations identify at-risk students. This initiative includes the entire student body.

At participant 4-6KPU, the early alert initiative began in the fall of 2013. The early alert initiative began as a voluntary initiative. The initiative advanced to a program that was located inside the faculty access of the computer system. The faculty home screen has an icon allowing faculty members easy access to attendance reporting, class rosters, progress reporting, and administrative duties. Instructors give feedback on each student in their class. These alerts make the retention staff aware of issues and the faculty members' recommendations for students. The faculty member can also offer additional comments to assist in the retention efforts. Faculty referrals grew from 1800 when the early alert initiative began to 37,000 in the 2014-2015 school year. Not all alerts require action but administrators respond to all alerts that identify an at-risk student assuring students receive needed assistance. The retention staff sends out an automated email and follows up with a phone call. Retention staff ensure that the student receives the progress update and discuss the course of action. Examples of alerts can be (a) excessive absences, (b) incomplete assignments, (c) lack of engagement in class, (d) lack of organizational skills, (e) recommendations for the student to have counseling or testing, (f) student support services, (f) the math or writing lab, or (g) to contact the instructor. The participant noted the college is purchasing tracking software that notes when a student has utilized the labs, counseling and testing, and the student success center. The tracking system will allow for better tracking and assessment. Faculty feedback shows pass rates increased while the number of students withdrawing from school decreased.

The academic department at participant 2-4KPU implemented an early alert program in the fall of 2013. Early alerts began as an attendance only alert when first implemented. The alert comes from faculty members, who identify an at-risk student. The faculty member initiates the alert and the student receives an email indicating the reason for the alert. A completion coach contacts the student and advises the student. An example would be a student who has failed his first math class and the coach assists in acquiring tutoring for the student.

Each of the colleges' leaders who used a form of the early alert initiative believes that early alerts are a vital part of their retention plan. Participants also agreed that it is important to have faculty buy-in for success of the initiative, and to increase their chances of staying in school and being successful, noted students in need of help would readily accept help when offered.

New student orientation. Understanding how students best comprehend information is a means of increasing retention. Significant and positive interaction with the faculty and preparation for university life are imperative in the students' programs (Turner, & Thompson, 2014). New student orientation is a retention initiative that typically incorporates interaction with faculty and gives the student insights on college life, including expectations of students. Permzadian and Cred'e's (2015) showed freshmen orientation class was more effective for students who had poor academic attitudes. The Tennessee Board of Regents requires all public colleges offer a new student orientation. In all institutions, participants felt that new student orientation was an effective tool in retaining students, to the extent that many college administrators made new student orientation mandatory for all first-time students.

Participant 4-6KPU noted the orientation was a requirement prior to registration. Participant 4-6KPU described the orientation process as beginning with an online component. After completion of the online element, students were eligible to register for the on ground component. College administrators believe the new student orientation helps students be more prepared and have a better understanding of what to expect in the fall, when they begin college, which supports King's (2012) findings. Information gained during the orientation includes financial aid, academic information, and general student information. Students also meet with an academic advisor and register for classes during orientation.

Participant 5-7KPU had orientation in two sessions. The first session included a financial aid session for the parents and the student. The second session involved a technology piece discussing the student's portal, Elearn and D2L, the course platform. In the afternoon, a time for students to socialize with new acquaintances and old friends was scheduled, along with a time for support persons to come together while waiting to proceed in the registration and advising process. This orientation process supports Tinto's (2006) research suggesting integrating students into college while meeting faculty members and other students entering into school.

Participant 2-4KPU added an extra retention initiative to the new student orientation. After the orientation, the students met one-on-one with a FAST (Freshmen Academic Success Team) member who would talk to them about their program of study. The discussion consisted of the student's ACT scores, how long it should take the student to complete the program, and the classes for completing the program. The program began with new freshmen meeting in groups of 20 and seeing a presentation on the program in which the student enrolled, and the expectation of the profession the student plans to enter. The college participant noted feedback from the orientation indicated students did not feel as if anyone was talking to them directly and the information did not apply to the individual. The process was changed and the participant noted that although one-on-one communication takes longer, subsequent feedback demonstrated an increase in student satisfaction.

