

2019

## Student Retention at Online Learning Institutions

Johnetta P. Banks  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Johnetta Banks

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. David Weintraub, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Lynne Orr, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Glenn Penny, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

The Office of the Provost

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Student Retention at Online Learning Institutions

by

Johnetta Banks

EdS, Walden University, 2016

MAT, Grambling State University, 2011

MS, Grambling State University, 2005

BA, Grambling State University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrative Leadership in Teaching and Learning

Walden University

October 2019

## Abstract

At a local community college in Texas, student retention remained a concern as enrollment was increasing while online student retention was decreasing. The purpose of this study was to examine student retention in online courses at the college. The conceptual framework that guided the project study was Tinto's integration model, which provided insight as to why students choose to leave or continue their educational journey. The overarching question that guided the study queried the factors influencing students' decisions to take online courses at the higher education level. A qualitative case study was used to capture information on 10 students regarding their perceptions of online learning and retention issues within the programs. Interviews were used to collect the data, along with research notes from each 40 minute interview. All information was transcribed and member checked, the data and research notes were uploaded in Nvivo 11. Once analyzed the following themes emerged, personal, academic, and institutional. The results also revealed that student participation and belonging are key indicators of student performance online and seem to be the most significant reason for failure or withdrawal from online courses. To address the reasons, a professional development plan was developed for the local community college to increase student, faculty, and staff awareness, interaction, and to assist in creating a welcoming, learning, and supportive environment. The implications for social change include presenting the professional development to the local community college to increase student retention and success rates for online courses by understanding the student population and their needs to be successful, resulting in an increase for graduation.

Student Retention at Online Learning Institutions

by

Johnetta Banks

EdS, Walden University, 2016

MAT, Grambling State University, 2011

MS, Grambling State University, 2005

BA, Grambling State University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2019

## Dedication

I first give thanks to my God Almighty for granting me the understanding and unwavering faith to complete my dissertation. Thank you for grace and mercy and reassuring me that all things work together for his good (Romans 8:28), and that I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). Lastly, I wish to dedicate this to the late Mary Johnson Davis (my grandmother), Kennis Ray Davis (my uncle), Ray Braggs (my brother-in-law), Justin Braggs (my nephew), Nicholas Braggs (my nephew), and John Hampton (my father). There is not a day that goes by that I do not wish to have just one more conversation with you. You all are truly missed and will forever be etched into my heart. Rest in heart, and I love you.

## Acknowledgments

This study is dedicated to my husband (Jermaine Banks), my children (Nickalos, Angel, Trinity, and Leah), and my mom (Bennie Thompson). Thank you all for believing in me when I did not believe in myself. Thank you all for having patience with me. Thank you, Jermaine, for travelling with me to my residency, which afforded me an awesome opportunity to gain a wealth of knowledge on how to develop my dissertation. You never gave up on me and encouraged me daily to reach my goal. Thank you to my children who received less family time, but you gave me unselfish love by writing little notes to encourage me to push hard for my dreams. Thank you to my mom who has been by my side since I begin my educational journey and has motivated me to fight hard to conquer obstacles. Thanks to my best friend of twenty plus years, Alexshondra, who has been my confidant, and spiritual motivator throughout this entire doctoral process. Thank you for encouraging and helping me to refocus during those tough times I wanted to give up. I will always love you best friend-sister. To my sisters, Vanessa and Angela, thank you for just being you and loving me. The love my family displayed gave me the strength to push forward. You all are truly the wind beneath my wings. I love you all dearly and I am proud to dedicate this dissertation to you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Wronkovich, for being that supportive committee chair member that did not mind having long phone conversations or exchanging numerous of emails and understanding that life happens. I also would like to thank Dr. Weintraub for stepping right in to motivate me when my chair decided to retire. Thank you for the phone calls and emails to keep me on task. I truly appreciate everything you have done.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Definition of Problem .....	2
Rationale .....	3
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level .....	3
Evidence of the Problem in the Professional Literature .....	5
Definitions.....	6
Significance of the Study .....	6
Research Question .....	7
Review of the Literature .....	8
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Retention.....	10
Online Learning .....	12
Student Engagement and Satisfaction.....	14
Instructor Engagement and Satisfaction .....	15
Demographics .....	16
Implications.....	18
Summary.....	18
Section 2: The Methodology.....	20
Research Design and Approach .....	20

Criteria for Selecting and Setting of Participants .....	21
Ethical Considerations .....	22
Data Collection .....	23
Interviews.....	23
Role of the Researcher .....	25
Data Analysis .....	26
Data Analysis Results .....	28
Key Findings.....	29
Discrepant Cases.....	39
Quality of Evidence .....	40
Project Description.....	42
Summary .....	42
Introduction.....	44
Description.....	44
Rationale .....	46
Literature Review.....	47
Online Learning .....	47
Student Satisfaction .....	49
Professor Satisfaction.....	50
Demographics .....	52
Professional Development .....	52

Professional Development and Change .....	53
Project Description.....	54
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	55
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	56
Potential Barriers .....	56
Roles and Responsibilities .....	57
Project Evaluation.....	57
Local Community .....	58
Summary.....	59
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	60
Project's Strengths .....	60
Project Limitations.....	61
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches .....	61
Analysis of Scholarship .....	62
Analysis of Project Development and Evaluation .....	63
Analysis of Leadership and Change .....	64
Analysis of Self as a Scholar .....	64
Analysis of Self as a Practitioner .....	65
Analysis of Self as Project Developer .....	66
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	67
Conclusion and Summary .....	68

References.....	70
Appendix A: The Project .....	92
Appendix B: Professional Development Evaluation .....	120

List of Tables

Table 1. Average Online Course Success & Retention Rates .....4

Table 2. Student Themes.....30

## Section 1: The Problem

For most colleges and universities, student retention has become a major factor in the overall health of the institution. Student retention is both personally and institutionally invaluable because it reflects the effectiveness of the experience. State educational institutions have focused on student retention because it influences the workforce and addresses global economic challenges (Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011). Higher completion rates contribute to institutions' positive images (Aljohani, 2016a); while high withdrawal rates negatively influence both institutions' image and their sustainability (Farid-ul-Hasnain & Krantz, 2011). With student retention decreasing, leaders of higher education institutions are searching for ways to address the problem (Reason, 2009; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988, 2001).

Most institutions in the United States have revamped many of their courses into fully online offerings in hopes of providing a quality education to those students who prefer to further their education within their busy schedule (Layne, Boston, & Ice, 2013). Even though online education continues to grow, so do the concerns about student retention (Hachey, Wladis, & Conway, 2013). Researchers found that there is a relationship between course completion and student success in online education (Willging & Johnson, 2004). From an institutional point of view, when students drop out from school, staff handle more paperwork, advisors spend more time advising, and the institution loses revenue (Moody, 2004).

Over the decades, student retention has been a major area of focus for institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Astin et al., 2012; Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012; Fraser,

Fahlman, Arscott, & Guillot, 2018; Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Previous researchers have focused on student retention, but have failed to offer strategies that can be used to create a learning environment that socially encourages students to continue their education (Yang, Sinha, Adamson, & Rose, 2013). Previous researchers have identified components that could influence student retention and explained why students fail to complete their courses (Yang et al., 2013). According to Astin et al. (2012) and Habley et al. (2012), these studies only provided individual characteristics instead of an understanding of students' reactions to the learning environment. As a result, helping students find success at the collegiate level has been a continued challenge for many colleges and universities (Roueche, Baker, & Brownell., 1971). When exploring the issue of student retention, there is a scarcity of research focused on the online environment (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Instructor perceptions regarding low retention rate is another element that appears to be limited in the research (Dangerfield, 2010). The scarcity of research focused on the online environment is one factor, which prompted this study.

### **Definition of Problem**

The local problem that prompted this study was poor student retention in online courses at the local community college located in Texas. The local community college district consists of seven colleges. Each college confers the following degrees (Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, and Associate of Applied Sciences) and vocational certificates (Accounting, Business, Criminal Justice, Education, Management, Medical, Technology, and Welding). Most the students who attended are first generational,

transfer, returning, or dual-credit. The college has opted to offer online courses as an instructional methodology that assists students in reducing the amount of time attending traditional courses on campus and allowing the students more time to tend to their personal responsibilities. Despite this flexibility, the retention rate of students at the school have not shown significant improvement.

### **Rationale**

Students now have more options for enrolling in colleges or universities, which is why student retention has become such a major area of concern (Chen, 2012). According to the vice president of instruction, the local college administrators are concerned with student retention in online courses and have offered additional funding to develop retention strategies that can aid in assisting students to continue their path of completing college. Students who are enrolled but do not participate in the fully online courses are likely to feel overwhelmed, causing a negative impact on course student retention (O'Keefe, 2013).

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The local college community district offers courses that are listed as traditional, hybrid/blended, fully online, or continuing education. The college community district services approximately 50,000 students, and the chancellor expects the population to grow larger by 2020. Enrollment data for the past 7 years indicate that student retention in online courses continues to be a challenge for the district (Table 1). From 2011 to 2017, the number of students being retained has fluctuated over the years.

Table 1

*Average Online Course Success and Retention Rates 2011-2017*

Academic year	Retention
	7.9%
2015-2016	7%
2014-2015	9%
2013-2014	8%
2012-2013	12%
2011-2012	9%

Unfortunately, the data shown in Figure 1 show the retention of students by the years but there was no information collected from the students to determine the reasons for leaving or failing the courses. Campus administrators at my research site hired a data analyst whose primary position was to collect and track student data, which included new and returning students, course completion, course withdrawals, course grades, and completion by program. The data analyst monitored student registration for each semester by determining how many students took advantage of priority registration, students who registered late, the number of students who attend each course on the first date of class, and how many were financially certified in the course based on the census date given by the admission office. The date given not only certifies the student, but also begins the process of tracking and monitoring students and their academic progress. At the end of the semester, the data analyst collected data from the grades posted by the instructor and compared it to the number of students who started the class. The data included how many students withdrew from the course by the drop date. This was how data on student retention by course was created. The collected data was compared to the previous year's data to see if there had been an increase or decrease as it related to

student retention. The information was shared every semester with the educational administration team. Each campus in the district had been charged with developing strategies that aided in retaining students in online courses.

### **Evidence of the Problem in the Professional Literature**

From 1980 to 2011, there was an increase in college entrance for students from 9 to 20 million in the United States (Tinto, 2012). Nevertheless, during that time the number of students who graduated from the colleges with a bachelor's degree only increased marginally (Tinto, 2012). In fact, Tinto (2012) explained that one out of every four students will enter a higher education institution and will fail to receive a degree. Previous research data have shown that about 41% of academic administrators have agreed that retaining students in online courses has become an increasing concern (Ferdousi, 2016) as part of a national concern for retaining students and encouraging them to continue until graduation (Tinto, 2012). To remain competitive, the institutions need to develop action plans that address student retention (Tinto, 2012).

Numerous researchers (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1988, 2001, 2006) have developed models to gain an understanding of student retention. However, Hachey et al. (2013) suggested that there was still more to be learned about student retention in online education and its barriers. The online education field requires more teaching approaches that capture the continually evolving learning environment (Gatin, 2009), and newly developed theories may guide institutions by addressing student retention concerns (Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2010).

In this qualitative case study, I sought to gain insight into student retention in online courses at the local community college. Further, I sought to investigate the thematic components that contribute to student retention in online courses not only at the local community college, but also in the general community college population.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are used throughout the study:

*Blended/hybrid instruction:* An instructional methodology that is a combination of face-to-face instruction (traditional) and computer-aided learning (Finn & Bucceri, 2004).

*Drop-out:* A student who fails to complete the required coursework to earn a degree (Xu & Jaggars, 2013).

*Fully-online learning:* An internet-based instructional methodology that is offered through a learning management system (Clark, 2001).

*Persistence:* A students' ability to continue their education from enrollment to graduation without stopping (Astin et al., 2012).

*Retention:* A way to understand if a student is persisting or working toward completion of a course or program (Tichenor & Cosgrove, 1991).

