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Improving Undergraduate Student Retention at a Midwestern University

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MED, Rockhurst University, 2007

MA, University of Central Missouri, 2003

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Student retention in higher education has become a national problem. At a small midwestern university, the retention rate has been declining, and the freshman to sophomore retention rate was 64% in 2013. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate ways to improve student retention. Tinto's theory of integration was used to explore the students' and administrators' perceptions of the factors that contribute to poor student retention to graduation. This study analyzed 519 student exit-forms from 2012-2015, 6 semistructured interviews from a purposeful sample of 10 administrators, and an analysis of university archival data. A thematic analysis of the data was completed. The following themes emerged from the analysis: financial problems, academic concerns, and social concerns. Based on the research findings, a 3-day professional development workshop was developed for university administrators, faculty, and staff to help increase their knowledge of retention, reasons why students are not staying, and strategies to academically and socially integrate students into the campus community. The workshop included strategies and activities designed to increase student retention. This study provided administrators, faculty, and staff with strategies and resources to help increase student retention, which may lead to improved graduation rates and less time to graduate.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my son, Ricky. I decided to pursue my doctorate because I did not believe I could tell you to become whatever you dream of being if I was not willing to do the same. I hope by watching me, you now know that the only thing stopping you is yourself. I hope you will always remember that education is the true equalizer, the one thing no one can take away from you, the thing that you can proudly accomplish if you have persistence, dedication and the desire.

I also dedicate this to my nieces, Megan, Katalina, Aubrey, Maria, and Olivia. I am the first woman in our family to reach this level of education, and I hope that because I have cleared the path you can as well if that is your dream. Ladies, do not ever forget that women can also be doctors!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Many universities are experiencing student retention challenges. The National

Center for Educational Statistics (2014) reported that first-time, full-time students

enrolled in a 4-year university with open admissions had an average retention rate of 61%

in 2012. The National Student Clearinghouse also reported that of all students who

started college in Fall 2012, 69% returned to a university, whereas only 58% returned to

the university they had attended the previous year. Lower retention can cause various

concerns for the student and institution.

Low student retention results in lost revenue for institutions and can result in

reduced funding from the state and federal governments (O'Keeffe, 2013). Retention is a

problem for institutions and taxpayers. According to the American Institutes for Research

(2010), $6.2 billion in state-appropriated aid was paid to colleges during 2003-2008 to

help educate students who did not return the second year, and the federal government

invested over $1.5 billion to individual students and state governments invested $1.4

billion. Low retention can slow student progress, even if an individual transfers to

another institution, because students may lose credits when they enroll in another

institution. The lost credits can mean extra and time and money to graduate. According to

the American Institutes for Research, less than 10% of all students who leave the initial

institute will graduate from any university. If students do not graduate, overall earnings

will be significantly less than the students who persist to graduation (Fry, 2013). Students

who have a college degree are also more likely to report job satisfaction than peers who did not earn a degree (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Definition of the Problem

Retention of students at the university level has been a growing problem (Tinto, 2006/2007). Universities are challenged to understand why some students are not persisting to graduation and to develop methods to improve retention. Students who failed to graduate have been burdened with loans that are problematic to repay due to a lack of employment or underemployment (Mitchell, 2016). In this study, I focused on the reasons for declining retention at RDT University (pseudonym) and used the qualitative approach. This university had set up several programs (e.g., Living and Learning Communities, a first-year experience course, a student success center, success coaches, and faculty advising) to combat the declining retention, but retention rates continue to fall.

RDT University is a private, religious-based, liberal arts university, offering approximately 50 undergraduate degrees and five masters degrees. The university is located in the Midwest in a town of approximately 40,000 people and is the largest town in a 2-hour radius. The undergraduate enrollment is between 1,000-1,200 students, and over 90% of the students attend full time. A majority of the undergraduate students are of traditional age (24-years-old and younger) and reside in on-campus housing. In addition, half the student body is student athletes. The student body is 72% White, 10% Black or African American, and 8% race/ethnicity unknown (R. Paul, personal communication, February 15, 2015).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, 2014), the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year for RDT University was 64% in 2013. The retention rate for the class of 2015 at RDT University over the 4 years was 50%, which totaled a loss of nearly $3.5 million. This loss resulted in an elimination of 20 professional positions, and an estimated loss of 27 professional positions, during the 2015-2016 school year. Eliminating those positions directly affects the student experience by increasing class sizes and providing less support for students. This statistic was only for those students who begun as first-time, full-time students (R. Paul, personal communication, February 15, 2015). Further investigation into the all-undergraduate students continued to show a negative result in retention. In 2011, the freshman class started the school year with 276 students. Only 50% of those who began the university as a freshman also enrolled at the start of their senior year Table 1 demonstrates the retention rate each year for the Class of 2014 cohort.

Table 1

Class of 2015 Retention Rates

School year	Enrollment	Fall to fall retention rate
2011	276	--
2012	193	69.9%
2013	148	53.3%
2014	138	50.0%

Further investigation into the undergraduate student body continued to demonstrate difficulties in retention. Decreasing retention rates posed a problem for the university, students, and community. Table 2 identifies the retention rate for the entire student body, showing that the retention rate decreased yearly.

Table 2

All Undergraduate Student Body Retention (2011-2014)

School year	Spring to fall retention (Full-time undergraduates)
2011	65.3%
2012	65.6%
2013	64.4%
2014	62.8%

Definitions

The following definitions grounded in literature are used throughout the study. These definitions will contribute to understanding and providing clarification throughout this paper.

First-generation students: Students whose parents do not possess a college degree (Stuber, 2011).

Persistence: Students who continue at the university from the beginning of their first year through graduation, as long as this occurs within 6 years (Chen & St. John, 2011).

Retention: Students who continually enroll in consecutive semesters until graduation (Seidman, 2012).

Undergraduates: Students enrolled in a higher educational institution, which have not yet earned a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2014).

Significance

Students, the RTD University, and the surrounding communities may benefit from this study because students who leave before graduation experience many negative effects. For the university, "any student leaving the institution is a loss—a loss of revenue or funding, recognition of an inability to meet a student's educational needs, or a possible decrease in public rankings" (Kopp & Shaw, 2016, p. 27). More importantly are the negative effects on the students. Even if students withdraw to transfer to another university, credits may not transfer so that the degree could take longer to obtain. A longer time to graduate may lead to additional student loans and delays in beginning full-time employment. The potential financial consequences of delayed graduation or lack of degree can put financial and professional lives in jeopardy by limiting short- and long-term career opportunities (Kopp & Shaw, 2016). Students who do not graduate from college have lower annual earnings compared to graduates (Fry, 2013). In 2012, U.S. workers, aged 25-34, earned a median annual income of $46,900 with a bachelor's degree, $37,500 with an associate's degree, and $30,000 with only a high school diploma (NCES, 2014). Finally, the community also suffers. With a decreased level of skilled workers with the necessary degree available, local businesses have a smaller pool from which to draw upon. Higher wages for these workers would also have meant additional funds to spend in the community on goods and services. In the long term, local

communities can also suffer from having fewer young people who are informed citizens/leaders.

Guiding/Research Question

At the local study site, some students withdraw prior to graduation. To assist such students, the university has developed a retention program. However, many students continue to withdraw prior to graduation. In the guiding research question for the study, I focused on students' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for poor student retention to graduation at RDT University. The purpose of the study was to investigate why students withdraw. Within this conceptual framework, I addressed the following sub questions:

1. What were the reasons students provided for withdrawing from the university before graduating?

2. What do administrators perceive are reasons for the decline in student retention?

3. What innovative programs can administrators suggest to improve student retention?

Review of the Literature

The literature review of student retention was primarily based on scholarly research that was less than 5-years-old. The review includes a conceptual framework and the broader problem affecting student retention to aides in a better understanding of the problem. I investigated possible reasons and solutions for poor student retention.

Key words used in the literature search were *attrition, dismissal, dropout, persistence, retention, system departure, undergraduate, voluntary withdrawal,* and *involuntary withdrawal*. Multiple databases, including *Education Source* and *ERIC*, were used to access peer-reviewed research, as well as textbooks, websites, journals, such as *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice,* books, handbooks, and government documents.

Conceptual Framework

I used Tinto's (1975) student integration model as a conceptual basis for an in-depth understanding of why students do not retain. Tinto developed the model in 1975. Tinto's model is the most widely used model for examining student retention (Lobo, 2012). Consequently, any discussion of the conceptual framework should first begin with an analysis of Tinto's work.

Tinto's model and the model's components align with effective student retention strategies and models. Using the foundational elements of Durkheim's theory of suicide, Tinto explained that students who are not able to integrate into the university's community, academically and socially, might not to persist (as cited in Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). The most common reasons why students do not retain are school policy, administration, faculty, the curriculum, financial obligations, and social and emotional issues (Tinto, 2001). Tinto (1993) theorized that students must integrate into the institution both academically and socially to ensure successful persistence to graduation.

According to the model of integration, students enter college unprepared for the college experience. Tinto (1999) identified that there are four factors that affect the student's ability to be successful: (a) students need to be clear about academic expectations, university requirements, and effective advising need to help them understand those requirements as they pertain to their goals; (b) there should be opportunities for students to have academic, social, and/or personal support in whatever form best suits student needs; (c) students should feel as if they are valued, and the interactions with faculty, staff, and other students should be frequent and of high quality; and (d) the learning should be connected to student interest. Students should be actively involved in their learning. Tinto (1999) suggested that all of these factors must be present for students to persist through their involvement on campus and in the classroom.

Student involvement is imperative to the retention of students and is most important during the first year of students' academic career (Tinto, 2001). Tinto (1993) claimed that students enter college with a set of traits (i.e., achievement level in high school, socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity), and the abovementioned traits influence the student's levels of commitment to the university. The same traits, in conjunction with their level of commitment, have a direct influence on how much students become integrated into the college's social and academic community. The higher degree of integration, the more likely the student will retain (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, , Hirschy, Jones, & McLenden, 2014; Hermanowicz, 2006).

Tinto (1997) explained that integration, which happens in and out of the classroom, is central to the success of retaining students. Depending on the student and

the student's circumstances, academic integration in and outside of the classroom may be the only encounter that a student has with other students and faculty members at the college. Students who are integrated into the academic environment on a campus have a stronger commitment to the university and graduation (Braxton et al., 2014). The classroom, and the interaction that students have with faculty, not only impacts a student's performance, but also the student's perception of academic quality of the university. The interaction also aids in the feeling of academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Students who are involved academically on campus are more likely to have heightened social and intellectual development and commitment to the university (Tinto, 1993). Students who are involved socially through academic integration or cocurricular activities such as clubs, participating in campus events, or spending time with peers in the residence halls are likely to persist (Tinto, 1997). Students stay because of friendships that they have developed and because of an underlying need for a place to belong, (O'Keffee, 2013; Tinto, 1997).

Tinto's (1975) student integration model guided this study's research questions and methodology with an objective of understanding why students voluntarily withdraw from the university. Tinto's conceptual framework also guided the analysis of the data, organizing the data, and conclusions.

Review of Literature Related to the Broader Problem

Student retention has been an area of study for over 40 years, but has moved from student centered to institution centered (Grillo & Leist, 2014; Kiser & Hammer, 2016) and continues to be one of the most widely studied areas in higher education (Tinto,

2006/2007). Entire conferences are devoted to student retention, as well as articles in scholarly journals. The *Journal of College Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* was created to collect the existing research and the topic of graduate thesis and dissertations. Although retention has been researched for decades, retention continues to be a key concern for universities, many of whom have not found ways to increase retention (Park, Perry, & Edwards, 2011; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Shepler & Woosley, 2012).

Theories/models of student retention. Using models of student retention, several factors have been suggested as possible causes for students to withdraw; although, at present, there is not a single, correct answer. Early researchers focused on why the student was not persisting, such as lack of motivation, socioeconomic level, and diversity. Now the focus has shifted to what the university is not doing for the student (Grillo & Leist, 2014). Persistence is influenced, not determined, by the education a student received prior to attending the university, socioeconomic status, level of achievement toward academic goals, participation on campus, and dedication to the institution and academic goals (Bean, 1990). There are a variety of reasons why students do not persist to graduation. Although some reasons can be identified, in many instances, they are not consistent. Consequently, researchers cannot agree on a single reason or a set of reasons for each student or for students at each university.

The model of student attrition, developed in 1980, was used to explain how background characteristics of the student were the most important factors in determining if a student would persist to graduation or not. These characteristics included their academic success in high school, their satisfaction of the university, and their

socioeconomic status. The model later included peer influence (Bean, 1980). In a second

theory, the student development model that was developed in 1984, scholars argued that

student development during their college experience impacted their decision to persist or

not (Astin, 1984). There are three considerations when investigating student

development: (a) the student prior experiences, (b) the student experiences while in

college, and (c) the student's beliefs and knowledge about college. A student's

involvement is the most important factor in student retention. Therefore, if universities

can get students involved, they are more likely to retain them, placing an emphasis on

what the university needs to do to help students (Astin). Astin expanded Bean's model to

explain further student persistence.

In later theories of student retention, researchers began to evaluate retention as it

pertained to minority students. In these later theories, scholars also suggested

collaboration with other departments in the university to help meet the needs of students.

Theorists identified that students have a need to experience positive interactions with all

members of the campus community, and these interactions influence a student's decision

to stay (Wyckoff, 1998). Providing multiculturalism programing for students helps to

increase retention. In addition, collaboration between admissions, academic support,

academics, and financial aid is needed to help increase student retention (Swail, 2004). In

the theory of student departure in commuter colleges and universities, scholars focused

on the economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological factors that influenced

students who commute to persist or do not (Braxton et al., 2004). Additionally, the

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (2012) discussed the

continued need for research on both access and retention. Retention researchers have focused on freshman to sophomore retention (Kerby, 2015). The research over the past 40 decades has provided administrators with a multiple number of factors to investigate when evaluating why students do not persist at their institution.

Academic factors. Students' prior academic performance and their preparedness for university life will impact a decision to stay. A student's high school grades, the number of credit hours attempted and completed during a student's freshman year, and a student's self-awareness of his or her academic ability will help determine if a student will retain (Raju & Schumacker, 2014/2015). A predictor of a student's success in college is his or her first semester academic performance; those with a lower GPA in their first semester are less likely to persist to graduation (Gershenfeld, Ward, Hood, & Zhan, 2016). A student's motivation to do well plays a role in the student's academic achievement. The student is more likely to earn better grades in the first semester if the student is motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically (D'Lima, Winsler, & Kitsantas, 2014).

Academic preparedness could also include nonacademic preparation, such as knowledge of available resources on campus like academic support services, financial aid, and career services (Slade, Eatmon, Staley, & Dixon, 2015). Students who lack the preparation for the academic rigors, and students who are not prepared for life outside of the classroom, are less likely to persist. Researchers agree that adequate or appropriate academic support services, such as supplemental instruction and academic peer mentoring, may enable students to adjust to college. However, the students who do not

participate in the available services, and do not make adjustments to their academics, are less likely to persist through to graduation (Grillo & Leist, 2014; Terrion & Daoust, 2012).