Freshmen success class. Findings from Bremer et al. (2013) study showed that the preuniversity study skills preparation course was beneficial because the course reduced stress. The authors demonstrated a freshmen success class effectively affected students' motivation and improved academic achievement, however, the findings did not show the course improved retention. Flanders (2015) believed that freshmen classes had an effect on student retention. A freshman success class was an offering at most of the community colleges in the study. The success course was to familiarize freshmen to college life. The presentation of this class varied from one college to another. The freshmen course at Participant 4-6KPU was called Student Learning Support Academy. This course was accessible to students enrolling as first-time freshmen, whether directly from high school or adults who were entering college for the first time. The course was available in the summer semester to students with learning support placement. Students could work on building their skill level in reading, writing, or math. Students could take a placement challenge test at the end of the program to qualify for remediating out of learning support placement to college level classes. Students were provided sessions to assist with major choices through career exploration activities and learning style activities to prepare for their first semester.

Participant 3-5PKU offered an intense learning strategies course. Students could earn 3 credit hours to take the class as opposed to many similar programs that offer 1 credit hour for the course. Subjects covered included learning strategies, selfactualizations, time management skills, career exploration, and development of an academic plan. The graduation and retention rate of the students attending the college compared to the overall student population was considerably higher, which along with the reviews from students, led to the decision to make the class mandatory for all new students. The number of credit hours required for degrees would increase by 3 credit hours to include this class in all programs offered by the college.

Student advising/counseling. Students prepared for college life have a better understanding of graduation requirements and knowledge of opportunities for student involvement (Turner & Thompson, 2014). Student advising and counseling is an initiative to guide and assist the student and their families to have a better understanding of college life. Student advising and counseling may include the early alert process. The advising process was available in a variety of ways. The most common method is personal, one-on-one advising. These counselors had various titles and responsibilities. Titles included completion coach, completion advisor, success coach, academic advisor and other advisors. Advising and counseling can be academic and at Participant 1-10KPU mental health counseling was offered. Often students are entering college with mental health issues. Veterans who return to college can suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Participant 1-10KPU had academic counselors who assisted new students with career exploration. Academic counselors provided assistance with creating a plan and developing skills for being successful in their academic classes.

At Participant 5-7KPU, the completion advisors were division specific. The advisor would do general advising but their main focus was their division, such as health sciences, business, and humanities. Completion advisors would talk to the student regarding why they were doing poorly in a particular class, study habits, and time management. Each student has a completion advisor and a faculty advisor. Each student's faculty advisor teaches in the program of the student's major. The advising was mandatory for first-time freshmen throughout the first semester. The school offered *DegreeWorks*, which is a 24-hour, 7-days per week online advising tool. If a student wanted to change, their major the student could do a *what if analysis* and the program projects what they would need to take and what would transfer in the context of what they have already taken. *Scheduler* is another program that allows students to input particular courses they want to take. Participant 5-7KPU noted *Scheduler* reduced the frustration of the scheduling process, and provided the opportunity to schedule more classes, which can help to shorten the length of time it takes to graduate.

Success coaches at Participant 3-5KPU worked with students from the time students enter college until they have completed their first 24 credit hours. The success coaches helped students develop an academic plan, a career plan, and a financial plan. The career and the academic course work are very compatible, as the academic studies lead to their career field. With financial planning, many of these students were able to fund their education and remain in school until they graduated.

Success coaches at Participant 2-4KPU met with students and performed freshmen check-ups. These freshmen check-ups were one-on-one meetings with all freshmen. When the program began, success coaches saw 70% of the students and in the 2014-2015 school year success coaches saw 88% of the freshmen students. The retention of the freshmen increased and the probation numbers decreased. The coaches told the students they were not responsible to police students, but were available to help determine and address students' needs. If the student needed tutoring, the coach took the student to tutoring. If the student needed help in math or writing, the student received tutoring in the subject and assistance in the lab. The student was involved in meetings every 2 or 3 weeks and the meetings continued into the next semester or longer if needed. Most importantly, the coaches from Participant 2-4KPU tried to form a connection to these students.