*Traditional instruction:* An instructional methodology involving a classroom setting and a group of individuals (Relan & Gillani, 1997).

### **Significance of the Study**

At the local community college, student retention in online courses has become a major focus of the administration and district executive team. The student population in

the local community college has grown with no signs of slowing down. The school has revamped educational opportunities to stay competitive with surrounding institutions. According to Allen and Seaman (2015), online learning continues to be a popular choice of delivery for students, and the administrations for institutions agree that it posed greater challenges for student retention. Students who are earn lower grades are less likely to pass online courses as compared to traditional courses (Hart, Friedman, & Hill, 2018). The district was trying to gain an understanding of what factors impacted student success in the online courses. The community college's administrative team has been charged with developing strategies to address the retention rates in online learning. In this qualitative case study, I investigated the relationship between student retention and online learning. The study aided in helping to understand what factors influences student's dropout and persistence.

### **Research Question**

A qualitative case study was used to explore student retention in an online learning environment. Researchers use case study to focus on a single phenomenon and/or its entirety to explain a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). I collected data using student interviews and coded them to identify contributing factors for the decrease in student retention.

The overarching question that guided the qualitative case study was: What factors impact students' decisions to take online courses at the higher education level?

The following sub questions were addressed:

1. What factors motivate continuation of studies online?

2. What factors impact the decision to withdraw from online courses?

### **Review of the Literature**

Student retention has been a consistent concern in higher education. Students attend community college for numerous reasons, and many of the students come from challenging backgrounds that could possibly influence their educational goals (Corum, 2010). Researchers have noted that retention will likely be a concern for community colleges for many years to come, especially since the growth of enrollment has increased educational performance accountability for institutions (Foss, Foss, Paynton, & Hahn, 2014).

In the literature review, I identified key areas of topics as they relate to student retention within online learning courses. The literature review was guided by the problem statement and research questions. The literature review is organized by the following subcategories: (a) conceptual framework, (b) student retention, (c) online learning, and (d) student engagement and participation. In preparing the literature review, I referred to scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and websites.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Student retention is an old issue at the collegiate level. As such, I have decided to open this literature review with some older studies to provide some historical context (see Hachey et al., 2013). There have been numerous research studies advocating a variety of theories to illuminate student retention issues in higher education. To create his theory, Spady (1971) used Durkheim's suicide theory to evaluate the reasons for which undergraduate students' dropout. He proposed that if students have long lasting

friendships with peers and positive interactions with the institution, then they are less likely to withdraw. Astin (1970, 1993) noted that personal characteristics of students entering college and identifiable environmental factors can play a significant role in student retention. Bean and Metzner (1985) focused on nontraditional students' academic performance at universities and colleges. They revealed that social integration is not necessarily a factor at institutions. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) used the work of Astin (1970) to focus on student outcomes instead of influences to understand what leads to retention. While they found some interesting outcomes, their work was limited to student experiences.

For this study, I chose Tinto's (1975) student integration model as the conceptual framework. The model provides a descriptive reason as to why students decide to leave college or continue their educational paths (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993). Tinto (1987) created retention principles for colleges and universities. The principles state that colleges should:

1. Provide each incoming student with the necessary skills for their academic journey;
2. Build positive rapport with students outside of the classroom;
3. Promote systematic retention strategies;
4. Consider retention options to maintain student early;
5. Be committed to the student population;
6. Consider that retentions strategies be educationally focused. (p. 138-140)

While the student integration model primarily focuses on the academic side of college, it also takes into consideration the social aspects such as daily routines and personal needs. Students are more prone to withdraw from college because they are not able to build a foundational relationship with their college community (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model guided the project study by providing the foundational explanation for student retention in blended and online learning at the community college level.

### **Retention**

Undergraduate student retention at institutions are calculated as the number of students who enroll and graduate (Tinto, 2012). Since the late 1800s, retention has been a concern for colleges (Aljohani, 2016b; Habley et al., 2012). Braxton (2000) noted that formal research on student retention began around 1926. In the early years, student retention was known as the "age of involvement," and it focused primarily on one's motivation, attributes, and skills (American Higher Education, 1984; Tinto, 2006). Boyraz, Horne, Owens, and Armstrong (2013) suggested that students' prior background both academically and personally plays a significant role in student retention.

An institution's attrition rate reflects a direct loss of income from tuition, and it demonstrates a failure to the educational mission (Bean, 1990). Institutions are ill prepared to lose a significant number of students because this is a main source of revenue and the life-blood of the school. Retention is top priority for online higher education institutions (Kilburn, Kilburn, & Cates, 2014). According to Jenkins and Cho (2012), online courses, compared to traditional courses, have a much lower completion rate (Bart, 2012; Hachey et al., 2013). Unfortunately, retention rates for online courses

are seven times lower than traditional face-to-face courses, a gap which has created an educational problem for today institutions (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007; Layne et al., 2013; Patterson & McFadden, 2009).

Buddin (2014) highlighted that 12% of students who take the ACT dropout within their first-year of college. Tinto (1975, 1987) concluded that many dropouts in post-secondary education are students who failed to fully integrate within the environment. Previous researchers have focused on students' characteristics instead of their interactions within the collegiate level (Aljohani, 2016b; Astin et al., 2012). According to Habley et al. (2012), students' decisions to drop out or withdraw are based primarily on their interaction within the institution.

Institutions should develop specific plans that address student retention to reduce student dropout (Tinto, 2012). Hachey et al. (2013) proposed that institutions should be better be able to identify potential problems and provide early support. Yet, as Layne et al. (2013) emphasized, previous researchers have only focused on the student characteristics instead of the methodology and approach. The stakes seem higher for blended and fully online courses. Additionally, Hachey et al. (2013) reported that 7 to 20% of students who take online courses are very likely to withdraw from a college or university. Similarly, Yoder (2011) claimed that it costs the United States approximately \$4.5 billion in lost earnings when students fail to complete college. Heisserer and Parette (2002) identified that student retention is often affected by students' feeling rejected or overwhelmed while attending college. Mohammadi (1994) pointed out that student demographics and socioeconomic status have a significant impact on retention.

O'Keefe (2013) also described risk factors that could contribute to a student's decision to leave such as physical and mental disabilities, working (full or part-time), a student's ethnicity, and if the student is a first generational. Tinto's (2006) book, *Leaving College*, was the first book-length longitudinal study that focused on connecting the environments (social and academic systems), student retention, and individuals over a specific period. A constant variable for education has been instructor-student engagement, which can be viewed as a key component for first-year college student students (Tinto, 2001).

### **Online Learning**

Throughout the United States, online learning has been adopted by numerous higher education institutions (Bonk & Graham, 2005). In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, nontraditional education was known as distance learning. It was often administered through the mail. During the 1990s, distance learning gradually became online learning as the development of the World Wide Web and internet browsers made it feasible to deliver learning online (Bean, 1990). During that time, the Higher Education Act (HEA) created the Distance Education Demonstration Program (DEDP), which provided waivers for for-profit institutions like the University of Phoenix. By 2006, the United States Department of Education terminated the 50% rule, which would allow the online institutions such as Kaplan, DeVry, and University of Phoenix to grow (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012). The rule was initially created as a restriction for online colleges. An institution had to offer at least 50% of instruction within a traditional classroom setting. When Congress overturned the rule in 2006, online institutions were

able to provide appropriate instruction to students over the internet (Deming et al., 2012). Thus, students were able to apply and receive federal funding for learning without instructional methods entering in as a qualifying factor.

Online learning has become the most pursued way to attend community colleges and universities (Layne et al., 2013). The largest online enrollment growth was seen during the school year 2009-2010, which grew by over 29% (Castillo, 2013). The data showed that on average, 60% of students enrolling in community colleges take a portion of classes online. More students enrolling in higher education are technology savvy and are pursuing alternative learning pathways, which will allow online learning to continue to grow as the years go by (Allen & Seaman, 2013). In addition, online courses allow students to complete course work independently to meet assigned deadlines (Ferdousi, 2016). Yet, even with new and innovative delivery systems, it seems that student retention remains a critical area of focus for collegiate institutions (Ferdousi, 2016). Online student dropout rates range from 20-50%, which is a higher dropout rate compared to traditional classes, which range from 10-20% (Allen & Seaman, 2013). A decrease in online student retention can have a negative effect on the institution (Tan & Shao, 2015). Ferdousi (2016) found that 41% of academic administrators at higher educational institutions agreed that student retention is a major issue when comparing online and traditional courses. Ferdousi also suggested that 2-year colleges dropout rates are greater than private and for-profit institutions. Dropout rates could be indicative of the mixture of the student population such as non-traditional student who have pressing personal issues that force them to dropout from the online courses (Allen & Seaman,

2014). To determine if the instructional methodology is working in specific cases, the institutions should review the level of student engagement and how well the instructional technology was infused into the course (Kuh, 2001).

### **Student Engagement and Satisfaction**

One note that has been evident in the research was that student satisfaction with coursework seems to be declining despite the use of enhanced learning technology. In fact, Thompson and Subich (2011) discovered that if students have negative experiences and are not satisfied with their courses, they are very likely to dropout or withdraw from the course or school. A student's academics and personal growth can be impacted from their experiences while pursuing their higher educational degree (Walpole, 2011).

Chickering and Gamson (1987) coined the framework *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. The authors' framework stated that during the engagement process students should (1) be encouraged to use learning activities, (2) interact with instructors and peers, (3) be given feedback in a timely manner, (4) complete all assignments, (5) be made aware of academic integrity, (6) maintain a positive relationship among their peers, and (7) provide a quality instruction that addresses the area of concerns for students. Brophy, Good, and Wittrock (1986) did not mention student engagement; their practice encouraged students to be active in learning, working cooperatively with one another, receiving quality feedback that aids in their personal and academic growth. These factors should be present if an institution is successful in respect to student retention.

Furthermore, individual courses should be designed with strenuous tasks. Just like in traditional courses, students in online courses need to feel engaged in some meaningful way. Students who take ownership of their learning can be very successful in taking online and blended learning courses (Chou & Chou, 2011). Therefore, Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, and Piggott (2010) proposed that if a student wants a deeper understanding and is motivated to learn, then the student would be successful in the course. However, Hsu (2011) voiced that the students should not only oversee their own learning but build positive relationships with the instructors and peers. In short, what works in the traditional model seems to work in the online world as well.

### **Instructor Engagement and Satisfaction**

To teach infused technology courses and increase student retention the instructor must motivate, provide consistent interaction, and be familiar with the course design to ensure success within the course for the student and the instructor (King & Arnold, 2012). Nevertheless, the professor must be disciplined and prepared to teach blended and online learning courses (King & Arnold, 2012). However, keep in mind that professors new to the online model often are unaware of the time commitment. Professors have voiced that teaching blended and online learning courses increase their workload and time commitment (Edginton & Holbrook, 2010; Gedik, Kiraz, & Ozden, 2013; King & Arnold, 2012; Napier, Dekhane, & Smith, 2011).

The biggest challenge many faculty members face was the time commitment involved in developing a truly interactive online course, which can take away the instructor motivation to teach online. Of course, low staff morale can cause a decrease in

student interaction and retention (Dziuban & Moskal, 2001). Moreover, Napier et al. (2011) suggested key components that aid in blended and online learning success and student retention: (1) the utilization of technology, (2) be creative when managing the out-of-class time, (3) used your strengths, (4) provide continuously support for the students, and (5) there are no boundaries. Similarly, Napier et al. (2011) disclosed that instructors at a small public liberal arts college invest a considerable amount of time developing and implementing the online course. Likewise, Edginton and Holbrook (2010) declared that when facilitating online learning courses instructors should be prepared to spend the necessary time to review the technology and in creating the course activities. Nevertheless, to do these things, the faculty must receive adequate training in the areas of technical and pedagogical practices to ensure student and instructor success in the blended and online learning courses (Hubbard, 2008). Lastly, instructors should be willing to understand the demographics of the students they are currently teaching to increasing student success (Claybrooks, & Taylor, 2016).