Socioeconomic status. Scholars have suggested that students with lower family incomes and in historically undereducated households are less likely to persist to graduation. President Barak Obama, in 2014, addressed this problem by issuing a call to action to help increase retention for low-income students. This report offered reasons for the lack of persistence for first-generation students and provided possible solutions.

Low-income students are less likely to apply, find a good match for their educational and career goals, and even attend college than their higher income peers. Soria and Bultman (2014) explained that a person's socioeconomic status plays a significant role in whether a student will attend college or not and persist to graduation. Low-income students are also less likely to take a core curriculum in high school and meet the readiness benchmarks for college (United States, 2014). Because of these factors, many low-income students do not persist to graduation in contrast with their middle to high-income peers. College has become costly because a student must pay for tuition, books, and living expenses. Therefore, a parent's socioeconomic status plays a role in a decision to persist or not. Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, (2011) explained that a family's income has a role in a student's choice to persist even if a student received an adequate financial package or scholarships and was academically prepared to come into college. Students from families with financial means to help alleviate the cost of tuition

and living expenses have a greater chance to persist than students whose family income is lower (Attewell et al., 2011).

Students' abilities to pay for school, as well as abilities to maneuver through the educational system, can impact a decision to stay, especially for first-generation students. Stuber (2011) reported that there is a difference between the persistence rates of first generation students and their counterparts. First-generation college students tend to have more work demands than peers and are more frequently employed, sometimes full-time, to help pay tuition (Karimshah, Wyder, Henman, Tay, Capelin & Short, 2013). They may also encounter obstacles that other students may not encounter (Kopp & Shaw, 2016). These individuals are also at risk for not persisting due to a lack of academic preparedness, which results in lower confidence to seek out academic support services when academic concerns arise, fewer efforts to speak to professors, or less attendance at study group sessions (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Stuber, 2011).

Working class students who need to work full time to pay for college and are typically of a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to retain because of a reported lower satisfaction with the university, lower levels of academic involvement and engagement, and less time spent on academic activities and working with peers (Soria & Bultman, 2014). Students who spend time working to pay for college can be less socially integrated into the campus community, losing the opportunity to get the full college experience and feeling the sense of belonging as compared to their peers who do not work full time.

Student needs. Students have various needs, and if these needs are not satisfied, the student is less likely to persist. Student needs vary depending on individual circumstances and goals, just as reasons for leaving vary (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). The identification of such needs is critical to student academic success, and universities must focus on identifying them. Students need to perceive that a university's brand aligns with individual values and education goals (Kalsbeek, 2013). Brand promise is essential to the retention of student, with institutions ensuring that they are delivering what is promised. If such promises are not maintained, students will not persist. Educational goals also influence a student's decision to persist (Chen, 2011). If students do not have academic goals that align with the perceived rigor or the degree offerings, students will not persist to graduation. The more committed a student is to the university, the more likely the student will stay and graduate. Students who are unsatisfied with individual programs are less likely to persist (Severiens & ten Dam, 2012). If students feel frustrated because they do not understand the university's brand and how that brand fits individual career goals, the student is less likely to persist to graduation.

Students also benefit from becoming socially engaged in the campus community. Shinde (2010) explained that students who are more likely to engage socially on campus through cocurricular activities are more likely to retain. In addition, students often report satisfaction with the overall experience with the university. Social engagement can occur through on-campus activities, clubs, organizations, and sports. Students who become socially engaged and have made friends are more resilient in situations that arise on campus; however, being socially engaged does not necessarily mean students have made

friends (Thomas & Hanson, 2014). Students are more likely to persist if they live on campus (Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016). Living in the residence halls may provide students with shared experiences and social engagement.

Students need to find peers or mentors with similar experiences who they may relate to on campus, especially if they are from underrepresented groups, most notably African American and Hispanic American students. If cultural considerations are not embedded in the university's mission, students are less likely to persist. Minority students are less likely to persist in college than their European American peers, and African American and Hispanic American students are less likely to even enroll in college (D'Lima et al., 2014). African American students are more likely to persist to graduation if the students can connect with African American university mentors, specifically faculty. Often mentors and faculty may serve as role models for the students and help the students to stay focused on academic success (Simmons, 2014). Students need to have social support available to them; if not, are less likely to matriculate. Social support can come in a variety of ways; however, a network of peers is traditionally the most important.

University relationships. Personal relationships in the academic community are key to student retention (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). The support that students receive can be from peers or university mentors, specifically professors. If students do not participate in those relationships, the student is less likely to persist to graduation. The relationship fostered between the student and faculty member need be an interactive relationship, and provide students with academic and life support (Schademan & Thompson, 2016; Turner

& Thompson, 2014). Faculty members have a direct influence on student retention and should ideally foster interactive—give and take—relationships with students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; O'Keffee, 2013; Vogt, 2008). Bensimon (2007) in her presidential address for the *Association for the Study of Higher Education* discussed student and faculty role.

> If, as scholars of higher education, we wish to produce knowledge to improve student success, we cannot ignore that practitioners play a significant role. More specifically, if our goal is to do scholarship that makes a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating (e.g., racially marginalized groups and the poor), we have to expand the scholarship on student success and take into account the influence of practitioners—positively and negatively. If we continue to concentrate only on what students accomplished or failed to accomplish when they were in high school and what they do or fail to do once they enter college, our understanding of success will be flawed, as well as incomplete. (p. 445)

Relationships with students can be built through academic advising. That relationship has a direct influence on retention. The relationships are often linked to institutional satisfaction (Whitsett et al., 2014). It provides the student with clear information about institutional choices as an alignment with student goals (Tinto, 1993), and can help academically and socially integrate students into the university culture (Chiteng, 2014). Research supports the idea that relationships with key stakeholders in

the university will likely increase retention; however, there is much debate on how the relationships should be fostered and developed.

Student perceptions that their university's brand aligns with individual values and education goals are also key to persistence (Kalsbeek, 2013). The more committed a student is to the university; the more likely the student will stay and graduate. Students who are unsatisfied with their program are less likely to persist (Kopp & Shaw, 2016; Severiens & ten Dam, 2012), as are students unsatisfied with their educational goals also influencing a student's decision to persist or not (Chen, 2011). If students do not have academic goals that align with the perceived rigor of the university and degree offerings, students will not persist to graduation.

There are a variety of reasons that students do not persist at the institution the student initially enrolled in as a freshman. Not one specific reason provides the answers for all students at all institutions (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). However, some researchers have found several factors that seem to be common to many institutions. Such factors include students' experiences before college, the student's commitment to the institution, the institution's academics, and the student's involvement in extracurricular activities. All those factors directly influence student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Implications

Students leaving the university before graduation have an impact financially for the student, the university, and community. Research has been conducted for decades to discern the reasons students do not retain, however, reasons that students leave vary and there is not one program or intervention that works for all students (Lees, 2014). Based

on the results of this study, RTD University can provide professional development opportunities to the campus community to improve retention programs. These programs may improve the university retention rate and ensure more students graduate with a college degree. This study may also provide administrators with reasons why students are leaving before graduation so that informed potential policy decisions can be created and implemented.

Summary

Low student retention rates pose a financial challenge for the universities, for local communities and for students who do not graduate. Evidence of challenges can be observed on both a national and local levels. This qualitative case study focused on reasons why students are not persisting at a small liberal arts university located in the Midwest. The study is based on findings from personal communication and results from interviews with administrators, evaluation of documentary data, and self-reported reasons students provided on why they left on their exit forms.

In Section 1, I introduced the local problem, the problem at the national level, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework of the study, and the research questions for the study. I also presented the current peer-reviewed literature and seminal articles and books on themes related to student persistence and retention.

In Section 2, I will outline the methodology of the study, including the qualitative case study design and the reason for choosing the mode of inquiry. I will also discuss the participants and how the data was collected and analyzed.

Section 2: The Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodology that I used to explore my problem. I will begin with an explanation and justification for my qualitative research design. I will also include in this section the participants and the steps to gain access to the participants, as well as the steps taken to protect their rights. The data collection and data analysis techniques that were used will be included in this section. Finally, this section includes the results of the research.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study was to discover the perceived reasons why students are not persisting to graduation. To improve the student retention rate, RDT University has implemented several strategies, but those strategies have not been grounded in research. Retention research is not new, and there are vast amounts of research on plausible reasons students do not stay (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Seidman, 2012). I used Tinto's integration model as the conceptual framework.

The qualitative methodology is ideal for this doctoral project for several reasons. First, the qualitative methodology allowed for investigation of the current problem at the university by understanding what the problem means to the participants. These results cannot be generalized (Lowhorn, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Second, the qualitative methodology enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2014; Hancock & Algozziene, 2011) by adding meaning to the problem and collecting detailed and descriptive data that are grounded in a variety of sources (Kahlke, 2014; Labuschagne, 2003). Third, the qualitative methodology allowed for flexibility and

required much less control than a quantitative study, because it occurred in the natural

setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Staller, 2010). Lowhorn (2007)

explained that quantitative researchers seek to establish conclusions about populations

that are statistically significant, that can be generalized, that are either experimental or

descriptive, and that address a hypothesis. I sought to understand phenomena at a specific

institution; therefore, the quantitative methodology would not be appropriate.

I weighed different designs of inquiry to determine which would be most useful

and decided to use interviews and the archival narrative survey. In the interviews, the

participants and university administrators were provided an opportunity to discuss their

perceptions of the problem based on their experiences and their role in the university. The

narrative survey, from the fall 2013-fall 2015, was the student's written narratives. In

these narratives, the students explained, in their own words, why they were not returning

to the university. The narrative survey provided an understanding of the history of the

problem. Yin (2014) explained that the narrative survey allows the researcher to have no

control over the phenomenon. Therefore, by focusing on what occurred in the past, I

better understood the historic how the problem happened and why the problem happened.

In contrast, the interviews aided understanding the current reasons for the lower

university retention rate.

Ethnography. This design requires immersion of the researcher in the

participants' environment and observation in their natural setting (Lodico, Spaulding, &

Voegtle, 2010). It focuses on the how culture or society can influence a particular event

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), by participating in the lives of those who are being studied

(Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnographers seek to study the participants over an extended amount of time through close examination and analysis of their culture (Creswell, 2014). I did not study the culture of the university, and I used an archival student narrative survey that does not align with the purpose of ethnography --the observation of participants in their natural setting. Therefore, I concluded that this design was not appropriate to address my research questions.

Grounded theory. This design uses the results and literature to generalize to other settings and thus (or hence) to create a theory (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory scholars focus on how something changes over time. It uses primarily interview data with some document data and focuses on comparisons (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). I did not seek to create a theory. Therefore, this was not the appropriate mode of inquiry to answer the research questions.

Narrative. The narrative design allows a participant to tell the story of his/her life, and allows the researcher to find meaning and create realities through the stories (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The research questions of this study did not lend themselves to this design of inquiry because I was not seeking to create reality through stories.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and a design best suited for a researcher investigating a shared phenomenon or lived experiences among the same group of individuals (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). It is used to clarify the experiences that the participants have in hopes of better understanding how those experiences have shaped their world (Smith, 2008). I did not focus on students with the

same lived experiences. Therefore, a phenomenological approach would not help answer my research questions.

Each design of inquiry provides a process for conducting research that will yield results to answer the research questions. After investigating each of the designs of inquiry, I chose a case study approach. Because I cannot control the data that were collected, this approach provided the best opportunity for insight into the problem. The case study approach is explained in further detail in the next section.

Selection of Qualitative Tradition

Yin (1994) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). A case study tradition answers the research questions of "how" or "why" of a real-world case (Neri de Souza, Neri, & Costa, 2016; Yin, 2014). Case studies are also effective when the researcher has no control over what has happened. Additionally, a case study involves gathering information from multiple sources or perspectives, such as interviews, document analysis, and observations (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2014). To further understand case study as a mode of inquiry, a researcher must understand the case has to be a bounded system. If it is not, it does not qualify as a case. The case that is being studied, RDT University, must have boundaries that exist within the context of what is being studied. Merriam (2009) explained that a case is bounded if there are not an infinite number of data points that could be collected. For purposes of this research, I only investigated the data forms filled out by students who left from fall 2012 through spring 2015. The form

provided a place for students to write reason(s) for leaving the university. I also

interviewed administrators who work with students daily, as student services or academic

administrators, and evaluated documentary data that exists, such as the strategic plan and

student handbook. The case study was appropriate because it allowed me to explore why

students are leaving according to their exit data and administrator perceptions.

<div align="center">

Participants

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Criteria for Selecting Administrators

The participant selection for my qualitative case study included inviting the

student service and academic administrators to participate in an interview. Purposeful

sampling was used because I wanted to understand something specific and select the

sample that can provide the most information for understanding (Merriam, 2009). I chose

the individuals intentionally. I used homogeneous purposeful sampling because the

individuals participating in the interviews shared similar characteristics. These

administrators had worked at the university for at least 2 years, and they worked directly

with students. Ten administrators were invited to participate, and six administrators chose

to participate and were interviewed. Once they accepted the invitation, a time and

location was arranged for the interviews.

Justification for the Number of Participants

I used Creswell's (2012) approach of six to eight persons per group for

interviews. Interviews were one-on-one, semistructured interview with the participant

remaining anonymous. Individuals were chosen from administrators who have daily,

purposeful interaction with students. The size was small, but it allowed for a deeper

inquiry into the problem and possible solutions.

Gaining Access to Participants

The procedure for gaining access to the participants for interviews included the

following process. After receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval from RDT

University and Walden University, I contacted the administrators who met the

aforementioned criteria. Each administrator who met the criteria was e-mailed, first to

explain the purpose of the proposed study and then to invite the administrators to

participate with the goal of gathering individual perceptions of why student do not persist

to graduation. Administrators had 1 week to respond before I would send them a

reminder e-mail; however, all responded within the week.

Establishing Researcher/Participant Relationships

Bourdeau (2000) provided four standards for ethical conduct by the researchers.

The first principle is respect for freedom of the participant, which means that the

researcher should consider what the participant is comfortable doing. The second

principle is to do no harm, which means that the researcher should not do anything that

may cause stress or harm to the participant. The third principle is benefit; the researcher

should attempt to use the research to benefit the participants. The final principle is justice,

which means that the researchers do not use the research to benefit themselves if it is

detrimental to the participants. Considering those four guiding principles, I initially began

the researcher/participant relationship through established e-mail notifications. The first

e-mail was a letter of invitation to participate in the study and the letter of informed

consent. The e-mail included my personal contact information for any questions and instructions for the next steps. The letter of invitation introduced my educational experience, my current position at the university, and my program of study. In the letter of invitation, I also outlined the time commitment for the interviews and a reminder that participation was fully voluntary and, at any point, they could choose to stop the interview.

Protection of Participants

The protection of participants, specifically protecting them from any potential harm, is the responsibility of the researcher. To protect the participants, I first participated in the National Institute of Health (NIH) training module. I obtained IRB approval from my institution and Walden, IRB approval number 01-12-17-0360735. The local IRB served as the IRB of record for the data collection, and Walden University IRB served as record for the data analysis and results.

I scheduled interviews with the participants. Each received a letter of informed consent, which defined the research purpose and the procedures for the data collection, and it included a scheduled time and location for the interview (Creswell, 2014). Each participant was informed that individual participation was voluntary, and a participant could conclude the interview at any time without penalty. No participant chose to conclude the interview early. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed without using the participant's name or any other identifying information. The research documentation was secured in a locked cabinet behind a locked door and is only accessible by me for a period of 5 years.