Tutoring. One-third of students identified academic work as the reason for not returning to college (Wehde-Roddiger, Trevino, Anderson, Arrambide, O'Connor, & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Some students are not prepared for college and need assistance. Davidson and Wilson (2013) showed academic integration had an effect on retention. Each of the participants spoke of some type of tutoring. Tutoring was offered in person, in a lab, and online. Participant 5-7KPU was piloting a program called *Tutor.com.* The program begins full-time in the Spring semester of 2016. *Tutor.com* was available 24-hours, 7-days per week and offered online interaction with a live tutor specific to the college. Analyzing the data revealed students would log in and chat with the tutor. The accessibility to immediate tutoring was more effective because they had immediate help and feedback instead of dropping something off and waiting for the feedback.

Supplemental instructors were another form of help available for struggling, at-risk students. Participant 1-10PKU had supplemental instruction in classes such as algebra. The supplemental instructor was a student who took the class the prior semester and did extremely well in the class. The supplemental instructor was in the class to offer tutoring and assistance outside of the class instruction.

Mentoring is another initiative used by college leaders. One such program was MP3. Participant 2-4KPU had this program due to a grant but did not rewrite the grant this year. This program was directed to underrepresented populations. To be eligible the student must fall into either of 3 categories, ethnicity, first generation college student, or low-income. In MP3, African American males were the largest population. The mentors were faculty members and representatives from the community. The mentors invited the student for dinner and took a personal interest in the student. Participant 2-4KPU noted MP3 was a very successful initiative.

Another retention initiative is dual enrollment classes, where high school students take college level courses and earn credit both in high school and in college. Most of the Tennessee community colleges offer a form of dual enrollment. Participant 3-5KPU called the program Middle College. Middle College is a cohort model that has 20 to 30 students from five local high schools. The students must have an ACT score of 24 or higher. Students are taking college level classes while in high school. The students will graduate with an associate's degree and their high school diploma. The first part of the school day is at the college and the remaining part of the day is at high school. Participant 3-5KPU credited dual enrollments as a factor in the school's increased retention. Other community colleges use dual enrollment to enable the student to earn credit hours to transfer toward a degree.

Participant 3-5KPU believed their retention rate was high due to the majority of their students being cohort-based students. Many students were in the nursing and other allied health programs. These programs have limited enrollment and students have to work harder to get into these programs. The commitment and hard work the students have displayed to get into these programs can impact their determination to complete the program and graduate.

Participant 3-5KPPU revisited the academic and suspension policy of the colleges to determine what, if any, impact it had on retention. The committee of directors reviewing academic and suspension policies of the college concluded that students accumulated too many credits before they were on probation and were not able to make the necessary changes to be successful. Changing policy to implementing the probation earlier appeared to result in more students on probation. However, academic counselors advised students and developed academic plans, which led to more students staying in school and graduating.

Tennessee public colleges funding is an outcome-based formula. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission reviews student outcomes, measured at specific intervals of students' progression to graduation, and calculates colleges' allocation of money for the year. Not using new student enrollment as a factor in the calculation increases the importance of student retention and student progress to the college administrators. Early alerts, new student orientation, freshmen success class, student advising, student counseling, and tutoring are strategies the college administrators and their staff used to retain, support, and to increase students' success. College personnel consider first-generation and adult learners as at-risk students and monitor at-risk students to offer assistance to aid their success.

Student retention also indirectly affects citizens, whose taxes contribute to funding a student's education. Students use these funds as financial aid to pay tuition, which contributes to the operational cost of the college.

Application to Professional Practice

In 2010, Tennessee changed the way it funded the state colleges. Tennessee changed to outcomes-based formula, which takes into account the number of students who graduated from the college and completion of classes. The change in policy led to changes in tracking students and focusing on student retention. Retaining students until graduation or transferring to another college became critical to the funding of the college.