### **Demographics**

Students' demographics refer to their age, gender, educational background, race, and enrollment status, which can directly have an impact on them academically, psychological, and environmentally (Jeffreys, 2012; Mitchell, 2016). Academic factors can refer to the students' ability to study or their course schedule; whereas, psychological factors are a students' attitudes or beliefs that may affect their educational journey (Mitchell, 2016). Environmental factors included students' finances, family, or

any other personal external issues that are outside of the higher education institution (Mitchell, 2016).

Fenty, Messemer, and Rogers (2016) disclosed that adult students often enter education with many impacting factors such as dependents, working, age, or academically unprepared, and the list could go on. They saw the list as factors, which could be potential barriers for students. However, these barriers are constantly challenging colleges and universities to address changing student needs (Ferdousi, 2016; Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Tinto, 2012). Many institutions have responded by providing the additional support like online learning, childcare, and evening classes (Fenty et al., 2016).

Research by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) suggested that first-generational or low-income students are often overwhelmed with the higher educational processes, which caused them to feel displaced or alone being unable to adjust to the collegiate life academically or socially. During the transition process, first generational students may lack parental involvement or support (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016; Wilkins, 2014). First generational or low-income student face many challenges while in college from trying to define their own identity to financial and social struggles (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

London (1996) determined that first-generational and low-income students who have strong bonds with their families are often found to have a more negative college experience than a student from a middle-class family (Lareau, 2011). Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) noted that when a first-generational student leaves home the families feel as if they have been abandoned. This may cause a feeling within the student of

separation, which often inspire the student to drop out of school (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Because of the stressors within the first year, first-generational and low-income students may have difficulty building peer connections or finding academic support (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Wilkins, 2014).

### **Implications**

Based on the literature review on student retention and perspectives, there are a numerous of factors that can influence students' decisions to leave or fail an online course. The factors can impact a student academically, personally, and institutionally. The project study results indicated a need for helping faculty and staff to understand the population of students in which it serves and to foster a supportive learning environment. The professional development training is a positive social change as it may include the increasing of student retention and success at the local college in Texas. The project study also implied that if students, faculty, and staff are involved in the learning process, students have a better chance of continuing and later graduating from the institution.

### **Summary**

In Section 1, I provided an overview of what the local college district in the southwest region of the United States has experienced with online learning. The literature review provided a wealth of information on how various researchers investigated the impact on student retention and academic performance. The research questions sought to investigate students' perceptions of online learning. Data has shown that online learning has increased for many years (Allen & Seaman, 2013). When

students drop from, it has a negative impact on student retention (Tan & Shao, 2015). In Section 2, I provided an explanation of the chosen methodology to guide my research study.

## Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine student retention in online courses at the local community college in Texas. The study consisted of interviewing 10 student participants that have withdrawn or failed online courses, and to understand what influenced their decision to leave. Based on the findings, student retention could be addressed if factors are identified that influence students' decisions to persist or withdraw from the institution.

### **Research Design and Approach**

A case study approach was selected to identify and analyze patterns that can be used to identify a learning environment that is more conducive to online learning. A qualitative case study research approach allows researchers to collect data through a variety of methods including observations, interviews, and field documents and then summarize the data using narrative or verbal means (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). I chose the case study methodology to understand the students' perceptions of online learning while gaining insight on the retention issues within the programs.

I considered using other methods of qualitative research, specifically phenomenology and grounded theory, for this study, but did not select them for the following reasons. Researchers use phenomenological research to capture individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Grounded theory is only used when a new theory is being generated (Merriam, 2002). Neither method would get at the heart of the issue in this research study. A case study methodology provided the best approach to capture and understand student perceptions about retention in online

learning courses via interviews. The overarching question that guided the qualitative case study was: What factors impact students' decisions to take online courses at the higher education level?

The following sub questions were also addressed:

1. What factors motivate continuation of studies online?
2. What factors impact the decision to withdraw from online courses?

### **Criteria for Selecting and Setting of Participants**

I used purposeful sampling to identify the student participants. Lodico et al. (2010) stated, "Purposeful sampling allows the researchers to select individuals, in hopes of learning and understanding the central phenomenon" (p. 206). In a qualitative inquiry, the researcher focuses primarily on small samples selected purposefully (Patton, 2002). When choosing participants and locations, researchers must identify individuals who are information rich (Patton, 2002). I used the following criteria to select the student participants: (a) a student must have been enrolled in an online learning course and have dropped or failed an online course within the semester, and (b) a student must be in their first or second semester of courses.

According to school records, there are approximately 9,000 students and 150 professors who participate in online learning through the college. The college's database coordinator identified 300 students who met the research criteria. I sent an email to all 300 students inviting them to an informational meeting that included a date, time, and place for an informational meeting. Of the 300 invited, only 100 came to the informational meeting. The meeting was held for approximately 20 minutes or less,

depending on how in-depth of information the student participant provided. I briefly gave an overview of the research study and explained that students who chose to participate would need to send me an email that included their name and email address. Afterwards, I advised all students that if they were interested, they should take one of the handouts at the back of the room. Upon receipt of the first 10 email responses, I sent a follow up note to secure their consent via a consent form. The consent form provided a detailed overview of the research study. All information collected for the research was secured and remains confidential. To give participation consent, the student needed to respond via email. The receipt of the student email inferred consent to the research specifications. Upon receipts of the email from the first 10 participants, I established a dates and times for the interviews. Participants were assured that the informational study focused on general trends between student retention and online learning and collected information would remain confidential.

The nature of the research necessitated an institutional review board (IRB) review from both Walden University (#06-16-17-0193198) and the local college. In meeting with the local college's IRB, I explained my purpose for conducting the research and how it would assist in developing retention strategies for the institution. The study could not commence until permission was received from both institutions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In a study of this nature, ethical issues can arise and should be considered and identified for the participants' protection (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995). The following components were in place to ensure ethical protection: (a) student participants were

given an informed consent outlining that the research was strictly voluntarily with the option to withdraw, (b) the purpose of the study was explained to the student participants, (c) all participants were protected and not placed in harm's way, and (d) the issue that was studied was clarified (see Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995). Prior to the initiation of data collection, I obtained permission to collect data from the Walden University IRB (see Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995).

### **Data Collection**

The primary sources of data for the study included face-to-face student interviews to gain a better understanding of the students' perceptions. I collected the data over a 4-week period. The interviews were audio recorded and I maintained a journal for each interview. These sources of data offered the best method for capturing student's thoughts and direct quotes in response to the interview questions on student retention in online learning courses. The selected participants met at a time that was convenient for them at a private location on campus that ensured their privacy. Excluding the actual interview, all communication was done via email. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how in-depth the participant elaborated on their experiences.

### **Interviews**

The importance of face-to-face interviews has been repeatedly shown in the literature as a source of important qualitative data (Yin, 2009). Interviews were vital, as the student participants provided critical information about the topic that may not have been obtained in written communication. Janesick (2004) stated that when conducting

qualitative research, interviewing is a major component. I personally developed the interview question script and submitted the script for review by the local college's IRB. A requirement for this research was that the IRB committee chair possess a terminal degree. The interview questions focused primarily on (a) students' perceptions regarding online learning and (b) students' perceptions regarding barriers to persistence and dropout of college. Using proven strategies for data collection, participants received the questions prior to the interview so that they were familiar with the interview content (Janesick, 2004). The interviews were held at the college, in a convenient location for the participants. Moreover, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, audiotaped, with research annotations and a complete transcription.

For the data collection, I followed an established process to ensure minimal bias (Yin, 2009). Each interview question was open-ended and allowed me to probe for additional information (see Yin, 2009). The established procedure allows me to capture in-depth responses and personal views on the research topic that other methods simply cannot duplicate (see Yin, 2009). However, interviews can be potentially biased if questions are not articulated correctly, or if participants are not able to recall their experience (Ponterotto, 2014). I was particularly careful to conduct each interview in a manner to reduce the chance of researcher bias.

To capture and understand human participants, interviews are the best source in case studies (Yin, 2009). To further facilitate the collection of essential data, I set the interviews up in a private room at the college, free of distraction, and away from the general classrooms. The interview setting was welcoming and relaxing, promoting a

sense of comfort. However, I did observe that six out of the 10 student participants were nervous, hesitant to respond, and fidgety. Before beginning the interview, I reassured the students that their names would not be shared with anyone and that their identities were completely anonymous. Students were then asked the eight questions scripted. As I was conducting each interview, I observed the student participants to capture any nonverbal cues (see Creswell, 2012). Once all interviews were complete, I typed the responses and emailed each response to the perspective student participant to review for accuracy. To sustain trustworthiness in a qualitative case study, dependability and credibility are key components (Yin, 2009). Member checking provides participants with a summarized copy of their interview for validation (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Through member checking, I provided student participants the notes from their interviews to check for accuracy; I would make the necessary changes, if warranted. All 10 of the student participants verified the accuracy of the transcription, and no new data were added nor any data subtracted from the interview transcripts.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the major role of the researcher is to collect and analyze data (Creswell, 2003). In this study, I collected, organized, analyzed, and recorded the data findings to answer the research questions. If done correctly, research of this type should aid in finding connections (Merriam, 2002). An investigator should have a detached role when conducting research to avoid personal bias (Lodico et al., 2010). My role in the project study was both as an adjunct instructor teaching online courses for the college and as the disabilities services manager working with students which require

accommodations within the classroom. At the time of this research, my experience with the role of adjunct instructor consisted of 9 years of developing courses and teaching traditional and online courses in the areas of criminal justice, education, psychology, and sociology. At the institution where the project study was held, I have not taught any online courses. I interact with students daily, but none of those students participated in the research study. I provide accommodations for students receiving disability services, and I do serve as a mediator for those students only when there is an instructor-student conflict. I served in the capacity of the researcher who organized the study, collected the given data from research participants, and analyzed the collected data.

To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used. At the informal meeting, I stated the reason for the study, as well as my role within the study. In my role as a disability services manager, I am not responsible for conducting evaluations of instructors, nor am I in the role of supervisor for these individuals. As such, I am not in an authoritative relationship with study participants. All necessary precautions were taken to ensure the privacy and safety of the participants. There were no apparent biases when conducting the research at the host campus since there was no relationship between myself and the people involved in the teaching and learning process within the online courses.

### **Data Analysis**

In research of this nature, artifacts gathered for the study included any type of information that would help to understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Documentary information is extremely relevant in case studies, as it is stated clearly in

the data collection plans (Yin, 2009). The documents I chose included previous yearly data collected for the previous five years on online student retention. All documents were held for confidential purposes. As noted, the overall goal of this study was singularly focused. In the study I sought to identify current practices and use qualitative data to analyze the relationship of current practices on student retention. Information collected from audiotapes of the participant interviews and observations will remain secure in a file cabinet at my home. After the 5-year period, all paper data will be shredded, and all digital records will be expunged. These steps were taken to insure confidentiality of the information gathered from the participants.

Once data were collected, transcribed and downloaded, the task included analysis of the information. According to Hatch (2002), “Data analysis is the organizing and interpreting of data that allows the researcher to discover patterns, themes, relationships, explanations, interpretations, and/or generate theories” (p. 148). Data analysis within qualitative research studies is composed of data that is organized, transcribed, and analyzed (Creswell, 2012). The interviews and observation notes were transcribed and converted into text data, where they were then coded to ensure that there were no redundancy or relatable topics (Creswell, 2012). The data were analyzed using a combination of NVivo 11 and text segment codes. NVivo 11 is a software package that can be used to provide insight and assist researchers in organizing and analyzing qualitative data. Using tables, diagrams and executive summaries, the data were graphically displayed to aid in the analysis of recurrent and developing themes within the context of online learning courses. The data analysis phase consisted of preparing

data to be analyzed and gaining an understanding to make a larger interpretation of its meaning (Creswell, 2003).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), triangulation can be used to increase data accuracy. I used the transcribed data from the interviews and my notes and placed them in a word document, and all information was uploaded into NVivo 11 software where the data was analyzed and coded (Davis & Fill, 2007). In NVivo 11 software, I used search query and visualization tools to identify any connections to develop themes. If any new themes emerged, I would create new categories (Thomas, 2012). I assessed the data thoroughly to ensure a detailed response to the research questions.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore student retention from a student perspective and develop strategies that address low student retention rates in online courses. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at a local community college in Texas. Ten student participants answered nine questions. Each interview followed the prepared script and generally lasted 40 minutes. Once the interviews were transcribed, I sent each student participant their written response for member checking purposes. In the member checking process, each applicant reviewed their transcript and provided feedback, if necessary. If changes were warranted, they were addressed immediately and sent back to the student participant for review. The data collected, and research notes were placed in NVivo 11 software for coding. The following themes emerged personal

issues, academic issues, and institutional barriers. My research findings were used to develop a professional development training to address student retention.