Data Collection

The study consisted of three data collection methods: administrator interviews, archival student exit forms, and archival documents. Using the three independent methods, I was able to investigate the problem more exhaustively and provide increased credibility to the results. The administrator interviews were conducted on campus; the archival student exit data were acquired from the university's student record management system.

Administrator Interviews

The administrator interview questions, which were open-ended and semistructured, are listed in (Appendix B). The interview questions were prepared before interviewing the participants, and the same questions were asked to each participant. An interview protocol was used (Appendix C), which includes the identification of key participants for an interview. The interview protocol will include knowledge and opinions about the research question and can provide insight, brief scripts explaining the purpose of the research, confirmation of the data, background of the interviewee, and the questions that will guide the interview (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010).

Administrators who were chosen to participate based on the criteria established received an invitation (Appendix D), and when they accepted the invitation, they received the interview protocol focusing on the purpose of the study, an explanation of retention, and a description of my current status as a doctoral candidate. Creswell (2012) explained that the protocol must have a heading, instructions for the interviewer to follow, the

questions, probes for four to five of the questions, spaces to write the answers, and a final thank you at the end of the interview.

I audiotaped the interviews and took notes. The interviews were semistructured, which is well suited for case study research. There were predetermined questions allowing for flexibility to allow questions that probed deeper into the interviewees' perspective of student retention (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Conducting semistructured interviews allowed the questions to be refocused, if necessary, and to allow for follow up and clarifying questions (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I did not lead the interviewee to influence the answers and was careful of my body language so that it did not appear I agreed with any answer to a question. Six administrators responded, two men and four women, each representing a different division of the university, academic affairs, business office, enrollment management, student affairs, and campus ministry.

Archival Student Exit Forms

The archival student exit form is a form provided to the student by the university, upon the student withdrawing. The form includes basic demographic information of the student, name, major, and student identification number. The form also requires that the student go to various offices to ensure the proper paperwork is filled out with each office. The student must also provide a written reason why he/she is withdrawing from the university.

When the form was completed, and the student met with the dean of academic support, the reason the student provided for leaving was added to the university's records

database. Any administrator can have access to the data, but only the dean of academic support reviewed it before adding it to the database. The data has not been analyzed by the university and was only referenced if the dean was asked why students were leaving. The data was collected since fall 2013 but never analyzed. The students were given the exit surveys to ensure they spoke to all offices that were necessary for a proper checkout, and to have a record of who was leaving and why.

Undergraduate students who departed before graduation from RDT University were requested to complete an exit form if they were full-time for at least a semester. Students who did not inform the university of their departure before leaving campus, or did not return after a break, did not complete the exit forms, and were, therefore, not included in this study.

Documentary Data

Documents are sources of evidence that can be used in qualitative research to verify the information from other sources (Yin, 2014). These data can help make the explanation of what is happening in the organization richer and broader in context. For this study, I evaluated all existing documents from the university that discussed retention, which included the strategic plan, student handbook, faculty handbook, advising manual, and retention documents on the university website.

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Role of the Researcher

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As the researcher, it was essential that I identify any possible conflict of interests. Currently, I am the dean of students and academic success at RDT University. One facet of my position is student retention and overseeing all support academic initiatives for

undergraduate students. It should be further disclosed that I am also the director of the

masters of communication program. Furthermore, I am the advisor for all the students in

the program, and I teach several courses a semester. My role both in administration and

as a faculty member may have an advantage by providing me with a view from both sides

of the fence– academic and administrative.

I am the direct supervisor for two professional advisors, success coaches, who

serve in an administrative and faculty role for the university, and student affairs staff,

who work in residence life. These four individuals were excluded from the study. At

present, I have no direct authority over any other administrators, but I do report to the

vice president of enrollment management and the vice president of academic affairs.

Therefore, my position did not affect the responses of any administrators. The student

data that were analyzed were an archival narrative survey, and therefore, did not present

any risk of bias or conflict of interest due to my position.

Data Analysis

One of the most important portions of research is data analysis. There are several

analytic strategies that were used for qualitative data analysis. I analyzed the data using a

multistep approach which included data condensation, data display and conclusion

drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This study utilized the same

analysis techniques for the administrator interviews, archival student exit forms and the

administrator interviews.

Development of Case Narrative

Using rich description of the results from the interviews and the narrative survey a case narrative was developed. In a qualitative study, the researcher must summarize in detail findings, and use direct quotations when possible to provide a complete understanding of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

Transcription

After conducting the interviews with the administrators, I transcribed the response to the questions within 24 hours and asked each participant to review the transcript to determine the accuracy. Once each set of data was transcribed, data condensation was used, which is defined as "a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organized data in such a way that "final" conclusions can be drawn and verified" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12). The data from the student archival narratives was transcribed verbatim into the software, Atlas.ti.

Data Coding

The codes used initially derived from the conceptual framework and the reasons discussed in the conceptual framework. Tinto (2001) explained that the most common reasons students do not persist is school policy, administration, faculty, the curriculum, financial obligations, and social and emotional issues. The codes I used initially were financial, academic, social, and policies. The reasons that did not fit into established reasons from the conceptual framework were noted in the results section and new codes were created. The new codes that were created were family, personal and medical concerns and athletics.

Thematic Development

Once the data was transcribed and coded, I used the codes to develop themes and then I moved onto the second analysis technique, data display. Miles et al., (2014) described data display as a way to "assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of analyst that the display suggests may be useful" (p. 13). Once the data display was completed for the narrative survey, documentary data, and interviews, I began drawing and verifying conclusions. Tinto's (1975) model of student integration guided the research, providing a basis for understanding why students are not retained and the model was used to begin the evaluation of the data. Tinto's (1975) conceptual framework was integrated within the interview questions (Appendix B).

Software Assistance

The archival student narratives were uploaded into Atlas.ti, which is qualitative data analysis software that assists the researcher in coding the narratives thematically using a variety of data including textual, graphical, audio and video data (Atlas.ti, 2015). Using analysis software is fast and efficient and allows the researcher to use various types of analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The archival student narratives were uploaded into Atlas.ti by semester and year. I read through each response the student provided and tagged that response with a predetermined code based on the conceptual framework. I read through the student responses the first time to become familiar with the responses and then a second time I attached a code to the response. I then read through each

response a third time to ensure the code I attached previously was accurate. I looked at responses without a code to provide them with a label, which is why I ended up with sub-themes.

<h2 style="text-align: center">Evidence of Quality and Procedures</h2>

Lodico et al., (2010) offered several ways to establish credibility such as a description of the researcher's involvement in the field, an explanation of how the data was valid, presentation of a balanced view of all the perspectives, and a secondary examination of all collected data. To ensure that I have quality data and followed proper procedures, I employed member checking for my administrator interviews. A peer debriefer was used to look over the notes and provide feedback for the analysis. Detailed description of the results was provided and triangulation was used to provide validity to the data.

Member Checking

Member checking was completed by asking the participants to check the accuracy of the interviews (Merriam, 2009). During the interviews, the participants were informed of other participant responses to check for similarities and differences in the answers. A comparison of the responses to determine if there is consistency among the different interviewees helped ensure quality data. The participants' reactions to the responses of others were added to the results to aid in credibility (Mays & Pope, 2000). Once the interviews were transcribed, I provided opportunities for each participant to review the transcriptions and make changes or comments. There were no changes requested.

Peer Debriefer

A peer debriefer was used, which Lodico et al., (2010) defined as a colleague who works with the researcher, examining their notes and questions to help reexamine the data and look for all possible explanations. A peer debriefer provided feedback for the collection and analysis of the data, and enhanced the credibility of the analysis of the data. The peer debriefer I used is a medical doctor, practicing for 15 years and is familiar with research. He did not participate in the collection of the data, but did review the analysis of the data, specifically reviewing the archival student narratives, looking for discrepant cases and reviewing the codes.

Detailed Descriptions

All description of the data collection and analysis procedures was detailed to provide dependability. A rich description was provided for the participants, which explained the setting and the context to add transferability to the research. Providing detailed description of the results allowed the reader to determine if the results can be applied to a setting similar and provided relevancy to the data (Mays & Hope, 2000). When possible, direct quotations were used to provide the reader with the most complete understanding of the answers.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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The qualitative case study used triangulation for the data collection. Lodico et al., (2010) explained that triangulation is a comparison between three or more different data collection methods. The data methods were analyzed to investigate the potential similarities and differences in the results. The data collection methods results that were

compared were the administrator interviews, the narrative survey, and the documentary

data. Analyzing the data patterns that were similar can provide validity to the research

(Torrance, 2012).

Archival Data

The research began with an analysis of the university's archival data. The data

was coded using Atlas.ti. The archival data was peer debriefed after the coding. Themes

were created based off of the conceptual framework and existing literature. I assigned

each code a color. The following colors and codes were used initially: money and tuition

(green) curriculum and professors (blue) residence life and relationships (orange) and

university policies (purple). I went through the responses initially coding the themes

mentioned, and discovered responses that did not fit into the initial themes I selected. The

additional themes added once the initial coding was complete were medical reasons

(yellow), family reasons (pink), athletic reasons (teal), and personal reasons (red).

Students also provided transferring as the reason for leaving, therefore; those responses

were removed from the coding, but counted in the total number of responses.

When I finished coding the student responses, I looked for themes, which are the

major ideas that are presented in the data. Creswell (2012) explained that all qualitative

research contained themes and themes are similar codes brought together to form an idea.

The themes that emerged from the archival data are reported later in Section 2.

Interviews

Following each interview, the answers provided by the administrators were

transcribed from the recordings using my personal computer. The transcriptions were sent

to the participants and once they confirmed that the transcriptions were accurate, I began coding the data. The transcripts were reviewed by the participants and peer-reviewed to ensure accuracy. The similarities and differences in the participant responses were also identified. I used the same codes and colors for the interviews as I did the archival responses. The following colors and codes were used: money and tuition (green) curriculum and professors (blue) residence life and relationships (orange) and university policies (purple). The administrators did not discuss athletics, personal concerns, medical concerns or family concerns.

Documentary Data

My analysis of the documentary data – Forever Forward, Strategic Plan for 2017-2022, Academic Advising Handbook, and the university's website – was the collection and analysis of documentary data. Documentary data was evaluated to discern what programs, committees and goals were established to help with retention efforts. All the information was evaluated and analyzed by looking for any information on retention. The documents that were evaluated were located on the university's website. The documents had limited information about retention. The information did not include an explanation of programs for retention at the university, strategies, and retention goals or provide an understanding of the current retention plan.

<p align="center">**Data Analysis Results**</p>

This section will explain the findings from the analysis of the archival student exit form data, the administrator interviews, and evaluating the university's documentary data. The results of this research will also be compared to conceptual framework and

existing literature, and I will conclude this section a description of the project based on the findings.

Research questions guided the analysis of the data to determine the reasons that students were not persisting at the university. The research questions and the findings from the analysis of the archival narrative survey and the administrator interviews are the foundation for this study. Documentary data was analyzed to determine what programs were inexistence and to provide triangulation to the study.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What were the reasons students provided for withdrawing from the university before graduating?

Findings. Analysis of the data from the student exit forms helped answer the first research question. The university's records database hosted these student narratives. Each student response was uploaded into Atlas.ti and each response was then coded and searched for keywords. Between fall 2012 to spring 2015 (except spring 2014 because no data was available) there were 519 archived student exit forms. Of these, 79 students gave no reason for withdrawing and 82 students indicated they were transferring but provided no reason. The illustrative quotations for each theme are seen in each table following a discussion of the theme. Table 3 provides the summary of the themes found in the research and the frequency of student answers. The findings revealed that students withdrew for social, academic, and financial concerns, athletic and family problems, and medical reasons. The findings of reasons for students withdrawing align with reasons discussed in the review of literature. Financial concerns were the most frequent reason for

early withdrawal.

Table 3

Summary of Themes from Archival Student Narratives

Theme	Sub-Themes	Frequencies of Student Answers
Social Integration Reasons	Residence Life Social Problems Social Environment	20
Medical Reasons	--- ---	37
Athletic Reasons		38
Family Problems	Parents changing locations Homesickness Family Illness	71 (this does not make sense to me, moving away from parents? Parents changing homes?)
Academic Reasons	Major not offered Academic Rigor	84
Financial Reasons	Cost of Attendance Family Contribution	98

Themes. Several themes emerged from the student archival data. Those themes match some of the previous literature and reasons why students leave before graduation. The themes that emerged from the archival data were financial concerns, academic concerns, family problems, personal reasons, medical reasons, athletic reasons and social integration concerns.

Financial reasons. The most prominent theme that emerged from the student archival data was financial reasons, 98 students cited a financial reason as to why they were leaving the university. Consistently, I read in the archival student exit forms that students have difficulty paying for college tuition and life expenses regardless of their financial aid package (Table 4). Because the cost of tuition is perceived as high, and the family's ability to contribute is low, it is difficult for many students to continue at the university.

Table 4

Financial Reasons Students Provided for Leaving

Illustrative Quotations
▉ is to expensive and I can go to a state school cheaper and get done faster."
"I am saddened to report that I will not be returning to ▉ university in the fall. Unfortunately the financial aid package left me short of a couple thousand dollars and I do not have any parents who are willing to do a parent plus loan. Thank you so much for all that the campus and faculty have done for me."
"Will not be returning because of cost. Too expensive. I have a large balance left."
"Transferring to ▉ Community College because it is a smarter financial decision."
"I will not be returning to ▉ for the Spring 2013 semester because of the raise in tuition."
"I am moving back home to save money and commute."

Academic reasons. The second theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that students left for academic reasons, 84 students cited an academic concern as the reason they were leaving the university. The sub-themes that emerged from this theme were the major was not offered that the student was interested in and academic rigor of the courses (Table 5).

Table 5

Academic Reasons Students Provided for Leaving

Illustrative Quotations
"Hey, I will not be returning to ▇▇▇ University this fall because I would like to pursue a different major that ▇▇▇ does not have."
"I will not be returning because the nursing program kept changing its grades and other things and did not tell me so I could get the grades I needed to continue in the program."
"I will not be returning next semester to ▇ because I am transferring. I wish to study Physics and Astronomy and ▇▇ does not have the program I am looking for. Thanks for the last 2 years! "
"The prereqs I needed were closed, so I am taking them somewhere else."
"I am transferring to another school because they offer a major in Outdoor Leadership."
"Not pleased with the ▇ program."
"Pursue Jazz in Chicago where I am from, parents recommend withdraw."
"Found college to challenging."
"Study for Engineering degree. ▇ no longer offers continuing classes that are transferable."
"I am not happy at ▇ and I am going to finish my degree by taking on-line courses only."
"Not satisfied with the ▇ Program so I am transferring to another program closer to my home."

Family problems. The third theme that emerged from the archival student narratives was family problems, 71 students cited family problems as a reason they were leaving the university. The sub-themes developed from that theme were: moving, homesickness and family illness. Many of the responses from the students in this theme mentioned being too far away from home, or parents were moving, and they wanted to move closer to them (Table 6).