Retaining students until graduation or until students transfer to a 4-year university has an impact on the financial status of community colleges. All of the community college participants acknowledged that there was someone at the college monitoring student retention. All participants were concerned with the students understanding of what to expect in the next two or more years. The participating colleges' range of full-time student retention rates in 2014 was within six percentage points. Ensuring a student is comfortable and feels knowledgeable about what to expect along with understanding any pitfalls they may encounter is vital to retaining students. The importance of students feeling comfortable and knowing what to expect supports studies done by Marshall, Zhou, Gervan, and Wiebe (2012) in Canada and Tinto's (1997; 2006) studies that students do need a sense of belonging.

Participant 2-4KPU was the smallest college in the study according to enrollment but offered more retention initiatives than any of the other colleges. Retention at the college was 58% for the full-time and 42% for the part-time students enrolled at the college. Participant 2-4KPU has one of the highest retention rates for the full-time students and in the middle range for the part-time students. Upon entering the college, students attend an orientation, have mandatory advising, attend a freshmen course, and the faculty alerts the retention department of any student issues. Retention programs should not only include ways to integrate the student both academically and socially but also support significant and positive interactions with the faculty and preparation for university life (Turner & Thompson, 2014). The participant from the college indicated the most significant factor in their retention efforts was using academic checkups. Participant 2-4KPU is the only college that offered academic checkups to their students.

Participant 3-5KPU had the same full-time retention rate as Participant 2-4KPU (58%). However, the part-time retention rate was 2% higher at 44%. Both colleges offered new student orientations, cohort programs, and a freshmen course. Participants at 3-5KPU indicated that their initiatives were in the beginning and planning phase.

Student orientation, cohort programs, and a freshmen year course are the three initiatives all the participating colleges had in common. Participant 6-5KPU is roughly the same size as Participant 3-5KPU. Retention at this school for full-time students is the highest in the study at 60%. However, the part-time retention is the lowest (38%) of the six colleges in the study. Participant 3-5KPU uses early alerts as a retention initiative.

Based on the information gathered from these six community colleges, freshmen courses, student orientation, and early alerts are essential elements of a college retention program. Table 1 contains a summary of the retention rate data demonstrating that the full-time students are staying in school at a higher rate than the part-time students. Participant 3-5KPU has the next to highest retention rate for the part-time students and the next to highest graduation rate at the six colleges in the study.

Table 1

Retention and Graduation Rates for 2014 School Year for Students at Participating Colleges

Participant	Retention Full-time	Retention Part-time	Graduation Rate
1-10KPU	56	42	35.7
2-4-KPU	58	42	33.5
3-5KPU	58	44	36.2
4-6KPU	56	46	37.2
5-7KPU	54	41	25.2
6-5KPU	60	38	36.5

Participant 4-6KPU has the highest part-time retention rate and the highest graduation rate of all the community colleges in the study. Table 1 shows the full-time retention rate is 4% below the highest in the study. Retention initiatives serve not only the first-time student, but all students in the school. At this college, retention services role is to assist in improving graduation and retention rates campus wide. The department works collaboratively with all other departments. When a retention initiative is put forth, the retention services department tracks and evaluates the data to make data-driven decisions to improve upon existing retention initiatives for the college and to guide the development of new retention initiatives. The unique finding in Participant 4-6KPU is that many of the participants felt that the part-time students were harder to keep into school because many of these students were adult learners, with full-time jobs and families which could decrease their ability to complete college. Participant 4-6KPU offered an Adult Student Access Program (ASAP), which targeted adult learners. The college offered specific activities that helped students with technology barriers, advising workshops, and mentoring. Adult learners had access to summer academy and an accelerated program. The ASAP initiative in conjunction with the faculty feedback initiative, alerted the retention department to any at-risk activities and keeps the students in contact with the college. The feedback from the initiatives used at Participant 4-6KPU supports Tinto's (1997, 2006) findings that students needed a sense of belonging.

The lower retention of part-time students supports Garibaldi et al. (2012) study's conclusion. In addition to the increased length of time to complete a program, increasing tuition costs students more each year to complete their program. All of the participants mentioned financial reasons for the students dropping out of school. Some students dropped out of school because the economy had improved and they were able to find jobs. Others had dropped out of school because they were not able to afford transportation to get to school. Many of the community colleges had satellite campuses, which made it easier for students to come to class.