### **Key Findings**

One of the key findings from my research involved the relationship between the institution and retention. As previously stated, I based my research on the Tinto Student Integration Model (1975), focusing on the issue of student retention at our institution has become a major issue for the school. I found that other higher education institutions use specific strategies that when employed, improved the rate of student retention (Aljohani, 2016a). I found that one specific element was most important for retention, and that was a sense of belonging and connection to the institution. This observation is based on my analysis of the qualitative responses collected. I believe from the review of the data that finding a way to create this connection will go a long way to improving student retention at this school. The analysis of the data generated the following student cited themes: personal, academic, and institutional themes. The personal reasons ranged from family obligations to students feeling a sense of belonging at the institution level. The academic concerns consisted of negative interactions with the instructor to lack of understanding the learning management system. While the academic reasons are, the lack of instructor presence within the learning management system it is also demonstrates lack of knowledge on how to navigate of the system. The institutional concerns were the course design, policy and procedure for teaching an interactive online course, and students not having proper technology to access the online course. In Table 2, I noted following

themes that emerged based on the students' responses to the research study interview questions.

Table 2

*Student Themes*

---

Personal	Family obligations Lack of financial support Lack of family support/motivation First-generational student/no role model Work obligations Lack of transportation No laptop/computer Lack of self-discipline
Academic	Lack of interaction with faculty Lack of interaction with staff Lack of online learning knowledge Lack self-discipline Lack of learning management system Poor time management Poor study skills No sense of belonging No laptop/computer Did not purchase textbooks
Institutional	Lack of support from academic advisors, tutors, etc. Lack of technology support No sense of belonging

---

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the research questions was to capture what influences causes student participants to withdraw from online courses. Student participants disclosed that they failed to complete the courses due to financial concerns, time management, lack of self-discipline or motivation, family obligations, no family support (first-generational student), and/or work obligations. During the interviews, I learned that all student's participants were first-generational students and lacked having family support or motivation to persist in school. Student A disclosed, that she was a single parent to two children and that she had to work, so online learning was the best option. Student B voiced, that she cared for her elderly grandparents, "so online was the option I chose." Now, Student C shared, she "was recently divorced and was a stay at home parent, and she decided to enroll in school online; in hopes, of one day being able to pursue a career."

### **Personal Factors**

Family obligations and lack of additional financial support caused students to choose their employment over continuing their studies. Student F is a recent high school graduate and was not financially able to go to a university, so he enrolled at the local community to earn enough courses to transfer. He was enrolled in online courses by an advisor only to learn that he lacked time management and felt overwhelmed. He failed all his courses, putting him on probation for next term. Student G mentioned, that he graduated in May from high school, and his parents advised he had to continue learning. His advisor enrolled him in two traditional and two online courses, and he failed the

online courses. Occasionally, he would forget to login, nor did he have a personal computer. Student I was also a recent high school graduate. He came to the local college to pursue certificates in computer gaming. Unfortunately, he struggled with taking written exams that was 40 percent of his grade. He begins to become less motivated, and started to miss classes, which resulted in him failing the courses. Student J was enrolled in all online courses, because she was not able to financially travel back and forth to the campus. Her support team (mom and family long-term friend) explained how online learning would be so much easier, and that she would have so much time to focus on her daughter and work. Unfortunately, Student J became overwhelmed and began to miss assignments and exams. Her comment to the advisor was, “The courses moved too fast, causing me to fall further behind. Therefore, I failed both classes.”

Students voiced how there was no additional assistance for helping them to be successful in the course(s). Student D voiced, “That I registered late and was enrolled in online classes. I had no idea on how to navigate the learning management (Blackboard), and I missed the first three weeks of an 8-week term and I failed the course.” While Student E was advised by an online advisor and was not given an orientation on how to access the learning management system causing me to become frustrated and discouraged on continuing my studies. Now, Student H disclosed, “He requested online classes because he lacked transportation. On the fourth week of class, Student H received an email that Test 1 would be in the Testing Center. Student immediately sent an email to the professor and advisor explaining that I lacked transportation, and was not able to take Test 1. I enrolled in the course, because the course description included that

the course was 100 percent online. Student H received an email addressed to the student and advisor that it is the professor academic right on how the course was facilitated. Based on the information given, Student H withdrew from his course, as he felt that the professor nor advisor tried to assist or understand his concern.”

The research questions continued to capture student participants’ feedback on their interaction with faculty. Student A revealed, “I would post to the discussion thread and would not receive any feedback, nor was there any feedback on the weekly assignment. Leaving me to wonder if I would pass or not.” Student B stated, “I had a medical emergency, and tried to communicate the information to the professor. I received an email three weeks later from the professor; but I had already dropped the course.”

### **Academic Factors**

Student E is retired and decided that she wanted to finish her associates degree. She stated, “I voiced to the advisor that I lacked computed skills and would prefer to write out all of my assignments and submit directly to the professor and would like to take paper exams. While her grandchildren are helping to type assignments, they are not sure how to work Blackboard. The student emailed the professor and dean, and received no support causing her to withdraw from all of her courses.”

Student G stated, “I went to the professor office during his office hours to discuss my grades. I waited for 30 minutes and as I was leaving, I accidently bumped into the professor. The professor became rude and expressed that I would need to set an appointment. I went home and explained the situation to my parents, and they agreed to

avoid failing the course that I should withdraw.”

Students C has been at home for 15 years, and felt she had no marketable skills. She decided to pursue a business degree, but chose to take online classes with the option to attend a traditional class if she started to struggle. Because she had been out of school, she decided to take one traditional course and one online. She attended the traditional course since she had questions. In arriving to the class, she took her seat in the front. The professor began teaching, and Student C did not understand so she raised her hand. The professor acknowledged her and Student C went into seeking clarification on the information given by the professor. Unfortunately, the professor responded in a negative way causing younger students to giggle at the professor response. Student C left embarrassed and went straight to advising to withdraw from her traditional and online course even though she never logged into the learning management system.

Student D disclosed, “I would email the professor with my concerns, and would never get a response. This happened on three different occasions, causing the student to feel that there was no other way but to drop the course to avoid failing grade. Student F explained, “I would reach out to the professor with questions about assignments and exams and would not receive a response.” Student H shared, “I sought assistance from the professor and advisor, only to receive a negative response. So, I felt that it was in my best interest to withdraw from the course.” Student I considered himself a gamer, so computers to me was second nature. Nevertheless, I started taking classes and began to struggle, so I reached out to the professor and did not receive a response. I became so disengaged that I stopped doing the work and failed the course.”

Students expressed how emailing a professor and receiving a rude or no response would be aggravating leaving the student to withdraw from the institution. Student A expressed, “I missed several assignments causing me to fall behind. I work full-time, and my schedule conflicts with school. She emailed the professors twice, and reached out to her advisor. Of course, the advisor encouraged the student to email the professor again. The professor responded, “Failing to meet the requirements and advising that you (the student) are not able to complete coursework due to working is not a tolerable excuse. Therefore, you should withdraw from the course.” Student A expressed that she was so hurt and felt that she was penalized for having to care for her family. But she did withdraw from the course.”

Student B advised, “That she reached out to the professor because her grandmother had fallen and was hospitalized, and she was traveling back and forth to the hospital because she also had to care for her grandfather. As their overseer, she missed two weeks of coursework. The professor responded, “While I understand the situation, you are still responsible for staying on track for assignments and exams, so I will not allow you to makeup the work.” The student felt that the professor showed compassion, so she felt that she had no other choice but to withdraw from the course.”

### **Institutional Factors**

Student E being retired and no computer experience relied heavily on her granddaughters to type assignments. Unfortunately, the student has not been able to upload assignments, causing her assignments to be late since she is taking the assignments to the local college and submitting in-person. In meeting with the professor,

“He encouraged her to withdraw from the course since computer skill are essential, and if she is not able to meet the requirements so it was in her best decision to withdraw from the course.” She was in shock and very teary-eyed about the entire situation, but she did withdraw from the course.

Student G was not familiar with Blackboard and failed to complete the assignments and exams in a timely manner. It was only three weeks away from the term being over and he decided that he should finish the course. He sent an email to the professor requesting for assignments and exams to be re-opened. The professor responded, “Unfortunately, I will not re-open any assignments or exams. Expressing that you are not able to navigate Blackboard with it being only three weeks from the semester ending does not justify why you have failed to complete the coursework. Therefore, I suggest that you retake the course.”

Student J and her family thought it was best for her to take online courses since she was unable to travel to the campus. She had never taken online courses, nor did she attend orientation. She begins to struggle with assignments and reached out the advisor, who referred her back to the professor. She sent an email, and received a response encouraging her to withdraw because her work was not at the collegiate level. Student J felt embarrassed, so he withdrew.

Students failed to meet the course requirements, causing the student to withdraw or fail the course. Student A disclosed to the professor in an email, “That she was a single parent, and was not financially able to purchase the textbook. She would need to wait until she received her financial aid.” The professor responded, “Per the syllabus the

textbook is requirement to pass the course, and without it the student would fail.”

Student A believed it was the best decision to withdraw. Student B did not purchase the new textbook with being on a fixed income. Instead, he purchased the textbook from another student. Unfortunately, he learned that he needed an access code. He sent the professor an email explaining that he purchased a used textbook and was not aware that he needed an access code. The professor replied, “That he would need to purchase the access code which comes with a new textbook.” Student B thought that the professor would show some leniency. The student remained in the class and received a failing grade. Student C being newly divorced and a stay-at-home mom was also not able to purchase the textbook. She was relying on her financial aid funds to purchase textbooks. In waiting on financial aid, she was now four weeks into the semester, and her course was an 8-week course. In speaking with her advisor, it was best solution that she withdraws to avoid earning an “F.”

Student participants lacked those necessary skills in taking online classes that resulted in the student’s withdrawing or failing the course. Student F truly thought that college was going to be like high school. For example, if a high school student failed to complete an assignment or an exam, he would receive extra time or a day to complete. He stated, “He learned very quickly that at the college that was not the case. He thought that professors would remind students on when coursework was due. As a result, he failed his classes.” On the other hand, Student G would go online occasionally, and had horrible time management and study skills when it came to completing the coursework requirements. He did not take college seriously and voiced that he only pursued a degree

because his parents gave no other choice. Student I had computer skills, but did not test well. The student advised, “That he never studied for exams, and it reflected in his grades causing the student to fail the course.”

Student J was encouraged by her mom and family friend to enroll in online courses, even though her advisor was not in agreement with a first-time student taking courses online. Within the first two weeks, the student became overwhelmed and voiced that she had poor study skills and time management. Of course, she failed her courses and was placed on academic probation and financial aid warning. Lastly, all students voiced, “That they felt no sense of belonging and lacked interaction with staff and faculty causing students to write remarks on a website known as [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com) leaving comments about their experience in the course.” The website is commonly known to help students select professors with high ratings, and to avoid those professors who are not helpful.