Table 6

Family Problems Students Provided for Leaving

Illustrative Quotations
"Because of family issues have decided to transfer closer to home." "Will not be returning FA12 because of personal circumstances, my father passed away." "I am leaving because mother is sick and I want to be with her." "Will not be able to return because I have to help my father with his business." "Will enroll in a school near home in Florida because I am having family issues that require me to stay near home this year." "I will not be returning because my father is ill and I need to stay by him." "I have a lot going on at home so I need to take some time off." "Moving to Colorado with family."

Athletic reasons. The third theme to emerge from the archival data was athletic reasons. According to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, 2014), for the 2014-2015 school year, the university had 379 athletes that attended the university, which is equivalent to 37% of the student body. There were 38 students who provided athletics as a reason for leaving and though that is not a large percentage

compared to the total number of responses, it was a theme seen in the responses (Table

7). There were no sub-themes that emerged because most of the sports that are offered at

the university were mentioned. Students did not provide reasons they were no longer

playing the sport at the university, unless it was an injury and that was categorized under

medical concerns.

Table 7

Athletic Reasons Students Provided for Leaving

Illustrative Quotations
"Will not be returning to ▮ for the Spring 2013 semester because of football."
"I will not be attending ▮▮▮ next year. I am undecided right now, currently pursuing playing either basketball or baseball.
"Transferring to ▮▮▮▮▮ to play softball."
"Not impressed with golf program."
"Dissatisfied with athletics-volleyball."
"I have chosen to not play football, so I will be attending ▮▮▮▮ Community College.
"No longer interested in playing soccer."
"I am not interested in playing basketball anymore at this university."

Medical reasons. The fourth theme that emerged from the archival data was

medical reasons, with 37 students citing medical reasons as the reason they are leaving

the university. The only specific information provided was written as an "illness," or

"medical problems, or "take a leave of absence for medical reasons." There is not a clear

understanding of what medical concerns means, and sub-themes could not be created.

Social integration reasons. The final themes that emerged from the archival

student data were social integration reasons, with 20 students providing this as a reason

for leaving the university. For coding purposes, social integration reasons were defined as anything that dealt with the social integration of the student: social activities on campus, student life, residence halls, issues of diversity, friendships, a sense of belonging, and social environment (Table 8). When analyzing the archival student exit forms those were the least mentioned reasons from the students, but the number one reason for the administrators in their interviews. Since fall 2015 the university has had extensive financial problems, and the Student Affairs office and its corresponding budget for that office and their programs have been decreased significantly, so that has had an impact on the administrator's perceptions.

Table 8

Social Integration Reasons Students Provided for Leaving

Illustrative Quotations
Transferring to another school that is a better social fit for me."
"Do not like the ▮▮-mainly the students, so transferring to ▮▮▮ College in Kentucky."
"I am looking for a bigger campus and town, so I am going to a community college back home."
"Not able to find a group I fit into and I don't like the residence halls."
"Do not feel that ▮▮ is a good fit."
"Do not like the ▮▮ atmosphere."
"▮▮ is just not a good fit."
"Did not enjoy the atmosphere I was living in."
"I do not think there is anything to do on this campus."
"Not a proper environment academically or socially for African American males from a large city."
"Transferring because of social life experience."

Research Question 2: What do administrators perceive are reasons for the decline in student retention?

     Findings. The administrators who were interviewed, listed as Administrator A, B, C, D, E or F to protect their identities, provided several reasons why they believed students did not stay at the university and they all agreed with one another's responses. Their reasons were based solely on their job experience and the relationship they had with students. Each administrator was not aware of retention data for the university or the past reasons students provided for leaving. They believed they had a role in retaining students but that role did not extend past their current job description. When the administrators provided the reasons they believed students did not stay, none mentioned that their office might play a role in why students leave. Each administrator agreed that finances and social concerns were reasons students did not stay. Some administrators provided additional reasons such as athletics. When the additional responses were provided to administrators, they were all agreed with the responses. Administrator F stated, "students do not stay because we have bad advising by some of our faculty and some very rude administrators." Administrator D stated, "athletics is one of the reasons students do not stay, they are promised they will play, and then they don't get to play, they sit on the bench." Administrator A stated, "we have some great academic programs, we have some great professors, but we have some that aren't very good, don't seem to care about their students, cancel class all the time, and don't appear to be engaged."

     Themes. There were two themes that emerged out of the administrator interviews when they were asked why there was a decline in retention at the university. Two themes

emerged from this question: -- financial and social reasons. All the participants named financial concerns as a reason and cited the cost of the university. All six of the participants mentioned social concerns as one of the reasons for the decline in retention.

Financial reasons. Three of the administrators believed that students left the university before graduation because of financial reasons in the initial questioning. When I completed the member checking and explained that others had suggested financial reasons, the rest of the administrators agreed that finances played a role in students choosing to leave. Administrator C explained that the cost of the university is just too high even though the university has endowed scholarships and every student is awarded a scholarship. "As a private school we give out a lot of good scholarships and aid but we are just too expensive, and it is hard for the students we attract to afford us even with the scholarships and financial aid." The administrators went on to reiterate that the university cost is high and the students that the university brings in cannot pay the price tag and do not realize what that means until their bills are due. Administrator E explained, "We are just too expensive. Our students know what the cost is coming in but they don't realize how much money that really is until their first payment is due and some see that dollar sign and don't understand the value of the education."

Social reasons. All of the administrators cited social reasons as one of the reasons students are not being retained at the university. Currently, the university has had to make large cuts and student affairs staff has been cut drastically which has caused a decrease in programs and opportunities offered to the students. Thus the administrators did state that the current financial state of the university and the cuts that have been made have clouded

some of their answers. When asked for elaboration of what they meant by social reasons, they provided a variety of examples, ranging from lack of community on campus to a lack of campus programming. Administrator D stated, "There is no community on this campus for students, nothing to keep them engaged when they are not in class. They don't feel like this is their home, that they belong here." Administrator F explained, "Students are unhappy with things that aren't working for them, they have spotty Internet connections, their dorms aren't nice, the buildings are too cold or too hot, and it isn't meeting their expectations. There isn't anything for them to do so they get bored and decide to move home where they know what to expect." Administrator B explained that the lack of programs and budget cuts has decreased student satisfaction and desire to stay at the university. "One of the things I have heard from students is that the recreational activities on campus have declined significantly as far as activities and entertainment and that kind of thing."

Research Question 3: What innovative programs can administrators suggest to improve student retention?

Findings. The final question of the administrator interview asked what innovative programs could be implemented into the university to help retain students. The suggestions were limited only to increasing student programming through student affairs. They all acknowledged they had little understanding of what possible retention programs could be implemented and had a limited knowledge on retention programs. This lack of knowledge and understanding became evident when the documentary data was gathered and analyzed.

There are no committees for retention at the university and it is not mentioned in the faculty/staff handbook or the student handbook. The documents that were evaluated were found on the university's website (www.█████edu). Included in this analysis was the strategic plan for 2017-2022, the academic advising handbook, and the university's website performing a keyword search using the words, persistence, retention and attrition.

Strategic plan. When searching on the university's website for the strategic plan, there are two links. One link does not work and the other link explains the process for the strategic plan that will go in effect in 2017. The strategic plan draft for 2017-2022 provided three areas for focus, and listed under the pillar of academic excellence "retention and graduation." The following information about retention was included in the strategic plan:

> ███ Goal 3: Continue to foster the successful matriculation of high achieving, well-prepared college students while simultaneously fostering an environment that promotes the persistence of all ███ students toward graduation. Priorities Strategies for Goal 3: Develop interdisciplinary committee focused on retention initiatives, particularly with the most at risk student populations. Conduct a cost/benefit analysis and make recommendations regarding the development of an institutional Office of Retention. (Forever forward, 2017, pp. 2; 4)

Academic advising handbook. The *Academic Advising Handbook* last updated in 2013 quoted Vincent Tinto on the first page. A description of retention and how it

applies to academic advising was not discussed in the rest of the handbook. In fact, the words "retention, persistence or attrition" were not mentioned once in the handbook.

Keyword search. The words "retention," "persistence," and "attrition were typed into the university's website to conduct a keyword search. There were five results to the keyword retention and only one result provided any information about retention and that was limited. The keywords "persistence" or "attrition" yielded no results.

Treatment of Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases contradict or appear to contradict the emerging explanation and by searching for them and adding them to the results of the data the quality of the data increases (Du, 2012). The participants interviewed were asked to review the findings, which helped diminish discrepant cases and add credibility (Creswell, 2014). The archival student exit forms were peer debriefed to provide credibility to the research and investigate for discrepant cases. The reasons administrators believed students were leaving and the reasons provided by the students in their exit survey differed. The administrators agreed with financial, academic and social reasons, but never mentioned health, family and athletics. These discrepancies are very important to understanding why students are leaving, but do not support the conceptual framework, the existing literature or administrator beliefs. These cases may be an indication that administrators are not fully aware of student issues

Interpretation of Findings

This section will explain how the findings relate back to the conceptual framework and the scholarly literature. After analyzing the data from the archival student

exit forms and conducting the administrator interviews it became evident that students

and administrators identified that financial reasons, academic concerns, and social

reasons as reasons students leave before graduation. Those reasons matched with reasons

suggested by the conceptual framework and was supported by the existing literature. The

others reasons provided by the students, health, family and athletics are important to

understanding why students do not retain at RDT University but do not support the

existing literature or the conceptual framework. There is merit in those answers and they

will be included in Section 3. The analysis of the documentary data demonstrated few

existing documents discussing retention. The analysis also demonstrated a lack of

programs or emphasis on retention.

Financial reasons. According to the findings of the study, financial reasons were

the number one reason that students were leaving. Students cited continually that the cost

of attendance was too high and they could no longer afford to attend classes. The

administrators agreed with those statements notating that cost plays a major role in a

student's decision to continue at the university. The conceptual framework, Tinto (1993)

theory of student departure supported the results of the study. Tinto (1993) explained that

the financial resources of students play a role in their decision to leave or not. Student's

finances financial aid they receive and the type of aid a student receives impacts the

decision to stay (Adams, Meyers, & Beidas**,** 2016; Anderson, 2016; Olbrecht, Romano, &

Teigen, 2016). In the next section I will discuss various solutions to the financial

problem**s** many students face.

Academic reasons. The second most common reason that students do not persist

at the university, according to the results of this study, is academic reasons. There were

several academic reasons provided by students for leaving including not able to get into

the program the wanted, not fully prepared, and not offering the student's desired major.

Various concerns about the university's nursing program were always raised as to why

the student was leaving. Tinto (1993) explained that students needed to be academically

integrated into the university. Academic integration can include their grades,

identification with the academic standards of the university, the feeling of their academic

ability, and if they are enjoying what they are learning and courses offered. The

administrator notated that academic issues were reasons students left in the past, but with

the new resources, such as the Student Success Center, this is less of a problem. Students

are coming to college less academically prepared and academic support strategies and

services are essential to bridging the gap for those students (Adams et al., 2016; Day,

Flynn, & Moore, 2015; Kimbark, Peters, & Richardson, 2016). In the next section I will

discuss various solutions to the academic problems many students face.

Social reasons. The main reason administrators believed that students were

leaving was for social reasons. Although this reason was supported by the archival data, it

was not the most prevalent. Students who are not socially integrated into the university

community are less likely to remain/stay (Tinto, 2013). The administrators believed that

because of current funding restraints and a lowered budget social integration was a

problem on the campus. Tinto (2013) explained that social support and feeling included

in the campus community is an element of student retention. The administrators

discussed the lack of community and social engagement at the university as a reason that

supports the conceptual framework. In the next section I will discuss various solutions to the social problems many students face.

Limitations

This study had limitations in the archival data and the administrator interviews. I was not able to collect the archival student data directly from the students, nor did I transcribe what the students wrote on their exit forms. Without talking to the students myself, I cannot be sure that the reasons listed in the archival data are the real reasons why students left. Another limitation is the turnover in the administration and faculty at the university. The programs and opportunities afforded to students when the archival data was collected were more numerous than it is currently available. Therefore, the administrator interviews do have significant merit; their answers are based on their current reality and the current state of the university, whereas the archival data is the past state of the university. The administrator interviews' though vital to the study, did not provide the depth of knowledge for the case as hoped because I was not able to interview the administrators originally chosen. Those administrators would have provided valuable information because of the length of time they worked for the university and the proximity they had to the students' daily. The final limitation of the study is the lack of documentary data available.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative case study I was able to discover reasons students said they were not staying at the university and reasons why administrators believed students were not staying at the university. The students cited finances, academics, social, athletic,

health and family reasons for not staying and the administrators cited finances, academic

and social reasons. The results of the study allowed me to gain a better understanding of

why students are not persisting to graduation and look at possible solutions. Section 3

contains a detailed description of the project, a literature review that discusses possible

solutions to the problem, and implications for social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 includes the final project based on the analysis from my study. Using the findings from my study, I designed a 3-day professional development (PD) workshop, *Improving Retention at RDT University,* for administrators and faculty at RDT University (Appendix A). The purpose of the 3-day PD workshop is to enhance the skills of administrators, faculty, and staff in retaining students. The workshop will help participants conceptualize their role in retention and establish a conversation between campus professionals regarding student retention.

Description and Goals

Based upon the results of my study, I designed a 3-day PD workshop for the administrations and faculty. The PD workshop is designed to assist administrators, faculty, and staff in the development skills and best practices to improve student retention. The objectives for the 3-day professional development training are to (a) examine the reasons why student are not being retained and its impact on the university, (b) formulate plausible solutions to academically and socially integrate the students into the campus community, and (c) devise and assess high impact practices for implementation to improve student retention.

The goals of the PD workshop are to provide the campus community with the results of the study and provide the participants with the knowledge and skills to develop strategies to increase student persistence. Faculty and administrators are experts in their fields and have extensive academic backgrounds; however, they may not have knowledge

or skills in areas outside of their respective field of study (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013). PD should provide content knowledge, active participation, strategies, and skills for facilitators who are familiar with the audience and their experiences and motivation (Kennedy, 2016). The workshop's design will include icebreakers to increase communication and community, collaboration opportunities, competitive group activities, role-playing exercises, and presentations from various professionals and informational sessions, while incorporating various forms of technology and social media. The participants will have the opportunity to live tweet, using a Twitter handle specific to the workshop, to record their thoughts, comments, or questions. During the workshop, there will be a separate computer and screen set up for Twitter. This activity will provide all participants an opportunity to communicate throughout the 3 days. The purpose of this workshop is to provide PD opportunities for the professional community at the university. At the end of each day, the participants will be asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation and if the desired outcomes were met. They will also be asked to write down any lingering questions so that the next day we may begin by answering those questions.

The participants will be administrators, faculty, and staff. The participants' seating arrangements will vary each day depending on activity, sometimes sitting and working within their department and other times the groups will be more heterogeneous. Each table will have markers, large Post-It notes that can be hung on the wall, index cards, writing utensils, and copies of the PowerPoint presentation for notes. I will transpose the notes from the Post-It notes for future discussions. The guiding question

throughout the 3 days is, how do we act in a way that encourages our students to want to graduate? This guiding question will be on each group table. The daily workshop agenda is listed in (Appendix A).