Implications for Social Change

The ability to retain students and increase the graduation rate could increase the size of the college-educated workforce of Tennessee. Unlike students who dropped out or stayed in college longer than expected, students who persist and complete college can be more likely to repay their student loans, due to gainful employment upon graduation.

The benefits of having a college education are also catalysts for social change. College graduates are more likely to have employed and have a higher median income (“Benefits in Higher Education,” 2011). College graduates not only are more likely to have health insurance, they also may live healthier lifestyles (“Benefits in Higher Education,” 2011). College graduates also are more active in their children’s educational activities (Benefits in Higher Education, 2011). McGlynn (2011) noted that the difference in unemployment rates between college graduates with a bachelor’s degree and high school graduates increased to 5.1% in 2009.

College graduates also affect the community. Having qualified people to work is more economical for the businesses as there is no relocation fee and other associated cost to moving into a new area. Beretta, Volkswagen, and Amazon are just of the few of the businesses that came to Tennessee.

Marsh (2014) noted that a low retention and graduation rate might suggest to potential students that the college was not adequately educating their students. College leaders must report retention and graduation rates to IPEDS and the state each year, which are public records. The college navigator is a tool that enables the general public access to this information. Many parents and potential students, as well as high school counselors, use this tool in evaluating colleges.

Recommendations for Action

Tennessee Board of Regents, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the community colleges in Tennessee can use the findings of this study to understand the different uses of programs at each institution. Tennessee college administrators should ensure funding for their college has led to an increased awareness of student retention. College administrators must be good stewards of the citizen's money, ensuring students remain in college, receive a quality education, and graduate. At one institution, the previous president closed the counseling and testing center but a new president reopened the center after noting the need for student counseling. The participant at this college noted that the reinstatement of this assistance to the students was beneficial to retention. This participant noted the importance of advising and counseling, especially when they are new to the college and possibly overwhelmed by the process.

The faculty feedback or early alert programs are programs that, with faculty buy-in, have shown either a steady increase or an almost immediate increase in retention. Students knew where to go for information and help. Students feel as though someone is there for them to guide them through this new process called college. By sending early alerts throughout the semester, students were able to receive needed help when they needed it.

Developing and providing freshmen courses and new student orientations have demonstrated increases in retention rates at all six universities. New student orientation provides students in-depth information. This freshmen course enables students to hear the information again but more in-depth and at a slower pace. New students are also able to learn study skills, time management, and other needed tools to help them be successful in this class. Combining the freshmen course and the new student orientation aids in student success in college.

Of the six colleges in the study, only one performed academic checkups for the students. This school had the next to highest full-time student retention rate and the third highest retention for part-time students. Academic checkups encompass mentoring, counseling and advising. The program was mandatory and took time but the participant was excited about the results after beginning this initiative. I believe the academic checkup initiative is one all the college leaders, regardless of the size of the college, should begin.

I would also suggest a yearly collaboration or information exchange with the people at the colleges that oversee retention. College personnel collect and evaluate retention data on cohorts of students. However, data on individual programs and the dynamics of how each program works would be beneficial for Tennessee colleges as a whole. A best practices type of workshop should prove beneficial for each of the state's colleges.

Recommendations for Further Research

My recommendation for further study is to conduct a similar study with 4-year universities. I believe similar challenges would exist in a four-year institution that exists in a community college. The path to graduation is longer for the student to earn a bachelor's degree than an associate's degree. The longer time allows for more challenges for the student. A study evaluating the challenges for students in a community college versus a four-year university defining the similarities and the differences would be beneficial for college administrators. In 2014, Governor Haslam of Tennessee announced the Tennessee Promise Initiative would begin in the fall semester of 2015, which allowed high school graduates a college degree free of charge. Many of these students are going to community colleges to earn an associate's degree before going to a four-year institution. The Tennessee Promise Initiative has already affected the community colleges and the effect it will have on four-year universities now and in the next two years is undetermined. The retention of these students and their preparedness for both community college and transfer to a four-year university is still under evaluation by Tennessee higher education.