Student C disclosed, “That she would often have trouble accessing Blackboard and its content, and she would reach out to the professor, who would refer her to the local college help desk. In speaking with the help desk, she would find herself more confused and overwhelmed. Of course, the help desk would refer her back to the professor. The professor responded, “You should have taken a computer course prior to taking online courses.” Student D advised, “That she would email the professor and not receive a response. She decided to call the local college informational help desk, and it was not helpful. It left her more frustrated.” Student F goal was to earn enough credits to transfer to a university. Because the local college courses were cheaper than a university,

his family decided to pay out-of-pocket and use the financial aid for the chosen university. Nevertheless, he was having trouble submitting assignments and completing his exams in a timely manner. He thought that it was a glitch in Blackboard, so he reached out to the professor and the informational help desk. Only to receive a message from the professor that state, “No, students have reported a concern; therefore, you will receive a “0” for the assignments and exams.” He did not understand why he was receiving a “0” and feel that he was being mistreated.

Student H read the course description that the course was fully online; but into the course, he received an email that the exams are proctored on campus in the Testing Center. The student immediately sent an email to the professor, only to receive a response that all test is proctored on campus and she encouraged him to withdraw. There was no negotiation. Because the student lacked transportation was not an excuse to change the curriculum. Student J acknowledged that she was persuaded to take online classes by her mom and family friend, as it would allow her to take care of her daughter. She found it to be harder and frustrating, and the professors would not respond in a timely manner. Overall, when faculty did respond they usually advised students to read the syllabus or drop the course. As a result, student participants felt abandoned and decided not to persist within the course.

### **Discrepant Cases**

All interviews and interview notes were analyzed carefully for discrepant cases (see Lodico et al., 2010). The study revealed no discrepant cases.

### **Quality of Evidence**

In the project study, I used the transcribed interviews, my notes from the interviews, and NVivo 11 software to recognize any patterns within the categories to develop themes from the data; in hopes of, thoroughly providing detailed responses to the research questions. To increase the trustworthiness of data there must be a development of common meanings and emerging themes (Stake, 1995). I reviewed the data constantly looking for the specific amount of times a theme would arise and if it showed any type of relation to another category. The themes were written in columns along with a miscellaneous column for data that did not fit. Prior research findings from authors was triangulated with the students' responses to strengthen the research study. Coding was an inductive process of data that required examining of small pieces where one makes a connection between the information (see Lodico et al., 2010). As I came to learn, in a qualitative research study the researcher must constantly review the data to ensure that no information has been missed or coded incorrectly and not fully capturing the experiences of the participants (see Lodico et al., 2010).

Creswell (2003) disclosed to address accuracy and reliability, the data collected is member checked and triangulated to reduce bias. Member checking is the involvement of sharing initial interpretation of data with participants and determining if results are credible (Merriam, 1998). Member checking increases the reliability of the findings (Creswell, 1998). Participants were invited to participate in a transcript review to verify that the transcript reviews are accurate. In analyzing qualitative data, member checking was used to ensure that the transcription and analysis of data was accurate and written

from the participants' viewpoint. Participants could review the transcript of their responses via email (Creswell, 2003). Student participants reviewed transcripts for accuracy and to ensure that all raw data is protected, I used audit trails (Athens, 2010). The student participants had approximately three days to return any corrections or state that they agree to the transcribed notes via email. The students who participated in the research study were also allowed to review the data collected, along with my research notes of the collected data to validate or offer corrections. Fortunately, there was no new data given. Collecting a wealth of data increased the accuracy of the research findings and proved the study to be stronger (Patton, 2002). Reliability addressed within the study provided the student participants with the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, participant's selection, and data collection methods (Creswell, 2003).

To explain the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, credibility and reliability are important (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research was conducted to explore and explain individuals' experiences as others have seen them (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach was discussed in the section, along with how data was collected with the student participants being protected. The data collected offered findings that can provide educational leaders with a deeper understanding of student retention in online learning.

In qualitative research, credibility is established when the researcher gains the confidence of the participants (Harper & Cole, 2012). Allowing the researcher to review the captured notes of interview is a form of the credibility (Harper & Cole, 2012). Another way to maximize the collected data is to allow member checking, in which the

researcher verify all information for accuracy. If necessary, I would make corrections based on any feedback given during the member-checking process.

### **Project Description**

Several themes emerged from the data analysis. The themes were (a) personal, (b) academic, and (c) institutional. Based on the emerging themes, the Connection Project was developed to help advisors, faculty, and staff to understand the needs of the students when they first enter college. The Connection Project would be a professional development training for 3 days that is shared with staff, advisors and faculty that focus primarily on student retention and success. According to Matherson and Windle (2017), professional development trainings should be practical, energizing, teacher-driven, interactive, sustaining, and interactive. In addition, Jacob, Hill, and Corey (2017) noted that professional trainings should promote reasoning and thinking skills. The implementation of the project will address the concerns based on the data analyzed and themes. The professional development sessions will train faculty on how to best connect with students to increase student retention.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to gain insight on student retention in online learning courses. Through purposeful sampling ten students' participants were selected to interview and to gain an understanding of perception on why they did not persist or the reasons for failing the online courses at the local community college in Texas. The findings of the qualitative case study supported that institutions with open enrollment usually have the lowest retention rates because students only need a high

school diploma (Gannon-Cook, 2016; Sutton, 2014). The findings indicated that students do not persist due to not feeling a sense of belonging to the institution. Student participants voiced that they lacked the connection with the learning institution. Findings further support that online courses have low retention and high failure rates due to a sense of detachments from the institution. In Section 3, I plan to elaborate on the connection-building project developed specifically for the local community college based on the data gathered.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of my study was to explore student retention at a local community college in Texas, and to understand what factors influence students to withdraw from online courses and the institution. I collected data from students concerning the hindrances to the continuation of study at the school. The loss of students, especially in the online environment, is a financial and educational drag on the institution. Continuing to do the same thing and expecting different outcomes is not a solution. Therefore, I sought to understand what the data showed about current programming and possible changes that need to be implemented. In this section, I will include findings from my qualitative data and relate these to the program changes that I have recommended based on the research. These recommendations will take the form of programming changes, educational goals, and learning benchmarks that should guide the process of improved student retention. Further, I will show how the proposed changes could be implemented through a professional development program. The professional development will include activities, timelines, training steps, and outcome measures.

#### **Description**

The purpose of the project study was to explore student retention in online courses at the local community college in Texas, and to gain students perspective on why they choose to leave or failed the courses (Gomez, 2013). Through collected data, the following themes (academic, personal, and institutional reasons) emerged that influence a student's decision to fail or separate from the institution. Tinto's student

integration model guided the project study and the development of the faculty and staff professional development training. The professional development training will be called the Connection Project. The Connection Project incorporates that information to bridge the gap between students, staff, and faculty. Staff and faculty will help students to overcome any negative barriers that could influence the students academically, personally, and institutionally. Building this connection also requires faculty and staff to be knowledgeable of available resources on campus and within the community that can increase student success. Professors on the educational side will work within the classes to retain students by being more engaged with students through class discussions, emails, or feedback. Overall, the Connection Project is to bring awareness to the information that I gathered on the campus and to inform staff and faculty on ways that could increase student retention and engagement.

In the professional development training, staff and faculty will learn how to have conversations to inquire about students' academic, personal, and institutional needs and challenges that the students may encounter while attending college. To present the professional development, I created a PowerPoint presentation. Faculty and staff attending the 3-day professional development training will be able to:

1. Build a positive rapport with students.
2. Identify students' needs prior to the semester beginning.
3. Provide on-campus and off-campus resources for students.
4. Be familiar with how to navigate the learning management system to facilitate online courses.

5. Teach in different learning modalities.

### **Rationale**

Low student retention in online courses is what prompted the project study. Drake (2011) suggested to address student retention the institution should identify and offer support services to those students at risk. The professional development training was developed on the emerging themes and how these influence students' decision to leave or withdraw from the institution. The training is designed to help faculty and staff to focus on the needs of each student entering the institution, and to help students to develop an educational plan that will increase student success and retention.

The key to understanding the research problem can be found in the mission statement of the institution. The local community college has promised to help transform communities one at a time in hopes of changing one student at a time. To improve their skill levels and employability, students across the country have turned to community colleges. At this institution, students chose the online learning environment as an outlet that allow the flexibility to perform additional duties (working, caring for their family, etc.). Unfortunately, online learning students often fail to complete their studies or decide to dropout. Low retention rates influence the overall health of the institution. The data from this study will be shared with the administration team at the institution to develop course and retention strategies that can aid in helping students to achieve personal and academic goals, while providing for their families.

## Literature Review

Institution administrators have attempted to find ways to address student retention but have not had much success (Trammell & LaForge, 2017). Based on the information gathered from the student participants' interviews and current literature, it seemed logical that a professional development would provide the administrators with the means of addressing student retention. The professional development focused on providing faculty and staff with the knowledge and skills to build a positive rapport with students in an effective manner. The literature has shown that students need to feel a sense of belonging to the institution to increase student retention (Trammell & LaForge, 2017). The first step of the literature review was to seek information on student retention and its best strategies to address low student retention rates, and how to help faculty and staff to have meaningful conversations with students. Dissertations and journal articles, along with the following database search engines, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage Publications, EBSCOhost, and Academic Search Complete were used to develop the literature review. In the database searches, I used key terms such as *at-risk students*, *online learning*, *online education*, *student persistence*, *professional development*, and *student retention*. A goal of a proper literature review is to ensure that data saturation has been met (Rennie, 2012). According to Kolb (2012), data saturation in a research study is confirmed when no additional themes emerge from data analysis.

### Online Learning

Online learning has become one of the most preferred ways to attend and earn a higher educational degree or certificate for most adults who are working or caring for

their families (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Nortvig, Petersen, & Balle, 2018). Although, it is the most sought way to learn there are still challenges that have a negative impact on student retention (Fraser et al., 2018; Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). College and university personnel have struggled to understand why and how students decide to withdraw from school (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). Research has shown that some common factors include family, work, sense of belonging, and lack of family support (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). I designed the Connection Project to help faculty and staff find ways to build a rapport with students to increase student retention on the first day of interaction, whether it is online or in-person (see Schwartz & Holloway, 2012). Creating that personable experience is the first step in getting to know the student (Baker, Chiasson, Mahar, Schroeders, & Terras, 2016). It also opens a door to an open dialogue. The second step in the Connection Project is capturing information that may be useful to develop achievable goals that increase student success in college (see Baker et al., 2016; Capdeferro & Romero, 2012). In the open dialogue session, the faculty and staff should capture the important details that would hinder the student from completing the degree including employment, whether the student has children, relationship status, short and long term goals, a documented disability, any mental health concerns, status as a first generation student, socioeconomic status, full or part-time enrollment, and if attending traditionally, hybrid, or online. The last step is to ensure that each student is capable of accessing and navigating the LMS and its content (Hone & El Said, 2016; Trammell & LaForge, 2017). For the overall sustainability of the institution, students, programs, society, and community, student retention is critical (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017).

## **Student Satisfaction**

Student retention has been a major topic for over 20 years, and some researchers have set out to understand student interaction and a sense of belonging within the online learning environment (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Hachey et al., 2013; Masika & Jones, 2016; Miller, 2014; Thomas, 2012). Research has proven that providing institutional and academic support can increase student retention (Brock, 2010). The Connection Project will aid in helping staff and faculty to understand the students' needs and increase student success in courses and institution retention (Masika & Jones, 2016; Testa & Egan, 2014). Thomas (2012) mentioned that students' senses of belonging could reflect feeling encouraged by staff and faculty members (Haar, 2018; Masika & Jones, 2016). Secondly, if first year students are vocal about their coursework and are willing to study or collaborate with other students they can increase their chances for success (DeAngelo, 2014; Masika & Jones, 2016; Tinto, 2006). Barbatis (2010) voiced that student orientation and cultural understanding should be a component when getting to know students. According to Tinto (2006), students' interaction and engagement is critical within that first year because it can have a significant impact on student retention (Martin & Bollinger, 2018). Secondly, understanding that every student is different means that in teaching, faculty should teach to all the different learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, linguistic, logical, musical, intrapersonal, and naturalist), and they can all be combined in one setting, which could become overwhelming for the faculty as well as the student.