Day 1. The main goal of the first day is to understand the role each department and individual has in retaining students. The first day will begin with an icebreaker, using an online competitive group game. The purpose of the icebreaker is for the participants to communicate and work in groups in a relaxed situation before we begin discussions about retention. Groups will have the opportunity to create group names and compete against one another. After the icebreaker, the participants will use the same program and format to discern what information they know about why students are leaving and the university retention rate versus the national data. After each question, an explanation of the answer will be provided. Participants will then watch a 10-minute video of Vincent Tinto speaking about retention, and they will have time to discuss their thoughts on the video and reflect on their roles with retention. The session will end with the participants filling out an assessment of the day and writing down any lingering questions.

Day 2. Day 2 will begin with an icebreaker with the same goal for Day 1's icebreaker, allowing the participants to build community and communicate with one another. When the icebreaker activity is finished, the facilitator will answer any questions that were lingering from Day 1. The focus of this day will be financial aid, academic integration, advising, early alerts, and academic support. The vice president for enrollment management will begin by presenting information about financial aid and retention. After the presentation, participants will participate in role playing activities

with students expressing concerns about finances and staying in school. The role-playing activities will give participants opportunities to come up with possible solutions and ways to communicate with students. After the financial aid portion of the day, I will discuss Tinto's theory of academic integration, and the participants will analyze the various ways students can become academically integrated into the campus community. The university's professional advising team will present the advising session. During the remainder of the day, I will be presenting and leading the discussion. At the end of the sessions, participants will have opportunities to brainstorm and discuss ways to integrate students academically, improve academic advising skills, and brainstorming ideas for effective use of the early-alert system. There will be opportunities for the participants to discuss in their groups and write down answers. This day will end with an assessment and an opportunity to write down any lingering questions.

Day 3. Day 3 will begin with an icebreaker focusing once again on group communication and collaboration. Once the icebreaker is complete, I will address any lingering questions from the previous day. The focus for the final day will be social integration, and we will focus on learning communities and ways that every office can socially integrate the students into the campus community. There will be a short video from another university that has successfully implemented learning communities into their residence halls and a presentation from the director of residence life and campus programming, discussing learning communities, campus programming, and residence life curriculum. Groups will have opportunities to brainstorm ways of incorporating students into the social environment on campus not just in the residence halls. The athletic director

will present information about athletics and retention, and the medical group that oversees the counseling and wellness centers will discuss physical and mental health and its impact on retention. The day will end with a final assessment of the goals of the day.

Rationale

I chose the 3-day PD workshop because there is a need for training the faculty, staff, and administrators based on the data analysis results in Section 2. I found that there were reasons students provided for leaving that the administrators were not aware of, and that little documentary data existed to guide faculty, staff, and administrators in best practices for increasing student retention. Students leave because of finances, academic concerns, athletics, health and family concerns, and social concerns. The students and the administrators stated some of the same reasons, but the administrators did not mention all of the reasons that the students provided. This workshop will equip the university community with the skills and information to implement various solutions to increase student retention. The solutions may lead to improving student retention rate at the university and improving the current practices for the students that are persisting toward graduation.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is to find evidence to support the 3-day PD project. I focus on solutions to the retention problem at RDT University. Following the conceptual framework used for this study, I broke the solutions into two main categories: academic integration solutions and social integration solutions.

Key words used in the literature search were *academic integration, advising, academic support, residence halls, social integration and student success*. The review consists mainly of research articles from the past 5 years, and Walden University's library databases including, *Education Source* and *ERIC* were used, along with various other resources that I found.

Academic Integration

The second most frequent reason that students provided for not persisting was academic reasons, ranging from major was not available to academic rigor. There are several solutions discussed in the literature to alleviate some of the students' concerns or to help steer them in the direction that is appropriate for their goals and help them find success. Academic advising, academic support, early alerts, and assessment, if done correctly, can have a positive impact on student retention.

Academic advising. There are many definitions of advising from several sources all with the common theme that advising is an intentional relationship between a student and a professional from the university to aide in the student's academic pursuits. Kuhn (2008) explained that advising is when a professional in the educational institution provides guidance to the students academically, socially, or personally. Advising plays a role in student success and retention (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic advising allows for a holistic approach to student success, giving the advisor the opportunity to look at the entire experience of the student and help where needed, ensuring academic success and ultimately graduation (Drake, Jordan. & Miller, 2013).

Advising can connect students to the university in various ways. Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) found that for "every meeting with an advisor the odds that a student is retained increases by 13%," (p. 49). Advising helps build relationships between the university and the student by affectively increasing student persistence (Drake et al., 2013; Habley et al., 2012), helping students to feel as if they belong and are connected to the campus, (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Teasley, & Buchanan, 2013; Vianden & Barlow, 2015), helping students feel a sense of loyalty to the university (Vianden, & Barlow, 2015), and increasing student academic success (Drake et al., 2013; Kuh, 2008a). The advisor serves as a mentor and content expert and can help students' bridge the gap between what they are learning and job or graduate school placement in the future.

To ensure that advising is effective, the university must have clear outcomes and expectations for the advisor/advisee relationship. Problems that may exist in the advising structure are due to the lack of a clear purpose, lack of alignment, and lack of training (Felten, Gardner, Schroeder, Lambert, & Barefoot, 2016). There are several different types of advising that can be used to address various student concerns and help students achieve their goals. When these types of advising are explained to advisors, and they are provided with training, the advising relationship can be beneficial to student success and persistence, (Drake et al., 2013; Zhang, Gossett, Simpson, & Davis, 2017).

Academic support. The purpose of academic support is to complement and supplement the learning that is happening in the classroom. Students who use academic support services are more likely to find academic success and persist toward graduation (Grillo & Leist, 2014). There are several programs that qualify as academic support

including peer-to-peer tutoring and supplemental instruction.

Peer tutors are students who have been academically successful in a course and who helps another student in that same course. The tutor is not meant to be a teacher but meant to be someone who can help guide, explain, or facilitate the understanding of the materials. Students who participate in peer tutoring are likely to earn higher grades, to persist to the next semester and year (Coladarci, Willett, & Allen, 2013; Thomas, Bell, & Shoulders, 2013), and to help socially integrate students into the university (Carr & London, 2017; Grillo & Leist, 2014).

Supplemental instruction is large group tutoring offered for students enrolled in the traditionally difficult courses. Supplemental instructors (SI) are students who have taken the class they are supporting, retaking the class not for credit, and working in a close relationship with the professor to ensure that they are helping students understand the material to become successful. SIs will meet with groups of students in sessions, where they will go over the material learned in the class. Thus, they are supplementing what was learned in the classroom. SI is designed to help students' bridge the gap between the information presented in their courses, while helping to increase student success and retention (Goomas, 2014; Grillo & Leist, 2014).

Early alert. An early-alert system is a strategy for institutions to identify students who are struggling early in their academic career so the university personnel can intervene (Schroeder, 2013; Tampke, 2013). Early alert systems can inform the campus community of a range of issues including academic issues, such as attendance and lack of participation, or social issues such as problems with family, friends, or in the residence

halls, taking a holistic approach to student success (Howard & Flora, 2015). Early-alerts can also be grade check, 4-week grades, and midterm grades. Early-alert systems can target all students, though it has focus on first-year students and students who have historically struggled. The interventions for the students struggling vary depending on the students' needs. It could range from conversations with their academic advisor or a counselor to enrolling in academic support courses or attending tutoring and study skills workshops (Greenfield et al., 2013). The goal of early-alert systems is to increase awareness of the resources available to students so they may get the assistance they need and become successful (Habley et al., 2012).

Faculty relationships and teaching. Students who find relevance in their coursework, receive consistent and timely feedback, and whose courses are more experiential are more likely to be satisfied with their coursework and professors and are more likely to persist. Additionally, universities that engage undergraduate students in academic research with their professors have found success and are more likely to retain (Jones, Barlow, & Villarejo, 2010; Howard & Flora, 2015; Stanford, Rocheleau, Smith, & Mohan, 2017). Engaging in various academic pursuits with faculty lead to a higher level of student satisfaction with the academic curriculum at the university. Institutions and faculty who implement high impact practices into their classroom, such as undergraduate research, service learning, internship opportunities, and learning communities throughout a student's academic career, have more academic success than their peers who do not have these experiences, and a larger likelihood of retaining (Kuh, 2008b). If students perceive the academic curriculum of the university to be less

engaging, they are less likely to persist (Tinto, 2015).

Social Integration

Students that are socially integrated are more invested in the campus community and more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993). There are several ways that students can be socially integrated but at a small university a prominent way is through the residential experience.

Residence life. Residential universities should be vibrant, energetic environments for students. The residence halls should create a place for students to feel accepted and part of a community, which promotes learning and helps students to become socially integrated into the university. The experience of living on a residential campus in the halls can influence a student decision to persist (Blimling, 2015; Parameswaran & Bowers, 2014). Living on campus has increased the likelihood that a student will be retained because of the connection they make with the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students need to feel as if the residence halls are a place they can be at home, can interact with one another and make friends, have rules that are not too restrictive, and live in environments that are well kept (Blimling, 2015).

Designing residence halls that meet the student needs should also incorporate the academic endeavors of the students. There are a variety of strategies, including programming, guest speakers, and the incorporation of some of the academic strategies mentioned earlier, that can occur in the context of the residence halls. A living learning community (LLC), a high-impact practice, integrates the academic experience and residence life experience, resulting in higher student engagement and retention (Hall &

O'Neal, 2016). Students who participate in an LLC will typically take some courses

together, have a clear mission of the LLC, participate in programming specific to the

LLC in the residence halls and the larger community, and will be involved with faculty

(Blimling, 2015; Habley et al., 2012; Howard & Flora, 2015). Because students are living

with others who have the same values, interests, and goals, students are less likely to

retreat into themselves, not to seek help, or not to have others realize that they need help

when they are struggling (Romanoff, 2016). LLCs also encourage higher rates of campus

involvement, higher GPAs, a more satisfying social experience without as much drinking

and partying, and higher retention rates for those who participate as compared to those

who do not participate (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000; Blimling, 2015; Strange & Banning,

2015).

Implementation

The workshop consists of administrators, faculty, and staff because they all have a

role in helping shape student experiences. This 3-day professional development

workshop would occur before the start of the school year and will be held on campus.

The workshop will not cost the university any additional funds because the supplies

needed are readily available currently. I oversee many of the departments that will be

making the changes, including academic support, residence life, advising, the early alert

system and counseling and wellness centers. I developed the 3-day professional

development workshop, and all the supporting documentation, and have spoken to the

university's executive team about the implementation of the workshop and the plausible

solutions.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Potential resources and existing supports include assistance from the university's executive team, my student affairs team, our informational technology, facilities personnel, and access to the university's large meeting area. As the coordinator of the workshop, I will facilitate all aspects, including introducing the guest speakers, the vice president of enrollment management, the athletic director, the professional advising staff, and the director of the counseling and wellness centers. The materials (technology, papers, pens) that I will need for this workshop will not cost the university any additional funds because the resources are available. Appendix A includes all resources for the workshop.

Potential Barriers

With change, sometimes comes possible conflict and disagreement. The first possible barrier to this workshop will be the university finance. The workshop will not cost any additional money but the solutions, such as the learning communities, will cost additional dollars to implement. A creative solution to funding any new initiatives will need to be found which includes possible grants. A second barrier will be the length of time of the workshop, 3-days near the beginning of the school year is difficult because all campus professionals are trying to get ready for the new school year. Discussion ahead of time and support from the executive team will be crucial in ensuring that there are participants and they understand the value of the workshop. The final barrier is the idea of change. The university has gone through a great deal of change in the recent years, so introducing additional change could make some professionals resistant and not open to

the ideas discussed in the workshop. Once again, support from the executive team will be crucial.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The workshop will occur in the fall before the school year begins. The planning would begin at the end of the previous semester. Immediately after graduation, university personnel would be aware of the workshop and asked to reserve the days. I will speak with the president and the vice president for academic affairs to ensure that there are not any community meetings or departmental meetings required during the time of the workshop. The workshop will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. with an hour lunch and two breaks, one in the morning session and one in the afternoon session.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The implementation of the solutions will be the responsibility of everyone who works for the university. They will need to be cognizant of the relationship they are building with students which includes listening to any concerns the students may have and providing the appropriate office with the information so they can assist the student. Ensuring that the solutions are implemented will be the responsibility of the administrator who oversees the specific departments such as financial aid, athletics, residence life, and advising. I will develop and facilitate the workshop, and I will ensure that my team implements the programs suggested in the workshop.

Project Evaluation

The PD workshop will include formative and summative assessment. The summative assessment will be given to the participants at the end of each day by means

of a survey. The survey will ask the participants to evaluate the workshop, the facilitator and guest speakers. The survey will be used to ensure that the goals and objectives of the day were met and the final survey will determine what additional professional development is needed for the future (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The survey will be anonymous. The participants will also have the opportunity to write down any additional question(s) they may have and those questions will begin the next day's discussion. The results of the surveys will be compiled after the workshop is complete and made available to all who participated.

Ensuring that the implementation and the participation of the workshop can happen, I will need support from the executive team at the university, which consists of the president, vice president for academic affairs, vice president of enrollment management, and the athletic director. The other stakeholders will include the director of financial aid, the success coaches, which are professional advisors for our first-year students, director of residence life and campus programming and the assistant director of residence life and the first-year experience. They will also participate in the workshop.

<div align="center">

Implications Including Social Change

</div>

Local Community

This project can increase student persistence toward graduation consequently alleviating many financial problems for the university because students are not being retained. It also has should have a positive impact on our current students because there will be additional programs and services offered at the university to improve the student experience. The participants will have the skills and knowledge to create and implement

those programs and to more effectively communicate than they are now with students who are struggling with the decision to stay or leave. Improving the knowledge of best practices for retention of the administrators, faculty, and staff can help improve student experience and engagement.

Far-Reaching

The results of this study cannot be generalized to another university, however, the strategies and ideas from the 3-day professional development workshop could be used at other institutions to educate their administrators, faculty and staff. The skills that are introduced and the strategies and high impact practices that are discussed can be used at other universities. If implemented, the benefits of increasing students being retained and graduating from college for the local community and on a larger scale far outweigh any barriers. Students who graduate with a college degree have larger lifetime earning potential and are more civically engaged than those that do not earn a college degree (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Roughton, 2016). The goal of this professional development workshop is to provide administrators, faculty, and staff with skills, strategies and best practices to improve student satisfaction and retention.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

Section 3 described a professional-development workshop designed based on the problem and results of the study discussed in Sections 1 and 2. The solutions were grounded in scholarly research. The 3-day workshop for university administrators, faculty and staff at the university focused on developing skills and strategies to improve student retention. Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration served as the conceptual

framework for the study and was integrated throughout the workshop. The

implementation of the professional development workshop can help increase student

persistence. In Section 4, I summarize the reflections and conclusions of the study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this study, I investigated the reasons why students were not being retained at RDT University by evaluating student exit responses, conducting administrator interviews, and using archival data. Once the data were collected and analyzed, a 3-day PD workshop was created for the participants to build knowledge and skills to help improve student retention.

In this section, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the project and my reflections of the project and the process. I will also reflect on my experience of researching and writing the doctoral project. I will address how this project could potentially bring social change and the limitations of the project.