A comparison with out-of-state universities would also be beneficial. Colleges and universities from other states may have additional initiatives. I would especially be interested in a comparison between South Carolina and Tennessee colleges and universities. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data (2015) information, South Carolina colleges have higher graduation rate than Tennessee colleges and universities. South Carolina had the highest graduation rates in not only in state colleges and universities but also in private and proprietary colleges (Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data, 2015).

I also recommend a study of the first-generation and low-income students, at-risk students. First-generation students have no one in their families who has successfully completed college and understand the processes, including financial aid, admissions, how to choose classes, and other college expectations. The success rate of these students is important because examining or exploring the success rate of at-risk students could improve the chances of future generations to acquire a degree.

Reflections

During the research process, I was surprised that the community college administrators, who were governed by the same governing body, did not have the same initiatives in place and when the college administrators did use the same initiatives, the implementation processes were different. One college president removed advising for about 3 years and upon the arrival of a new president reestablished the advising and counseling center. All participants in the interview concurred student advising was a critical part of student success. Students need guidance, whether it is academic or soft skills, and they are learning as maturing adults. College is a new experience for many and without the guidance from parents or school faculty, students may feel overwhelmed.

I gained an understanding of why the practices worked and the importance of faculty buy-in regarding any initiative or policy implemented in a college. I did not have any preconceived ideas and had not worked with retention in a public college. I did gain a better understanding and appreciation for the retention efforts and a new belief that retaining students is something faculty and staff affect and concluded students' feeling of belonging and being supported is imperative to student retention.

I was amazed at the differences in policies of the six community colleges in this study. Each college leader has the same goal and competes for the same state funding.

During the interview process at the colleges, it was obvious that each person was unaware of the other schools' initiatives for their retention efforts, including the ones promoted by the Board of Regents and the state officials.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Retention of college students, which leads to graduation, is important not only for the individuals and their families but also for the community, the state, and for employers. Retaining graduates is profitable and good business for the colleges, but it is beneficial for the state with existing business and attracting future business. A well-educated workforce is an attractive incentive to any employer. It is beneficial for any state looking for employers willing to hire residents for their knowledge and training they received from a state college or university. Keeping students in school not only funds the college but it also supports employees for the college.

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Appendix A: Interview Script and Questions

Interview Script, prior to interview:

Hello, this is Jackie Roddy and I want to thank you for you agreeing to participate in the student retention study. Your input is appreciated and valuable to the study. Evaluating your retention practices/programs will enable me to compare your program with others in Tennessee and find similarities that can be used as a standard for all colleges and universities in Tennessee. I have your consent form and approval from the college administration to participate in this study. I want to remind you that the interview will be confidential. A coding system will ensure confidentiality of the identity of the college and participants.

Interview Questions

1. What role do you play in the retention activities at your college?
2. What type of retention data do you collect and at what stages in the student life cycle do you collect the data?
3. What types of programs or initiatives are offered at your institution geared to affect retention of first-year students?
4. Describe your first-year retention programs for your 2014-2015 school year.
5. What was your first-year retention before implementing the program(s)?
6. What was the change in your first-year retention since implementing this program?
7. Were other students in addition to first-year students affected from the implementation of this program? If so what other students were impacted?

8. If you realized a first-year retention improvement, how much time elapsed before you saw an improvement in retention?
9. What else could have affected either the first-year retention at the school or the program, (i.e. event or initiative)?
10. Describe any other programs or initiatives used for increasing first-year retention and what were the results?
11. What was the most significant thing that was done to increase first-year retention, and how do you know?
12. What departments at your college or university were involved in the first-year retention program or initiative?
13. What additional information do you feel pertinent to the study that was not addressed in the interview questions?

Interview Script, after the interview:

Thank you for answering the questions. Do you have my contact information? I will send you a copy of the transcript of the interview for your verification and if you would return it as soon as possible with any corrections. I will let you know if I need any additional information. Thank you again for your participation.