## **Professor Satisfaction**

When researching faculty satisfaction in online courses, the research was very scarce, and it focused primarily on professors' course loads (Trammell & LaForge, 2017). The research literature showed that if faculty taught an online course with more than 20 students that it is likely that the faculty member will not be engaged in the course and will fail to increase student success or peer-to-peer interaction (Freeman, 2015; Hew, 2016; Tomei, 2006; Trammell & LaForge, 2017). Allen and Seaman (2013) and Meyer and Murrell (2014a) indicated that faculty lack the training to teach online and often stated that there were no incentives to teach online causing faculty to be less engaged (Hartman, 2013).

The Connection Project's goal for faculty is to better understand the student population and to facilitate online and hybrid courses that increase student success and retention (Dykman & Davis, 2008). The first step is selecting faculty that are passionate for technology and how it intertwines with education (Boettcher, 2011; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Gagné, 2013; Garrett, 2014; Lefever & Currant, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2011). Faculty selected must endorse online learning (Hartman, 2013; Pappas, 2013). The Connection Project is a professional development that will aid in helping faculty to understand the student population and how to successfully teach adult learners (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Pappas, 2013; Simpson, 2013). Providing continuous professional development in online teaching and yearly evaluations could help faculty to increase student success (Hixon, Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2011; Meyer & Murrell, 2014b; Mujtaba, 2011; Thomas, 2012).

The second step is helping faculty to develop an online class that in the learning management that is engaging, easily accessible for students, and address each learning modality (Meyer & Murrell, 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Thomas (2012) stated that courses should be designed to help students feel a sense of belonging, interactive activities that aim to promote active learning, and promote engagement with peers and faculty (Borgemenke, Holt, & Fish, 2013; Tinto, 2006). Observing a potential challenge and creating a solution prior to the start of a semester can eliminate stress (Trammell & LaForge, 2017). Trammell and LaForge (2017) proposed that the online course syllabus should be posted in the learning management system at least two-days prior to the beginning of the semester. Forums should be available for students to interact with the professor to inquire about course content and for faculty again to express their expectations of each student for the course (Ragan, 2007).

The third step is getting faculty involved in the learning process to interact with students whether it is a discussion thread, providing feedback on an assignment, or in a forum (Meyer & Murrell, 2014c; Ragan, 2007; Trammell & LaForge, 2017). Faculty should encourage students to collaborate with their peers, review online netiquette, and how to professionally interact with the students and faculty in the course (Mintu-Wimsatt, Kernek, & Lozada, 2010; Tinto, 2006, 2012).

Finally, faculty should increase their presence, provide feedback that promote growth in the subject matter and in life, and respond to emails within 24-48 hours, as these are just ways to apply the Connection Project and increase student success and

retention (Everson, 2009; Trammell & LaForge, 2017; Warren, Rixner, Greiner, & Wong, 2014).

### **Demographics**

In reviewing student demographics, it can relate to a student's age, their education background, gender, enrollment status, and race, or anything that can have an influence on their academics, environment, or psychological state (Mitchell, 2016; Stone, 2017; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). Demographics that are recognizable are students having low socioeconomic status, being a first-generational student, working full or part-time while attending college and being educationally underprepared (O'Banion, 2011; Samuel & Scott, 2014). Samuel and Scott (2014) expressed that student barriers can often reflect in an overload of developmental classes, causing the student to lose interest in attending and could care less about their completion rate. The Connection Project's goal is to help build a positive rapport with students and to increase student retention. Fenty et al. (2016) reported that students might enter college with many factors that are considered as potential barriers that may influence their educational journey in a negative way. While those barriers are considered challenging, the advisor should note and review the best solutions to address the student need (Ferdousi, 2016; Trigwell, Prosser, & Taylor, 1994).

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is known to promote educational change and can be used across many areas within education: academic advising, academic research, teaching communities, educational based trips, and/or training sessions (Schrum,

Kortecamp, Rosenfeld, Briscoe, & Steeves, 2016). Professional development is a learning methodology to teach in educational areas that are considered to have a deficit (Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016). Matherson and Windle (2017) suggested that social interaction occurs during a professional development training and it signifies success. Nevertheless, Polly et al. (2014) determined that professional development is not always successful and can have a negative impact on results.

In Section 1, I pointed out that the focal point of my study was student retention in online learning and what caused students to withdraw from the institution. In Section 2, the data results revealed that students withdraw from the institution for not only personnel reasons, but also because they lack a sense of belonging. One suggestion that Wladis, Wladis, and Hachey (2014) mentioned is academic advisors should receive early alerts that could assist students in the online environment. Another suggestion from, Hartman (2013) included that academic educational leaders should develop a professional development which addresses the student retention concern. In other words, professional development can be used as a practical and interactive way that is educational driven (Matherson & Windle, 2017).

### **Professional Development and Change**

According to Witterholt, Goedhart, Suhre, and Van Stream (2012), professional development and the change process have a direct relationship to positive outcomes when focused on methods and best practices among educational professionals. Additionally, professional development can help educational professionals to gain a better understanding of the problem (Voogt et al. 2011). In fact, professional

development success is based on two critical components motivation and a change in one's mindset (Evans, 2014). The goal of the professional development proposed in this study is to bring awareness to the study findings and to provide campus resources that help faculty, staff, and administrators find success within and outside of the classroom (Vandeyar, 2017). However, the professional development cannot be based on older experiences; instead, it should be based on current research of the institution to implement a positive change (Roseler & Dentzau, 2013). Therefore, the professional development must include interactive activities, discussions, role-plays, and consistent communication from administrators, faculty, and staff (Jung & Brady, 2016). Lastly, a professional development success depends on how well it is developed and how it will be beneficial to the audience. Therefore, I have concluded that a professional development training on connection would be best suitable for this project.

### **Project Description**

The proposed project was based on the results from the student participants' interviews. The results yielded that students choose to drop or fail courses for personal, academic, or institutional reasons that can lead to low retention rates. To address the problem, I developed a professional development training known as the Connection Project for staff and faculty. For the remaining sections, I described the implementation and timetable, potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, and roles and responsibilities.

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

The purpose of the implementation plan is to establish a timeline to complete the professional development training. Caffarella (2010) suggested to present new information, one should include individuals of different levels for support. The first phase in the implementation process is to seek approval from the college administration team which consist of the president, vice president of student services, vice president of instruction, vice president of finances, dean of learning resource center, dean of arts and communications, dean of social science, dean of nursing, dean of career and technical education, dean of science technology engineering and mathematics, dean of student services, dean of enrollment, dean of institutional research, dean of workforce, and dean of distant learning. The pillars of the administrative executive team are needed to encourage the staff and faculty to partake in the professional development training to not only to gain insight on what students' perspectives; but, to also share their experiences with first generational, online, and hybrid student's. To seek approval, the findings, purpose, goals, and the professional development training will be presented to the administration team. All information will be presented in the summer prior to the start of a 2019-2020 academic year. Upon approval, tentative dates will be given for the professional development during fall return week for staff and faculty. Matherson and Windle (2017) articulated that professional development extended for periods is successful and can be sustaining. Lastly, the professional development training will span over 3 days.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The potential resources and finances required to facilitate the professional development training will be discussed at the administrative executive meeting. A meeting room will be requested to hold approximately 500 people (faculty and staff), along with round tables allowing six to eight people to sit comfortably and to take notes if desired. The room should have electrical plugs and internet access in case anyone would need to bring a personal laptop or any device to participate in the professional development due to a disability. Thirdly, the room will need to have a computer for the presenter and a projector with the remote, which will be used to present the findings of the research and the professional development training. Lastly, I would request \$4,000 to buy to refreshments (coffee, pastries, snacks, tea, condiments, and water) over the three-day professional development training and door prizes.

### **Potential Barriers**

Several barriers could exist at the local collegiate institution. The first barrier is my role within the college. As a disability services manager, I interact with faculty, staff, district, and the administration team weekly and sometimes daily. In handling student complaints, providing accommodations for students with disabilities, ADA coordinator for the campus, and serving as an advocate for students with disabilities can all be considered as barriers to the research. The administrative executive team would need to ensure that the professional development training is held at a time that is convenient for all faculty and staff are able to attend. Providing an incentive such as professional development credit could possibly increase attendance especially when the district has a

mandate of 20 per year. Another barrier will be faculty and staff not receiving the information based on their own biases or perceptions. However, as the research is student retention focused my goal is to share the information with the institution, and to find ways to address the problem.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

For the project to be successful, administrators would be instrumental in this process. With the approval, it would be beneficial if the professional development training was mandatory. The professional development training will aid in helping faculty and staff to understand the population in which it serves, and how negative influences can impact student retention. The training also allows for faculty and staff to participate in scenarios that can help with gaining an insight on how students perceived incidents. Lastly, as the presenter, I would need to ensure that the professional development training is engaging, interactive, and geared toward student success (Evans, 2014; Jacob et al., 2017; Matherson & Windle, 2017). A formative survey would be used to help determine the next step for the implementation of any project.

### **Project Evaluation**

The project evaluation is to determine if any changes are warranted (Caffarella, 2010). To evaluate the professional development training a formative survey will be administered to determine its effectiveness. The evaluation will include a combination of Likert and open ended questions. The Likert evaluation method is used to capture one's opinion and allows the researcher to summarize responses from the evaluation process (Warmbrod, 2014). The evaluation will take place after the professional development

training to measure success of training, to ensure if the learning objectives and goals were met and to offer any feedback. Appendix B includes the formative evaluation. The results of the study will determine if faculty and staff understand that student success and retention is critical and learning how to interact with students are all extremely important. The professional development training will aid in helping the administration team to become actively involved in providing additional support to students in online courses (Matherson & Windle, 2017).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implication for a positive social change would be to bring awareness to faculty and staff that the institutional have low student success and retention in online learning. Students that build a positive rapport with the institutional staff and faculty are likely to remain in school and graduate (Astin, 1985).

### **Local Community**

The goal of the professional development training is to help faculty and staff to understand the population in which it serves and how to interact in a positive way with students. Faculty and staff will help students to overcome barriers that influence the student personally, academically, or institutionally. Those students that persist are able to gain the necessary knowledge and skills that employers seek to fill open positions. With faculty and staff attending the professional development training, there is a possibility it cannot only increase student retention and success but can bridge the gap between the local community college and the community.

### **Larger Context**

Other institutions may be interested in the research and professional development training to address student retention and success concerns. In retaining students, higher education institutions can use the professional development training to train faculty and staff to understand that revenue is equally important when students fail classes or choose to leave the institution.

### **Summary**

Section 3 entailed the guidelines for a potential project. I provided the description and goals, rationale, literature review, professional development, gave a potential timeline, resources, and roles and responsibilities. Lastly, I provided the evaluation and social change. In Section 4, I will share my overall reflections and conclusions about the project study and experience.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The project study originated as an effort to understand online students' perception at a local community college. Students were failing courses or choosing to leave, and it was influencing student success and retention. Three themes emerged from the students' interviews: academic, personal, and institutional reasons. The 3-day professional development training covered the themes, college and community resources, and the results of the project study. To evaluate the professional development training a formative survey was given to faculty and staff to complete. This section provides an overview of the project strengths and limitations, recommendation for alternative approaches, scholarship, project development, leadership and change, reflection on the importance of the work, implications, applications, direction for future research, and a conclusion.

##### **Project's Strengths**

The Connection Project was developed to address online student retention and success. Students that are physically and mentally involved in their studies are likely to persist (Astin, 1985). The design of the project study is the first strength. Students' perceptions were captured from the interviews, and three themes emerged (see Porter, 2016). The themes were incorporated into the professional development training to help faculty and staff understand that student retention and success are key components to the foundation of the institution (see Aljohani, 2016b; Pianta et al., 2016). Another strength is the professional development training has the potential to build positive relationships and rapport between faculty, staff, and students that may help to increase student

satisfaction and retention (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Those relationships could begin in admissions, orientation, registration, academic advising, financial aid, tutorials, counseling, classrooms, and club activities.