Project Strengths

My project had several strengths. One strength was that I was able to analyze more than 400 archival student exit responses. The volume of data enabled me to evaluate student responses over eight semesters (4 years). A second strength of my project was the administrator interviews. I interviewed six administrators, all of whom had worked for the university for several years and were familiar with students and student problems and wants. The administrators were open and honest with me and shared their understanding of perceived reasons students were leaving. A final strength of this project was the vast amount of literature on student retention.

Tinto's (1993) theory of integration served as the conceptual framework for this study and became a guide in writing my interview questions and creating the PD

workshop. The workshop encourages collaboration and participation and encompasses all departments in the university. The workshop has flexibility in topics and time so that it could be implemented in various formats and to various participants.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**</div>

Many of the strengths of my study were also limitations. Although I was able to collect a large amount of archival student narratives, not all of the responses were consistent. In some cases, a reason for leaving was not provided. The process for collecting the student responses sometimes led to inaccurate responses. For example, the reason students provided for withdrawing was not always transcribed consistently into the university database.

The administrator interviews also had limitations. Some of the experienced administrators I had planned to interview left the university prior to my study because of budget cuts. Those administrators would have provided valuable perspectives on the retention issues. Also, some answers of administrators who participated in the study may have been biased by their frustration with the budget cuts. A final limitation was the lack of retention data and literature on the university's website and in the faculty/staff/administrator handbooks.

I recommend the university place more emphasis on documenting retention on the website and in reports. I also recommend that future studies include faculty and the staff who work with students on a daily basis. Such personnel could provide a different perspective as to why students are not persisting. Another recommendation is to cross check the reasons that students provided for leaving with National Student Clearinghouse

report. The Clearinghouse report would provide information on where the students went after leaving the university. This would give a deeper understanding as to why some students left and also confirm the accuracy of the exit interview data. An additional strategy for future researchers would be to do a follow-up study with students who left prior graduation to validate their reasons for withdrawing.

Finally, I recommend the university review its process for collecting student exit data and retention data. The exit survey is adequate, but using an exit interview, a scholar would gather a deeper level of understanding about their experiences and how those experiences shaped their decision to leave. It would be helpful to evaluate retention instruments and programs annually. A committee should be created to help guide the university in the gathering of retention data and ensuring effective implementation of high-impact practices to increase student retention.

Scholarship

I am writing this section last because I find it to be the most difficult, but the most important. Writing this doctoral project has been the most challenging yet rewarding academic experience I have ever had. I have written research papers and completed a master's degree thesis, but nothing has compared to this experience.

Beginning the process of creating my prospectus, I believed I would be finished in a year. I wrote the prospectus not understanding all aspects of the doctoral project: how to formulate a research question, how to write a problem statement, or how they all went together. I struggled with an idea and in part because I thought I knew it all and did not want to give up control. Control is why I did not finish in the time frame I hoped. I

became defeated when I did not get the prospectus approved and began to doubt my abilities. Yet, I am stubborn, and I needed to prove people wrong, so I kept working at it. When the prospectus was approved, I felt a little more confident and validated. During that process, I learned patience, and I learned more about the research process.

Once I began writing my proposal, I struggled with the problem statement. I knew what the problem was, but writing it out became difficult. Reflecting back, I am grateful that this part of the process took some time because it helped to create a clear path for the rest of the project. Writing my proposal taught me how to formulate a measureable research question, how a review of literature is grounded in current research, and how a methodology is thought-out and explained with precision and detail. I learned that just because I thought a section was complete did not mean that it was, and that research is an on-going process. During this time, I decided to let go of the control a little more and started attending the weekly Skype sessions with peers and professors. I found that those interactions gave me what I needed. That session provided me with a sense of community, others who understood what I was going through and could lift me and help with concepts, skills or ideas that I did not understand. What I missed about being in the classroom, I gained through those Monday evening sessions. When I completed the final defense, as my second chair was driving across the country and stopped on the side of the road for me, I felt like I had finally made it. I had become an academic, and I accomplished something that few others will.

The most enjoyable part of this process was the second half: collecting data, analyzing data, writing the results, and creating the project. I learned that I did not have

the answers, and the initial assumptions that I made about the reasons students were leaving were inaccurate. It is imperative to recognize bias and ensure it does not play a role in the analysis. I learned how to write the results of a qualitative case study, which I had never done before, and learned how to use those results to create something that will hopefully help bring change to the university. Scholarship is moving knowledge forward, taking what is known, learning more about it, and creating a plan to help others to understand the concept a little bit better. Throughout this process, I gained more respect for research and those who conduct it.

Project Development and Evaluation

When reflecting on project development, I learned that creating a meaningful project means a scholar must first not believe he or she knows the answer. I also learned that a scholar cannot create a project in its entirety quickly and with little concentrated effort. I began this project thinking I knew the answer and that I was going to change the university quickly. I was going to create this magical piece of research and solve all the university's problems. I was so passionate about retention and helping struggling students that sometimes I lost sight of what I was attempting to accomplish, especially in the beginning. I learned that I did not need to solve the problems of the university in this piece, nor could I, and that I did not have all the answers. Completing this process helped me to understand that I needed to design a question that could be answered through data collection and analysis. The analysis should then guide the project that aims to answer the question and solve the problem. I learned that I must identify best practices through

reading existing research, how to evaluate research and evaluate my own work, and to ensure that the evaluation does not only happen at the end of the process but throughout.

Leadership and Change

Through this process, I have improved my leadership skills and have learned that change, although sometimes necessary, is hard. An effective and exceptional leader must look at a situation he or she know needs changed, discover the problem, uncover the reasons for the problem, and make changes grounded in the research and literature. I had never done that before. I would look at an issue and come up with solutions, but never understand the problem or how it affected others. Becoming a leader means identifying the issue, seeking to understand the issue, and investigating ways to solve the issue to change things for the better. Through my experience at Walden University, I have learned those skills; an understanding what it means to be a leader in my profession; and an understanding that change is important, necessary, and valuable if educators want to keep moving forward.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

When I decided to start this journey, I did after much thought and discussion with my family, friends, and colleagues. Since I was a young child, I wanted to be a doctor, though I did not know at that time that there was anything other than a medical doctor. When the opportunity arose for me to earn a doctorate, I was unsure if I wanted to undertake this effort because I had already spent so much time in college, had earned two masters degrees, and could not automatically see the return on this investment. I finally decided to pursue this degree because it was something I have wanted since I was a

young child. I could never tell my son or students that they can become whatever they dreamed if I was not willing to do the same. I never understood the time commitment this would take or how much it would stretch me as a scholar and as an educator.

I have grown as a scholar and have developed my research, writing, critical thinking, and evaluating skills. I began this process thinking that I could continue with previous habits of procrastination, and that was not the case. I thought I knew the answer to everything, and I soon realized I knew the answer to little. I have improved my research skills, writing skills, communication skills, and my confidence to accomplish things I did not think that I could ever accomplish. I read research because I was and am interested in it, not because I had to do so; however, now I read the entire article. This experience has provided me with the skills necessary to be a successful scholar.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

This experience has increased my self-confidence. In my profession, I could point to sometimes when I knew the answer but would not speak up because I did not have the degree or, I believed, the knowledge base. As I progressed in this program, I spoke up more at meetings, asserted myself and explained information, and taught colleagues what I learned and what I was reading. I became more confident, and the decisions or suggestions that I made were grounded in literature and best practices. Soon, my colleagues began to listen to me, to ask my opinion on policies, and then asked me to present to others. I became respected. I began this degree as a part-time faculty member and will earn this degree as the dean of students and academic success. I believe it was in part because of the skills and abilities gained through earning my doctorate.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

In my new position, I will need to provide PD workshops to my team and others on occasion. Through my experience of creating and completing my 3-day PD workshop, I have gained the knowledge to create and implement a workshop based off of research and best practices. I learned that developing a workshop educating professionals is similar to creating lesson plans for students, objectives, varying strategies, resources, and assessment are all needed. I enjoyed creating this PD workshop and hope that I can facilitate some, if not all of it, to the university community. I am confident that I can create other PD workshops because of my experience creating this one for my doctoral project.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

I investigated the reasons why students were not persisting at a small midwestern private university that has faced many financial hardships. If some of the solutions are implemented, change will occur for students because they will graduate with a college degree and increase their lifetime earning power. If the college retains more students and they graduate, the college will help the local community by providing them with more qualified individuals for the workforce. Those individuals will stay in the community and help to grow the economy. Though this project study cannot be generalized, the research could be replicated at a similar institution to help them discern reasons their students are not retaining. In addition, the PD workshop can be included in their PD sessions.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In qualitative case study, I evaluated student archival data to discern the reasons students were leaving the university and triangulated that data by interviewing administrators to discover the reasons they believed students were leaving and evaluated documentary data. The students and the administrators had three similar reasons for leaving: finances, academics, and social experience. The students provided additional reasons not mentioned by the administrators, which included athletics, health concerns, and family issues. The reasons provided were supported by recent literature. The administrators might not know all of the concerns and reasons students have for leaving and the university should be more proactive in finding out what is going on with students to intervene promptly.

Future researchers should look at student experiences and how those experiences shaped a student's decision to leave. Another possible project would be to interview students who stayed and look at their experiences and how those experiences shaped their decisions to stay. Then the scholars could take those experiences and see if they could be replicated for other students, especially for those at high risk for leaving. Future researchers could also investigate the programs or services offered at the university to retain students and their effectiveness. A final study that evaluates student retention after some of the strategies mentioned in the PD workshop are implemented could provide valuable insight into its potential effectiveness. This should be done on a semester-by-semester basis.

Conclusion

This doctoral project is a first step, a mere beginning, to investigate the problem with retention at RTD University. More research will need to be conducted in a consistent and timely manner. The results of the research should guide the programs and strategies implemented. During this process, I have gained not only a better understanding of scholarship and research, but also a better understanding of myself as a scholar and researcher. I have realized that I can accomplish a great deal if I have the passion and fortitude. This experience has given me the opportunity to follow the dream, though through a different path that I had as a young child. It has helped me realize my potential as a leader, someone that can affect change and someone who now enjoys the research process.

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Appendix A: Professional Development Workshop

Title: Retention at RDT University

Purpose: The purpose of this professional development workshop is to provide administrators and faculty with an understanding of retention, reasons why students are leaving before graduation, skills and strategies to increase student retention.

Goals: The goals of the 3-day professional development training are to (a) examine the reasons student are not being retained, and its impact on the university (b) formulate plausible solutions to academically and socially integrate the students into the campus community, and (c) devise and assess high impact practices for implementation to improve student retention.

Desired Outcomes: The desired outcome of this 3-day professional development workshop is to provide the participants with the skills and strategies to incorporate high-impact practices and increase student retention.

Target Audience: The target audience is full-time administrators, faculty and staff.

Timeline: The timeline for this professional development workshop is 3 days.

Training Activities and Presentations: Presentations and activities will include various strategies including small group discussion, large group discussions, competitions between the groups, individual time for reflection, use of social media to allow the participants to comment or question during the workshop and various adult-learning strategies. The presentation is outlined after each day's agenda.

Day 1

Time	Activity	Facilitator
8:30 – 9.00 a.m.	Continental breakfast and check	
9:00 - 9:15 a.m.	Welcome and icebreaker	Dean of Students and Academic Success
9:15 - 10:30 a.m.	What do we already know??	Dean of Students and Academic Success
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break	
10:45 - 11:30 a.m.	What is retention and how do we compare?	Dean of Students and Academic Success
11:30 - 12:45 p.m.	Lunch	
12:45 - 1:15 p.m.	What is your role in helping to retain students?	Dean of Students and Academic Success
1:15 -2:15 p.m.	What are the university's high impact practices to help retain students?	Dean of Students and Academic Success
2:15 - 2:30 p.m.	Break	
2:30 - 3:30 p.m.	What are the University's retention goals and where do we go from here?	Dean of Students and Academic Success
3:30 p.m.	Dismissal	

Materials Needed: 2 projectors, 2 laptops, 2 screens for projectors, markers, large Post-It Notes for the wall, notecards and tape

Day 2

Time	Activity	Facilitator
8:30 – 9.00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast and Check-In	
9:00 - 9:15 a.m.	Icebreaker, questions from previous day and objectives for the day	Dean of Students and Academic Success
9:15 - 10:30 a.m.	Finances and Retention	Vice President of Enrollment Management
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break	
10:45 - 11:30 a.m.	Tinto's Theory of Integration and Academic Integration	Dean of Students and Academic Success
11:30 - 12:45 p.m.	Lunch	
12:45 - 1:15 p.m.	Academic Support	Dean of Students and Academic Success
1:15 - 2:15 p.m.	Advising	Professional Advisors
2:15 - 2:30 p.m.	Break	
2:30 – 3:15 p.m.	Early Warning/Early Alert and Retention	Dean of Students and Academic Success
3:15 - 3:30 p.m.	Where do we go from here and assessment.	Dean of Students and Academic Success
3:30 p.m.	Dismissal	

Materials Needed: 2 projectors, 2 laptops, 2 screens for projectors, markers, large Post-It

Notes for the wall, notecards and tape

Day 3

Time	Activity	Facilitator
8:30 – 9.00 a.m.	Continental Breakfast and Check-in	
9:00 - 9:15 a.m.	Icebreaker, objectives presented and questions from previous day answered	Dean of Students and Academic Success
9:15 - 10:30 a.m.	Recap of Tinto's Theory of Integration and Social Integration with discussion	Dean of Students and Academic Success
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break	
10:45 - 11:30 a.m.	Living Learning Communities	Director of Residence Life and Campus Programs
11:30 - 12:45 p.m.	Lunch	
12:45 - 1:15 p.m.	Athletics and Retention	Vice President of Athletics
1:15 -2:15 p.m.	Family, Health and Retention	Director of Counseling and Wellness Center
2:15 - 2:30 p.m.	Break	
2:30 - 3:30 p.m.	Key Strategies, where do we go from here and final assessment	Dean of Students and Academic Success
3:30 p.m.	Dismissal	

Materials Needed: 2 projectors, 2 laptops, 2 screens for projectors, markers, large Post-It Notes for the wall, notecards and tape

Training Activities and Presentations

Day 1

Icebreaker: Participants in groups at their tables will compete against other groups for their first icebreaker. The purpose of the icebreaker is to increase collaboration and communication. After the icebreaker, the goals for day 1 will be explained.

Question that drives our discussion: After discussing the purpose and goals for day 1, the question that drives the discussion will be presented. It will be read to the group and they will have 5 minutes to discuss at their table their answer to the question. Each table of participants will be asked to share a few examples.