### **Project Limitations**

The local college administration team reviews student success and retention yearly and provide monthly updates to the campus. The primary limitation for the project would be if the administration team provided no support to the Connection Project. The second limitation if approved by the administration team could be faculty deciding not to participate and not acknowledging that faculty should go beyond their scope to assist the students. With the Connection Project, the student population need to feel a sense of belonging. The third limitation could be staff not fully trying to understand factors causing the students to develop negative feelings about the institution. The last limitation would be if first-generational students that meet the criteria but choose not to participate for unknown reasons. To increase student success and retention, it truly takes a village.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

In this section, I address alternative ways to approach the initial project study in the local community. The first alternate approach could have been to explore second year first-generation students who have persisted through college. From there I could have learned what motivated them to finish and what obstacles they faced, and how they move past the obstacles. Lastly, I could offer them the opportunity to speak with incoming students like a mentoring program, in hopes of encouraging students to persist.

The second alternative is helping advisors to understand the population with whom they are dealing to increase student success. The advisors will help students to navigate the campus and provide additional resources throughout the community. Many students lack family support while attending college, so advisors may have to serve in that capacity as individuals who motivate the student and encourage student success. Advisors should conduct monthly follow-up for students who are on probation in hopes of helping the students finish their courses.

The third alternative is providing extensive training to faculty that discusses the impact of course building and interaction with students on student retention. Faculty should try to connect with students whether the course is online or in a traditional setting. When students are emailing faculty, faculty should provide a response within 24 to 48 hours, and no later than 72 hours. Secondly, faculty should be knowledgeable of the LMS (Blackboard) to help students with any concerns.

### **Analysis of Scholarship**

In completing the research study, I learned that it was very time consuming, especially when it came to the interviewing process. I found it was hard to get participants to be on the same time schedule. I also learned that research could be valuable when trying to understand a phenomenon within the educational system. In writing the research study, I realized my time management was poor. I would create plans and goals weekly, but would not achieve the goals. Once I received IRB approvals, I committed to working hard to complete the research project. I used a qualitative research design because I did not have a strong enough command of the quantitative

methodology to conduct such a project. If I had to approach my research project again, I would include second-year first-generation students. I would try to triangulate the reason why they persisted to complete versus a first-year generational student. I would focus on what motivated the student to push through all obstacles. Once I got to the research phase, I would take a leave of absence to allow time for me to interview and complete the writing phase. During the writing stages, I was pulled in so many directions for work and my family, that I had no time to complete the project in a timely manner.

### **Analysis of Project Development and Evaluation**

During the project planning stage, I was not thoughtful when planning. While I knew that the research study was time consuming, I was designating only 5 hours a week to plan and execute to goals. Unfortunately, that was not enough time to complete the research. My primary goals as a practitioner was to complete my dissertation within 3 years, and I failed miserably at that goal. I would find myself wanting to complete my studies or research project, but my job and family obligations were taking all my time. I did not stay on task. I should have developed concrete plans that would allow me to finish during my expected period.

I have had many surprises throughout my doctoral studies and research project. My experiences ranged from health scares to family and work obligations. During my research phase, I struggled with personnel changes and other issues, which caused delays in my research. When I started to obtain permission from the institution, I learned that the IRB committee had changed, so I waited almost 3 weeks to get an approval. The next surprise was trying to conduct all the interviews in a timely manner. In addition,

with all graduate school opportunities, balancing work, family, and school was a strain that I had to overcome, which included surprises at my job. However, I am thankful that my family and best friend who is like a sister was here to motivate me to push through the obstacles.

### **Analysis of Leadership and Change**

I developed the Connection Project to help administration, faculty, and staff to understand the population they serve create a welcoming environment, help students to feel a sense of belonging, and increase student success and retention. According to the results of my project study, three emerging themes derived from the students' interviews. Those themes were-personal, academic, and institutional factors that could prevent students from completing their educational degree. If I would conduct another project study, I would focus on those students who did persist and had the same barriers. I would want to understand the strategies those students used and how they could be transferable to students who are likely to withdraw from the course and institution. The strategic information could help administration, staff, and faculty to minimize the barriers and increase student success and retention.

### **Analysis of Self as a Scholar**

I underestimated the time it was going to take to earn a doctoral degree. I assumed that this degree would be like any other degree I had earned online. I found myself becoming overwhelmed and rushing, knowing that I was not submitting my best work as I was procrastinating instead of developing a schedule that would allow me to accomplish my goals. When I decided to pursue the doctoral degree, my children were at

a stage where school activities were not something that they found interesting. Once I completed all the courses for the doctoral program and I began the writing phase, my children became more involved in activities, and I started to have some health concerns.

In developing this project study, I lacked the motivation to continue the process due to two major spine surgeries, countless health scares, a stressful work environment, family obligations, and teaching at three institutions. I found myself often sitting at a laptop knowing that I had deadlines to meet, but my mind was completely blank. However, I learned how to properly develop and implement a project study. With the new educational demands for Texas higher education, I look forward to using the skills learned at Walden to help the institution to develop and implement solid plans.

### **Analysis of Self as a Practitioner**

Over the doctoral journey, I learned a lot about myself and as a practitioner. The first thing I learned was how to be patient and disciplined. Secondly, I had to ensure that I remain honest during all research and developmental stages of the project study. I had to manage my personal biases when writing even though I could easily relate to what I was hearing in the student's interviews, as well as the articles and journals I read to prepare the professional development training. For the past 9 years, I have worked adults and had to focus primarily on student retention and success. During that time, students shared personal stories that would often influence their educational journey in a negative way. I would do my best to help the students persist, but sometimes it was not enough so students would fail the courses or decide to leave the institution. However, with my knowledge I hope to keep helping students to persist in college to obtain their degree.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

Once this project is completed, I am thinking about additional research on student retention. I would love to explore the opinions of elderly faculty versus younger faculty. I plan to use the skills and knowledge I learned at Walden University to lead this project. Based on the results, I plan to share the information with the administration team, and to develop a professional development training that could address the gap between the elderly faculty and younger students.

### **Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The project chosen has been a major concern across higher education institutions worldwide. Nevertheless, I focused on the local community college first generational students. While the student population for online courses have increased the student retention, and success has decreased. Unfortunately, the student retention efforts have been unsuccessful. The Connection Project if accepted by the administration team would be the first professional development training that could address student retention and success for first generational students. The project study could be a positive influence at the local community college for students persisting with goals of graduation, a result which can lead to marketable citizens that can contribute back into the community (see Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2006). Institutions on a larger scale may choose to replicate the project study to increase student retention and success for students that students that choose to leave the institution or fail courses due to academic, personal, institutional factors.

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

The future research and implementation should focus on how student retention affects traditional and online courses, and what could be done to address the concern.

While I used a qualitative study for my project study, for future research, the researchers should use mixed methods to obtain quantitative results from surveys and charts, along with conducting interviews, for qualitative results.

While online learning has grown significantly over decades, student retention has become a concern to post-secondary institutions (Ferdousi, 2016; James, Swan, & Daston, 2016). The following recommendations would aid in addressing student retention. All online courses should be user friendly and easily accessible for students with disability (Ferdousi, 2016). Course material should be developed using the universal design methods, to maintain student interest level (Ferdousi, 2016). A course that is well designed will keep students engaged to reduce student retention (Tobin, 2014). The courses should foster a learning environment that promotes students to be in control of their learning (Ferdousi, 2016).

Students should be given a mandatory online training to explain the expectations of taking online courses. For example, students should know how to access the learning management system, how to navigate through the system, how to click on the syllabus, locate exams, submit assignments, understand plagiarism, understand the gradebook, and interact with their peers and professors. There should also be a training module for students to not only practice, but to understand time management and expectations from faculty (Gayton, 2013).

Faculty should go through extensive training before teaching online courses. The training should address faculty to student interaction, student-to-student interaction, how to have a welcoming environment, and how to monitor ongoing conversations within the discussion threads. Each course should have a learning community that allows students to freely ask questions and receive encouragement. It will also help faculty to develop the necessary skills to learn how identify any at-risk students and refer them to the online or campus-based resources (Ferdousi, 2016; Gayton, 2013).

Advisors should be trained to have those difficult conversations with students to determine if they are prepared for online courses. During this process, difficult conversation's advisors should discuss time management, commitment, and ways to overcome obstacles (Ferdousi, 2016). There should also be an online advising support icon besides the instructional lab provided on the campus. Students should be able to have access to online tutoring, library, counseling, and financial aid icons (Ferdousi, 2016; Gayton, 2013).

### **Conclusion and Summary**

In Section 4, I provided a reflective analysis of the project study strengths, recommendations, limitations, development and evaluation, scholarship, and leadership and change. I also included what I learned as a scholar, practitioner, and how to develop a project study. While the project study captured student perceptions, which were categorized into three themes: personal, academic, and institutional; it aided in developing the Connection Project that will be facilitated to the administration, faculty, and staff to gain a better understanding of the population at the local college. As online

learning continues to increase, higher educational institutions must understand the student population that it currently serves and find ways to retain and increase student success (Nortvig et al., 2018; Stone & O'Shea, 2019; Yukselturk, Ozekes, & Turel, 2014).

## References

- Aljohani, O. (2016a). A review of the contemporary international literature on student retention in higher education. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 4(1), 40-52.
- Aljohani, O. (2016b). A comprehensive review of the major studies and theoretical of student retention in higher education. *Higher Education Studies*, 6(2), 1-18.
- Allen, I. E., Seaman, J., & Garrett, R. (2007). *Blending in: The extent and promise of blended education in the United States*. Newburyport, MA: Sloan Consortium.
- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States*. Newburyport, MA: Sloan Consortium.
- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2014). *Grade change: Tracking online education in the United States*. Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group. Retrieved from <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradechange.pdf>
- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2015). *Grade level: Tracking online education in the United States*. Babson Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group.
- Allen, I. E., Seaman, J., & Garrett, R. (2007). Blending in. *The extent and promise of Blended Education in the United States*. Needham, MA: The Sloan Consortium.
- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the party*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Astin, A. W. (1970). The methodology of research on college impact, part one. *Sociology of Education*, 43, 223-254.

- Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving education excellence*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco CA: Jossey Bass.
- Astin, A.W., Berger, J. B., Bibo, E.W., Burkum, K.R., Cabrera, A.F., Crisp, G. . . . Mina, L. (2012). *College student retention: Formula for student success*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Athens, L. (2010). Naturalistic inquiry in theory and practice. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(1), 87-125. doi:10.1177/0891241609343663..
- Baker, M., Chiasson, K., Mahar, P., Schroeders, S., & Terras, K. (2016). Students' desired and experienced levels of connectivity to an asynchronous, online, distance degree program. *Online Learning*, 20(3), 244-263.
- Barbatis, P. (2010). Underprepared, ethnically diverse community college students: Factors contributing to persistence. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 33(3), 16.
- Bart, M. (Ed.). (2012, Feb.). *Faculty Focus: Special Report: Online student engagement tools and strategies*. Magna Publications. Retrieved from: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/wp-content/uploads/images/FF-Online-Student-Engagement-Report.pdf>
- Bean, J. P. (1990). Using retention research in enrollment management. *The Strategic Management of College Enrollments*, 170-185.
- Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, 55(4), 485-540.

doi: 10.3102/00346543055004485

- Berger, J. B., Ramirez, G. B., & Lyons, S. (2012). Past to present: A historical look at Retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, (pp. 1-31). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811.
- Bliuc, A.-M., Ellis, R., Goodyear, P., & Piggott, L. (2010). Learning through face-to-face and online discussions: Associations between students' conceptions, approaches, and academic performance in political science. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 41*(3), 512-524.
- Boettcher, J. V. (2011). Ten best practices for teaching online quick guide for new online faculty. *Designing for Learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.designingforlearning.info/services/writing/ecoach/tenbest.html>
- Bonk, C. J., & Graham, C. R. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.
- Borgemenke, A. J., Holt, W. C., & Fish, W. W. (2013). Universal course shell template design and implementation to enhance student outcomes in online coursework. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 14*(1).
- Boyratz, G., Horne, S. G., Owens, A. C., & Armstrong, A. P. (2013). Academic achievement and college persistence of African American students with trauma exposure. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(4), 582-592.