What do we know?: Participants will watch a video from Dr. Vincent Tinto discussing what we already know. After he briefly explains each lesson, the video will be stopped so the participants can discuss their thoughts about his message. At the end tables will be asked to share 1-2 predominant thoughts.
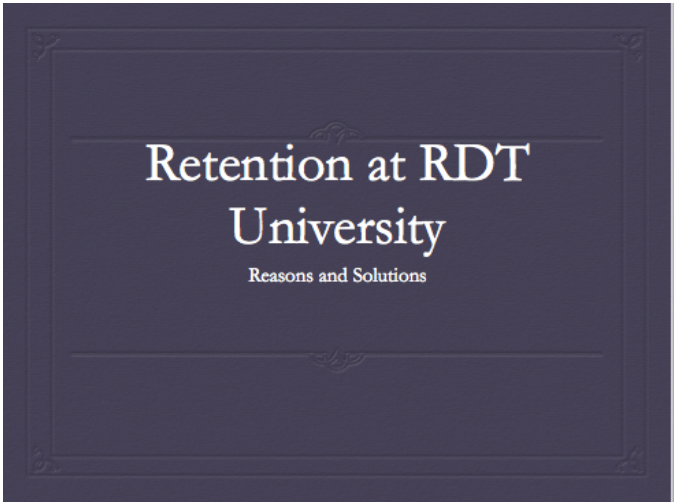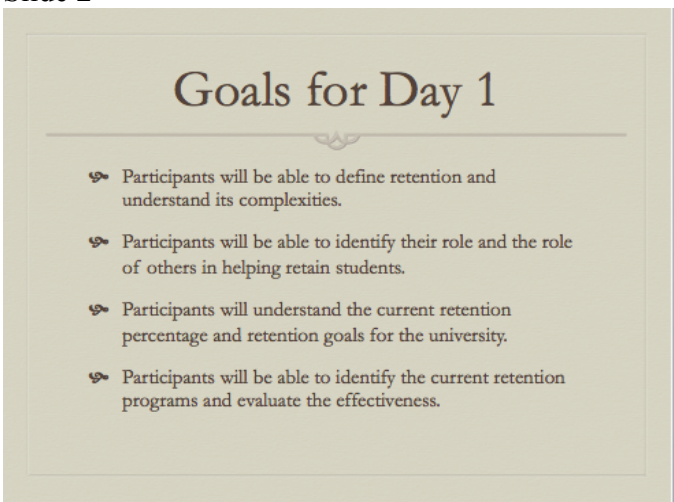
What is retention?: Using an online competitive game, the participants, at their tables, will compete in a game where they will attempt to answer the questions that correspond with the topics from the PowerPoint. There are eight questions that are directly linked to each PowerPoint slide. The game question will be asked, all groups will have time to figure out their answer and submit the answer using their phones or a laptop. Once everyone has submitted their answers, I will discuss the corresponding slide and the correct answer. The group that has the most points will win a small prize. This section will end with the participants watching a video of students providing reasons why they are not staying.

What is your role?: The participants at their tables will discuss their role and their office's role in retaining students. Every office should be represented at each table so there will be an opportunity for everyone to learn about others. Once the tables are done discussing their roles the larger group will compile a list of responsibilities for each office or department.

High-Impact Practices: After groups discussed what role they have in retention, they will learn briefly about high-impact practices that help retain students according to literature. They will take time to discuss as small groups examples of HIP's at the university, and then each table will be asked to provide 1-2 examples the group discussed.

University Retention Goals: The final session of the day will be to discuss the university's retention goals and how those goals are derived. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the goal.

Where do we go from here?: Each day of the presentation will end the same way. The participants will be asked for their final thoughts. Once that discussion is completed, an assessment of the day will be handed out and the participants will be asked to fill out the brief assessment. All tables have index cards on them and the participants will also be asked to write down any additional thoughts or questions that had and those will be answered, if possible, the next morning.

Slide 1	The presenter will open by introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the PD workshop and the supplies sitting at the tables. Each table will have markers, pens, index cards, copies of the presentation, and large sheets of paper. The markers and the paper are for the participants to write down ideas from the discussion for large group discussion. The index cards are for the participants to write down additional questions at the end of the presentation.
Slide 2	The goals will be explained for each day.
Slide 3	This question will drive the discussion for the next 3 days. The question comes directly from Vincent Tinto in a video that the participants will be watching on the next slide. It will help shape the conversation and the provide perspective. Each table will be given 5 minutes to consider this question and write down their answers. We will refer back to their answers later in the workshop.

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Slide 4	Once the question from previous slide is posed and everyone has written down answers, we will discuss to the 2 lessons we know. Clicking on the picture in the bottom corner of this slide, a video of Dr. Tinto discussing these lessons will come up. This portion starts at 2:30. I will show Dr. Tinto discussing the first lesson-stop the video and ask the tables to discuss thoughts and write them down on the paper. Then I will read the next lesson, show the video and ask them to discuss and write down their responses. We will then ask each table to highlight 1-2 of their thoughts to the entire group.

What do we know?

- Lesson 1: Student success does not arise by chance.
- Lesson 2: Simply providing students access without support does not provide meaningful opportunity to succeed, access without support is not opportunity (V. Tinto).

Slide 5	These questions can serve as a pre-test to determine what information do the participants already know.

What exactly is retention?

- How would you define retention?
- What is our current retention rate?
- Why is this so important?
- Why do we only report freshman to sophomore retention rate?
- What is the difference between persistence and retention?

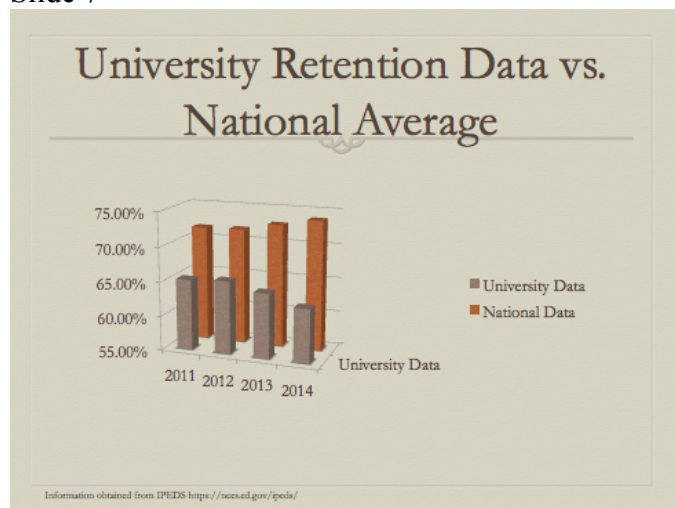| Slide 6	The definitions for these 2 words will be provided and an explanation will be given so that everyone understands the jargon used the next 3 days.
Definitions ☙ *Retention:* Students who continually enroll in consecutive semesters until graduation (Seidman, 2012). ☙ *Persistence:* Students who continue at the University from the beginning of their first year through graduation, as long as this occurs within six years (Chen & St. John, 2011).	
Slide 7	This slide is for perspective so that the participants know the university's retention rate as compared to the national average.
University Retention Data vs. National Average Information obtained from IPEDS https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/	

Slide 8	Before showing this slide I will ask tables to write down reasons why they think students leave and discuss with their group. After they have discussed with their group reasons they think, each table will present a few reasons to the entire group. I will then show this slide and read some other answers directly from students. Participants will then be asked for their thoughts and opinions of these quotes, where they surprising, did they know etc..?
Why do students say they are leaving? This wasn't an academic or personal fit for me. I am having troubles balances academics and sports and without sports I can't afford to go here. I do not enjoy the atmosphere I am living in. I decided I didn't want to play football anymore so I am going to transfer to another school. I am transferring to another school that has better opportunities in my major.	
Slide 9	As groups they will take time to process and discuss what role their office plays in retention efforts and what role do they see other offices playing in the retention efforts of the university.
What role does _____ play in retention efforts? Academic Support — Athletics Admissions — Academic Affairs Business Office — Security Advancement and Alumni Office — Facilities President's Office — Cafeteria Financial Aid — Campus Ministry Residence Life — University Marketing	

Slide 10	This slide explains High Impact Practices and will help us in evaluating what retention programs we have and our those programs HIP's. A handout from the American Association of Colleges is hyperlinked to the pencil picture and it lists and discusses HIP's. We will first discuss what programs we think we have and then we will evaluate the thoughts of the group compared to the research to determine what is missing.

What are our High Impact Practices (HIP)?
 	
 🖝 Strategies that have been tested and shown to be very beneficial to students.
   🖝 Tutoring?
   🖝 Supplemental Instruction?
   🖝 Study Abroad?
   🖝 What else?	

Slide 11	This slide explains the current strategy for the university's retention goal. It will be explained and then participants will discuss strategies to get to that goal.
University Retention Goals 🖝 Currently, the retention goal correlates to the budget goal. The number is set by the budget. **2017-2018 School Year** Total number of students need to make budget is 1000 students First-Year Students + Transfer Student Goal=386 Returning=1000-386=614 students need to return for the 2017-2018 school year. Should we set retention goal this way?	

Slide 12	This slide will be the final slide for the day. I will pass out the assessment survey for the day and ask participants to fill it out and ask before they leave to write down any additional thoughts or questions they had, so they may be addressed the next day.
Where do we go from here? ❧ Final thoughts? ❧ Please take a moment to fill out the assessment of today and place them on your table when finished. ❧ Please also take a moment to write down, on your index card, any additional thoughts or questions you have that were not addressed today.	

Training Activities and Presentations

Day 2

Overview and Questions from Day 1: At this time if there were any questions posed that could be answered, they will be addressed.

Finances and Retention: The Vice President of Enrollment Management who oversees the financial aid office and student accounts will give this presentation. At the end of the presentation there will be time for participants to discuss at their tables ways to support those offices and answer the questions on the slide. They will answer the questions at their tables and write their answers on the paper provided under the section finances.
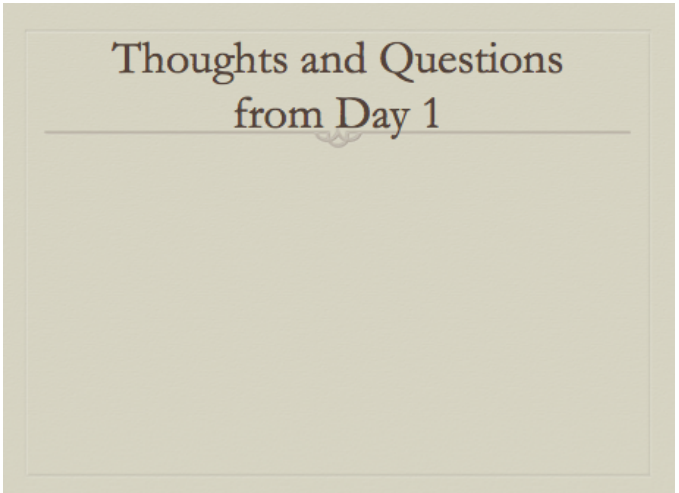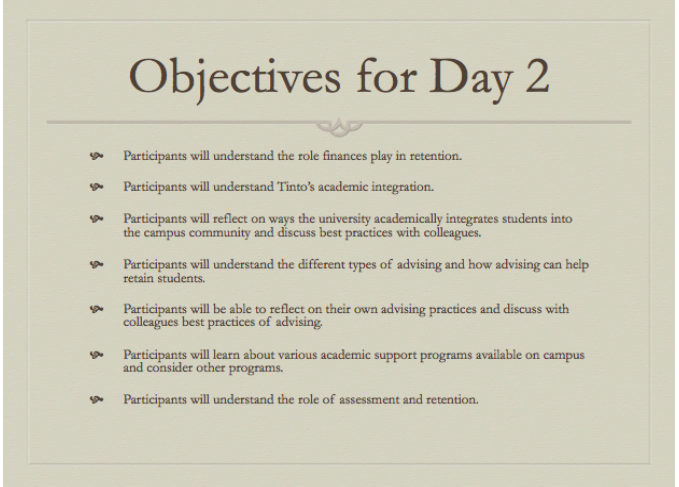
Tinto's Theory of Integration: Tinto's theory of integration will be discussed and presented to ensure that the participants have a basic knowledge of the theory. Academic integration will be highlighted on this day and the participants will be given a few examples of academic integration and its effects on retention and the campus community. Then at their tables participants will discuss how students are academically integrated into the campus community. The professors will be asked to begin the discussion by sharing ways they academically integrate the students. After they are done providing examples, the participants at the table will be asked to discuss ways they can support them. After the small group discussion we will discuss strategies in the larger group.

Academic Support: This will be a brief overview of the various academic support programs on campus that are designed to help students persist to graduation.

Academic Advising: One of the first HIP we will discuss is academic advising. The university's professional advisors will present this session and will include role-playing of various advising situations at the end of the presentation.

Early Warning/Early Alert and Retention: The early alert system at the university will be highlighted. I will explain what alerts are implemented currently, demonstrate to the participants our current early alert warning system and explain how to use the program. The groups will end this section of the presentation by discussing other types of early alerts that should be implemented and strategies for doing so. The responses will be written on their large Post-its under the early alert section heading.

Where do we go from here: This will be the final slide for this day. The participants will be asked to fill out the assessment for the day and will be asked to write down any additional questions they may have that were not answered.

Slide 1 **Thoughts and Questions from Day 1**	After Day 1 ends, I will collect all index cards with questions or thoughts and write them on this slide. We will begin our day with an icebreaker and then discuss questions, if there are any.
Slide 2 **Objectives for Day 2** - Participants will understand the role finances play in retention. - Participants will understand Tinto's academic integration. - Participants will reflect on ways the university academically integrates students into the campus community and discuss best practices with colleagues. - Participants will understand the different types of advising and how advising can help retain students. - Participants will be able to reflect on their own advising practices and discuss with colleagues best practices of advising. - Participants will learn about various academic support programs available on campus and consider other programs. - Participants will understand the role of assessment and retention.	
Slide 3 **Finances and Retention** - What can we do to help students with financial problems? - How can we help students that don't understand finances, financial aid, or the importance of paying their bill?	This will be a presentation from our Vice President of Enrollment Management, who oversees the Financial Aid office.
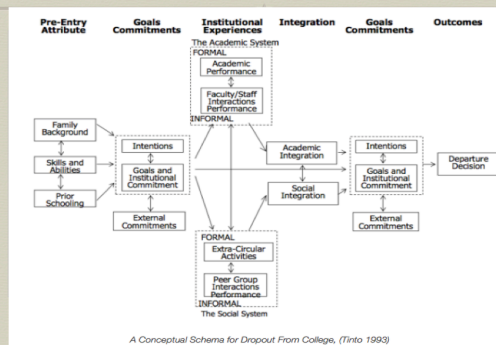
Slide 4	This next section will explain Vincent Tinto's theory of integration, which served as the conceptual framework for the study. Day 2 we will discuss academic integration and day 3 we will discuss social integration.
Tinto's Theory of Integration — *A Conceptual Schema for Dropout From College, (Tinto 1993)*	
Slide 5	I will provide a few examples of academic integration and the effects on retention of academically integrated students into the campus community.
Academic Integration and Retention — The classroom, and the interaction that students have with faculty, not only impacts a student's performance, but also the student's perception of academic quality of the University. (Tinto, 1993). Students who are integrated into the academic environment on a campus have a stronger commitment to the University and graduation (Braxton et.al, 2014). Students who are involved academically on campus are more likely to have heightened social and intellectual development and commitment to the University (Tinto, 1993).	
Slide 6	This will be group discussion. The professors at the table will be asked to discuss ways they academically integrate the students. After they are done providing examples, the participants at the table will be asked to discuss ways they can support them. After the small group discussion we will discuss strategies in the larger group.
Thoughts? How do we academically integrate our students into the campus community?	

Slide 7	This slide provides some examples of current academic support programs at the university. We will spend some time discussing each program, what it does and the tables will discuss other programs or ways to improve the existing programs.
Academic Support Programs on our campus • Peer Tutoring • Supplemental Instruction • Academic Support Courses • Early Alert • 3-week progress reports • Midterm grades • Career Services workshops • Individualized group study sessions (i.e. GRE Test prep) • Success Coach workshops based on student need	
Slide 8	The University's Professional Advisors will present the advising section.
How would you define advising? 	
Slide 9	Question to ask participants: When you advise students do you merely help them with picking out their courses, or do you do as this slide suggests, help students move beyond their worldviews? What can the university do to support you?
Concept of Advising 	

Slide 10	Question(s):
	Do you agree that these 6 items are what you are responsible for and is there anything that is missing? How do you and/or the institution communicate that to the students? What are the students responsible for and how is that measured and communicated?
Slide 11	Question:
	Does our current academic advising program meet these 4 standards?
Slide 12	Once we have completed our discussion of this slide, I will show the participants our current early alert warning system and explain how to use the program.

Slide 13	This slide will be the final slide for the day. I will pass out the assessment survey for the day and ask participants to fill it out and ask before they leave to write down any additional thoughts or questions they had, so they may be addressed the next day.
Where do we go from here? ❧ Final thoughts? ❧ Please take a moment to fill out the assessment of today and place them on your table when finished. ❧ Please also take a moment to write down, on your index card, any additional thoughts or questions you have that were not addressed today.	

Training and Activities Presentation

Day 3

Overview and Questions from Day 2: At this time if there were any questions posed that could be answered, they will be addressed.

Social Integration and Retention: We will review Tinto's Theory of Integration and discuss more closely social integration. After social integration is explained, the participants in their large groups will answer questions on Slide 4. There will be an area marked on their large post-it with the title from the slide. After the groups discuss the questions at their table, we will spend time as a whole group discussing the answers.

Living Learning Communities: the Director of Residence Life and Campus Programs will facilitate this section. The LLC concept will be explained to the groups, and information about the LLC at the university will be explained. They will also watch a short clip about the positive impact of LLC from UW Madison. After the video the groups will discuss implementing LLC on our campus and the role everyone could take in that implementation.

Athletics and Retention: This is be a presentation from our Vice President of Athletics. A the end of the presentation questions will be posed and the groups will have time to discuss at their tables and then with the group as a whole. Group answers will be written on the large Post-its under the heading athletics.

Family and Health and Retention: Since family and health related students in the study as reasons for leaving notated issues, this will be integrated into the workshop. The Director of the Counseling program will present information about health related issues

and retention and family stressors and retention. When the presentation is over the participants will discuss in their groups the questions posed and answers will be notated. The large group will come together and each table will highlight some ideas from their discussion.

Key Strategies: This workshop will end with the group finishing the video from day 1. Dr. Tinto will discuss key strategies for retention. Those strategies are on a handout and will be given to the participants at the conclusion of the video. They will need to, on their own, mark the strategies the university implements effectively. As a group they will spend 15 minutes discussing what areas we could improve on, and we will spend an additional 15 minutes as a whole group listening to the individual groups.

Where do we go from here: The participants will be asked if they have any final thoughts or questions and will fill out the final assessment.

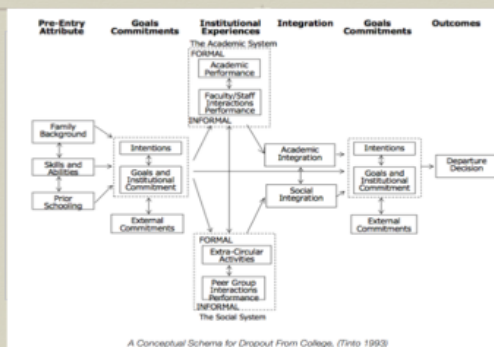|	
Slide 1 **Thoughts and Questions from Day 2.**	I will begin this day with questions or thoughts from the previous day. If there are none, then I will briefly summarize the previous day and move to the objectives for the day.
Slide 2 **Objectives for Day 3** ❧ Participants will understand what social integration means and how the university attempts to socially integrate the students into the campus community. ❧ Participants will work collaboratively with colleagues to create opportunities for social integration for students ❧ Participants will understand the role athletics play in student retention. ❧ Participants will understand the role family and health play in retention.	These will be highlighted briefly.
Slide 3 **Tinto's Theory of Integration** A Conceptual Schema for Dropout From College. (Tinto 1993)	This slide is the same as Day 2. On day 2 we discussed the theory and highlighted academic integration. Today I will quickly explain the slide again, with more of a focus on social integration.

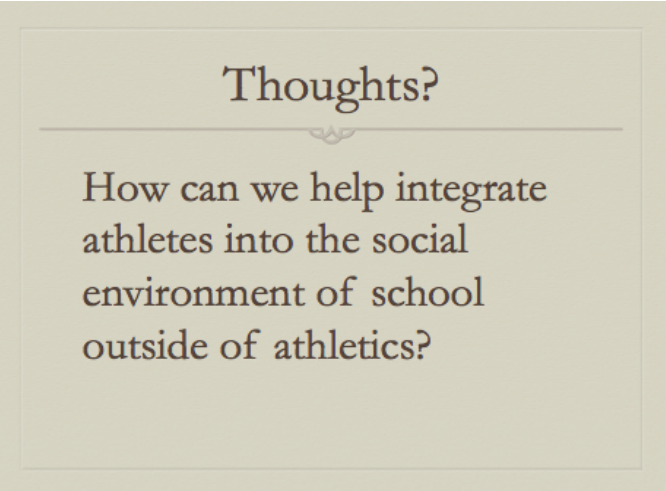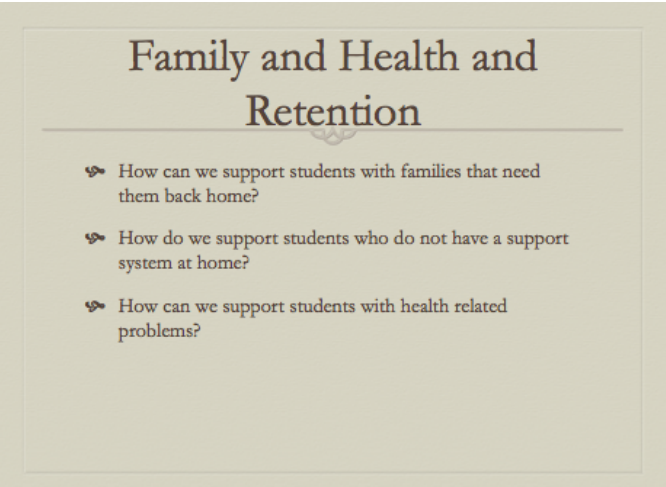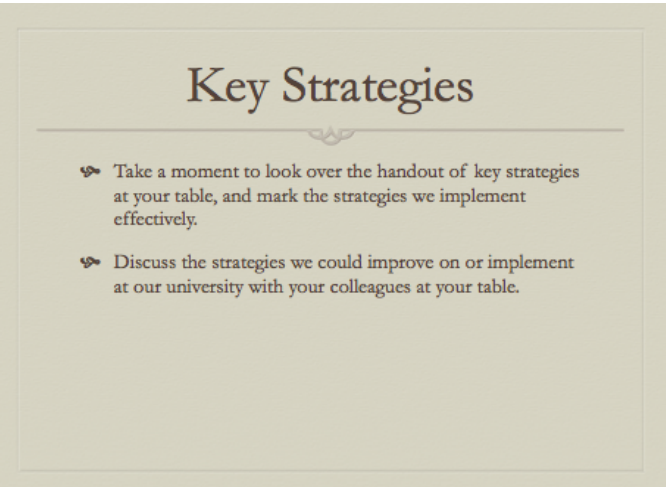|	
Slide 4 ## Social involvement drives academic involvement. ❧ How do students become socially involved on campus? ❧ What social experiences do we offer students within the confines of the academic experience? ❧ How does the university socially integrate students into the campus community? ❧ How do you socially integrate students into the campus community?	At tables participants will spend 20 minutes discussing these questions with their colleagues and writing down answers on the large sheets post-it notes. Once they are done discussing at the tables, we will spend time discussing the answers as a whole group.
Slide 5 ## Living Learning Communities ❧ A group of students who share similar academic goals, typically live together and take some courses together and will meet on a regular basis to study. ❧ What LLC could we have on our campus and what role can you play in their development?	The Director of Residence Life and Campus Programs will facilitate this section.

Slide 6
 	
## Athletics and Retention 	
 	
❧ According to NCAA (2015)
 	
  ❧ Median Time spent on academics and athletics
 	
    ❧ Division II: 38.5 hours/week in 2015- Academics
 	
    ❧ Division II: 32 hours/week in 2015- Athletics
	This will be a presentation from our Vice President for Athletics. He will discuss strategies that the coaches use to retain students.

Slide 7 **Thoughts?** How can we help integrate athletes into the social environment of school outside of athletics?	This question will be posed after the VP of Athletics finishes his presentation. The participants will discuss at their tables and then we will discuss as a whole group.
Slide 8 **Family and Health and Retention** ❧ How can we support students with families that need them back home? ❧ How do we support students who do not have a support system at home? ❧ How can we support students with health related problems?	The Director of our Counseling Program will present information about health related issues and retention, as well as, family related issues and retention. When he is done presenting these three questions will be posed, discussed at the tables with the participants and then as a whole group. The tables will be given 10 minutes.
Slide 9 **Key Strategies** ❧ Take a moment to look over the handout of key strategies at your table, and mark the strategies we implement effectively. ❧ Discuss the strategies we could improve on or implement at our university with your colleagues at your table.	Participants will be given a handout of key strategies, as taken from the Tinto video watched earlier. They will need to, on their own, mark the strategies the university implements effectively. As a group they will spend 15 minutes discussing what areas we could improve on, and we will spend an additional 15 minutes as a whole group listening to the individual groups.

Slide 10	Final thoughts or questions will be discussed and then the participants will be given the final assessment and asked to fill it out.
Where do we go from here? ➺ Thoughts or questions? ➺ Please take a moment to fill out the final assessment before leaving. 　➺ Thank you for participating in this workshop.	

<u>Assessment for Day 1 and Day 2</u>

Directions: Please circle your response to the questions provided below.

1=Strongly Disagree

3=Neither Agree or Disagree

5=Strongly Agree

1. The goals of the day, mentioned at the beginning of the day were met.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
2. The facilitator had expert knowledge and was prepared.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
3. The content presented was relevant and useful.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
4. The facilitator provided adequate time for discussion and created an environment that encouraged discussion.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
5.The facilitator stimulated my interest in the subject.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A

6. What did you take away from this workshop?

7. What are some areas of improvement for tomorrow?

Final Assessment for Participants

Directions: Please circle your response to the questions provided below.

1=Strongly Disagree

3=Neither Agree or Disagree

5=Strongly Agree

1. The PD Workshop helped me understand retention as it applies to student success.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
2. The PD Workshop helped me understand the various strategies for improving retention.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
3. The PD Workshop helped me understand how to integrate strategies for retention into my job effectively.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
4. The information I learned in this PD Workshop I will use often.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A
5.The PD Workshop helped aid in building a collaborative relationship with my colleagues.	1 2 3 4 5 N/A

Final Comments or Thoughts:

Key Strategies of Retention

Directions: After viewing the video, please mark the strategies that you know the university successfully implements. Include any additional strategies at the bottom.

1. Clear expectations for students.

2. Orientation is beginning of becoming a member of the scientific community—what to study and what courses to take.

3. Structured pathways-concrete, coherent path of courses they must take-move quickly through program.

4. Need for advising is critical

5. High expectation—no one rises to low expectations.

6. Contextualized academic support-the closer academic support is connected to individual courses the more effective that support is because they can see how it relates to how it works.

7. Social support-need to know struggles of becoming successful students.

8. Early warning systems.

9. Early assessment in courses.

10. Programs that are concerned about involvement-the more frequently students make contact with others, the better they will do. Students need to see themselves as a valued member of the community.

11. Opportunities for active involvement with other students, faculty and staff.

Other Suggestions:

Appendix B: Administrator Interview Questions

1. What is the role you serve at the university in helping to retain students?

2. In your opinion what are the reasons for the decline in student retention?

3. Evaluate the importance and level of academic integration of students within the university. For the purpose of this study academic integration is defined as the ability for the student to be integrated into the academic community of the university through their academic performance, academic relationships with professors and peers. (Tinto's model of integration)

4. Evaluate the importance and level of social integration of students within the university. For the purpose of this study social integration is defined as the ability of the student to be integrated into the social environment of the college campus through such programs as extra curricular activities and residence life. (Tinto's model of integration)

5. In your opinion, are students aware of and benefiting from retention programs?

6. What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the current retention programs?

7. Can you suggest anyways to improve the effectiveness of the current retention programs?

8. Can you suggest additional programs or services to help increase student retention?

Appendix C: Interview Protocols

Interview #_____

Date_____/_____/_____

Interview Protocol for Administrators

Script

Welcome and thank you for participating today in this study. My name is Christine Tracy. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting my project study as part of the degree requirement. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will include eight questions regarding your experiences with students and retention. I would like your permission to record this interview so I may accurately document your responses. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All your responses are confidential and will remain confidential. Your responses will be used to develop a better understanding of student retention at the university. The purpose of this study is to determine why students do not stay at ███████ University.

I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this research project, *Improving Undergraduate Student Retention at a Midwestern University.* I am the principal investigator, confirming your participation in the study. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or to a question, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

1. What is the role you serve at the university in helping to retain students?

2. In your opinion what are the reasons for the decline in student retention?

3. Evaluate the importance and level of academic integration of students within the university. For the purpose of this study academic integration is defined as the ability for the student to be integrated into the academic community of the university through their academic performance, academic relationships with professors and peers. (Tinto's model of integration)

4. Evaluate the importance and level of social integration of students within the university. For the purpose of this study social integration is defined as the ability of the student to be integrated into the social environment of the college campus through such programs as extra curricular activities and residence life. (Tinto's model of integration)

5. In your opinion, are students aware of and benefiting from retention programs?

6. What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the current retention programs?

7. Can you suggest anyways to improve the effectiveness of the current retention programs?

8. Can you suggest additional programs or services to help increase student retention?

Appendix D: Participation Email

Good Afternoon
I invite you to participate in my study about retention rates at the university. I am interested in learning your perspective on the retention causes and current strategies for improving the university's retention.

I am a doctoral student at Walden University and I would like your assistance as I work to complete my doctoral project study. I have received permission from ██████ University's IRB to conduct my research on the reasons for our retention problems on campus. Quincy University's IRB will serve as the IRB of record.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the reasons students have not retained at the university and your perceptions of why this has happened and what programs would be impactful. The benefit to participating in this study is the opportunity to provide insights that may lead to improving the student retention rate.

If you graciously agree, I will send you a consent form for you to review and sign. Involvement in the study will require no more than 60 minutes of your time. Each participant will be asked a series of questions during a pre-arranged individual interview. These questions will be sent to you ahead of time. After the interview, you will be asked to review your transcription to ensure accuracy.

I would like to begin these interviews the week of Jan. 17, 2017. If you are willing to assist me, please reply to this e-mail promptly so that I can coordinate our arrangements.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope you have a great day.