- Braxton, J. M. (2000). *Introduction: Reworking the student departure puzzle*. In J. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* (pp. 1-8). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Brock, T. (2010). Young adults and higher education: Barriers and breakthroughs to success. *The Future of Children*, 20(1), 109-132. doi: 10.1353/foc.0.0040
- Brophy, J., Good, T., & Wittrock, M. C. (1986). Handbook of research on teaching. *Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement*, 328-375.
- Buddin, R. 2014. High School GPA by Student Background and School Location. *ACT Research and Policy Information Brief 2014-8*. Iowa City/Washington: ACT.
- Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., & Castaneda, M. B. (1993). College persistence: Structural equations modeling test of an integrated model of student retention. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 64(2), 123-139.
- Caffarella, R. S. (2010). *Planning programs for adult learners: A practical guide for educators, trainers, and staff developers* (2nd. ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Capdeferro, N., & Romero, M. (2012). Are online learners frustrated with collaborative learning experiences? *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(2), 26-44.
- Castillo, M. (2013). At issue: Online education and the new community college student. *The Community College Enterprise*, 19(2), 35-46.
- Cavote, S., & Kopera-Frye, K. (2006). Non-traditional student persistence and first year experience courses. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(47), 477-489.

doi: 10.2190/Q166-2010-51T4-852L

- Chen, R. (2012). Institutional characteristics and college student dropout risks: A multilevel event history analysis. *Research in Higher Education, 53*, 487-505.
- Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin, 39*(7), 3-7.
- Christensen, C. M., Horn, M. B., Caldera, L., & Soares, L. (2011). Disrupting college: How disruptive innovation can deliver quality and affordability to postsecondary education. *The Center for American Progress*. Retrieved from [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/02/disrupting\\_college.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/02/disrupting_college.html)
- Chou, A. Y., & Chou, D. C. (2011). Course management systems and blended learning: An innovative learning approach. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 9*(3), 463-484.
- Clark, T. (2001). *Virtual schools: Trends and issues – A study of virtual schools in the United States*. San Francisco, CA: Distance Learning Resource Network.
- Corum, J. D. (2010). *Retention and student success: a case study of the factors influencing student retention in a rural community college vocational education program* (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas, Austin, TX. Retrieved from file:///E:/Walden/EDUC%208090-3/CORUM-EDD-TREATISE.pdf.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Dangerfield, H. (2010). *Faculty and staff perception of factors affecting student retention in online undergraduate and graduate programs (Doctoral Dissertation)*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1097044.pdf>
- Davis, H. C., & Fill, K. (2007). Embedding blended learning in a university's teaching culture: Experiences and reflections. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(5), 817-828.
- DeAngelo, L. (2014). Programs and practices that retain students from the first to second year: Results from a national study. *New Directions for Institutional Research 2013*, (160), 53-75.
- Deming, D. J., Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2012). The for-profit postsecondary school sector: Nimble critters or agile predators? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26(1), 139-64.
- Drake, J. K. (2011). The role of academic advising in student retention and persistence. *About Campus*, 16(3), 8-12. doi: 10.1002/abc.20062
- Dykman, C. A., & Davis, C. K. (2008). Online education forum: Part two—teaching online versus teaching conventionally. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 19(2), 157-164.
- Dziuban, C., & Moskal, P. (2001). Emerging research issues in distributed learning. In *Orlando, FL: Paper delivered at the 7th Sloan-C International Conference on Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 35-58.

- Edginton, A., & Holbrook, J. (2010). A blended learning approach to teaching basic pharmacokinetics and the significance of face-to-face interaction. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 74(5), 88.
- Evans, L. (2014). Leadership for professional development and learning: Enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 44(2), 179-198.
- Everson, M. (2009). 10 things I've learned about teaching online. *eLearn*, 2009(9), 2. Retrieved from <http://elearnmag.acm.org/featured.cfm?aid=1609990>. doi: 10.1145/1599450.1609990
- Farid-ul-Hasnain, S., & Krantz, G. (2011). Assessing reasons for school/college dropout among young adults and implications for awareness about STDs and HIV/AIDS: Findings from a population-based study in Karachi, Pakistan. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 18, 122-130.
- Fenty, D. J., Rogers, E. E., & Messemer, J. E. (2016). Adult entrances and exits: What does retention literature inform us about urban adult higher educational participants and student success. In *Adult Education Research Conference*, 5. <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2016/roundtables/5>
- Ferdousi, B. (2016). Addressing student retention and persistence issue in online classes. In *Proceedings of the 2016 American Society for Engineering Education North Central Section Conference*, Mt. Pleasant, MI.
- Finn, A., & Bucci, M. (2004). *A case study approach to blended learning*. Los Angeles: Centra Software.

- Foss, K. A., Foss, S. K., Paynton, S., & Hahn, L. (2014). Increasing college retention with a personalized system of instruction: a case study. *Journal of Case Studies in Education, 5*, 1.
- Fraser, J., Fahlman, D. W., Arscott, J., & Guillot, I. (2018). Pilot testing for feasibility a study of student retention and attrition in online undergraduate programs. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 19*(1).
- Freeman, L. A. (2015). Instructor time requirements to develop and teach online courses. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 18*(1).
- Gagné, R. M. (2013). Nine events of instruction. Application to online & hybrid courses. Retrieved from February, 22, 2016.
- Claybrooks, S. G., & Taylor, F. P. (2016). Student persistence and use of a college success course in proprietary postsecondary education. *College Student Journal, 50*(2), 199-211.
- Gannon-Cook, R. (2016). Sins of Omission. *The Wiley Handbook of Learning Technology, 1*, 301.
- Garrett, K. N. (2014). *A quantitative study of higher education faculty self-assessments of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (tpack) and technology training* (Doctoral Dissertation). The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.
- Gatin, G. V. (2009). *Keeping your distance: A basic social process*. Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Gayton, J. (2013). Factors affecting student retention in online courses: Overcoming this Critical problem. *Career and Technical Education Research, 38*(2), 147-

145. DOI: 10.5328/cter38.2.147.

Gedik, N., Kiraz, E. & Ozden, M. Y. (2013). Design of a blended learning environment: Considerations and implementation issues. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 29(1).

Gomez, C. (2013). Institutions must do more to support adults. *Recruiting & Retaining Adult Learners*. Retrieved from <http://www.recruitingretainingadultlearners.com/article-print-page/institutions-must-do-more-to-support-adults.aspx>

Haar, M. (2018). Increasing sense of community in higher education nutrition courses using technology. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 50(1), 96-99.

Habley, W. R., Bloom, J. L., & Robbins, S. (2012). Increasing persistence: Research-based strategies for college student success. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hachey, A. C., Wladis, C. W., & Conway, K. M. (2013). Balancing retention and access in online courses: Restricting enrollment...Is it worth the cost? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice*, 15(1), 9-46.

Harper, M., & Cole, P. (2012). Member checking: can benefits be gained similar to group therapy? *The qualitative report*, 17(2), 510-517.

Hart, C. M., Friedman, E., & Hill, M. (2018). Online course-taking and student outcomes in California community colleges. *Education Finance and Policy*, 13(1), 42-71.

Hartman, S. (2013). Math coaching in a rural school: Gaining entry: A vital first step. *Journal of Education*, 193(1), 57-67.

- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Suny Press.
- Heisserer, D., & Parette, P. (2002), 'Advising at-risk students in college and university settings'. *College Student Journal*, 36(1), 1-12.
- Hew, K. F. (2016). Promoting engagement in online courses: What strategies can we learn from three highly rated MOOCS. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 47(2), 320–341. doi: 10.1111/bjet.12235
- Hirschy, A. S., Bremer, C. D., & Castellano, M. (2011). Career and Technical Education (CTE) Student Success in Community Colleges. *Community College Review*, 39(3), 296-318.
- Hixon, E., Barczyk, C., Buckenmeyer, J., & Feldman, L. (2011). Mentoring university faculty to become high quality online educators: A program evaluation. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 14(5), 2011.
- Hone, K. S., & El Said, G. R. (2016). Exploring the factors affecting MOOC retention: A survey study. *Computers & Education*, 98, 157-168.
- Hsu, L. (2011). Blended learning in ethics education: A survey of nursing students. *Nursing Ethics*, 18(3), 418-430.
- Hubbard, P. (2008). CALL and the future of language teacher education. *CALICO Journal*, 25(2), 175-188.
- Jacob, K., Hill, H., & Corey, D. (2017). The impact of professional development program on teachers' mathematical knowledge for teaching, instruction, and student achievement. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 10(2), 379-407. doi:10.1080/19345747.2016.1273411

- James, S., Swan, K., & Daston, C. (2016). Retention, Progression and the Taking of Online Courses. *Online Learning*, 20(2), 75-96.
- Janesick, V. (2004). *Stretching exercises for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jeffreys, M. R. (2012). *Nursing student retention: Understanding the process and making a difference* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Springer.
- Jenkins, D., & Cho, S. S. W. (2012) *Get with the program: Accelerating community college students' entry into completion of programs of study* (CCRC Working Papers No. 32). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.
- Jung, H., & Brady, C. (2016). Roles of a teacher and researcher during in situ professional development around the implementation of mathematical modeling task. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 19(2-3), 277-295. doi: 10.1007/s10857-015-9335-6
- Kember, D., Ho, A., & Hong, C. (2010). Characterizing a teaching and learning environment capable of motivating student learning. *Learning Environments Research*, 13(1), 43-57. Doi: 10.1007/s10987-009-9065-8
- Kilburn, A., Kilburn, B., & Cates, T. (2014). Drivers of student retention: System availability, privacy, value and loyalty in online higher education. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 18(4).
- King, S. E., & Arnold, K.C. (2012). Blended Learning Environments in Higher Education: A Case Study of How Professors Make It Happen. *Mid-Western*

*Educational Researcher*, 25(1), 44-59.

- Kolb, S. M. (2012). Grounded theory and the constant comparative method: Valid research strategies for educators. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(1), 83.
- Kuh, G. D. (2001). Assessing what really matters to student learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement. *Change*, 33(3), 10-17.
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Layne, M., Boston, W. E., & Ice, P. (2013). A longitudinal study of online learners: Shoppers, swirlers, stoppers, and succeeders as a function of demographic characteristics. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 16(2), 1-12.
- Lefever, R., & Currant, B. (2010). How can technology be used to improve the learner experience a points of transition? *Higher Education Academy*, {online}. Retrieved from <http://technologyenhancedlearning.net/files/2010/04/ELESIGliteraturereviewFINAL240210.pdf>
- Lodico, M., Spaulding, D., & Voegtle, K. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory to Practice*, 2nd Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- London, H. B. (1996). How College Affects First-Generation Students. *About Campus*, 1, 5, 9.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Martin, F., & Bollinger, D. U. (2018). Engagement matters: Student perceptions on the importance of engagement strategies in the online learning environment. *Online Learning*, 22(1), 205-222.
- Masika, R., & Jones, J. (2016). Building student belonging and engagement: insights into higher education students' experiences of participating and learning together, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(2), 138-150, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585
- Matherson, L., & Windle, T. (2017). What do teachers want from their professional development? Four emerging themes. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 83(3), 28-32.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (Rev ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, K. A., & Murrell, V. S. (2014a). A national study of theories and their importance for faculty development for online teaching. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 17(2).
- Meyer, K. A., & Murrell, V. S. (2014b). A national study of training content and activities for faculty development for online teaching. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 18(1).
- Meyer, K. A., & Murrell, V.S. (2014c). A national survey of faculty development evaluation outcome measures and procedures. *Online Learning formerly*

*The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 18(3).

- Miller, K. (2014). A national study on student satisfaction with and importance of college environment variables as predictors of spring-to-spring retention. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio. Retrieved from <http://utdr.utoledo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2684&context=theses-dissertations>.
- Mintu-Wimsatt, A., Kernek, C., & Lozada, H. R. (2010). Netiquette: Make it part of your syllabus. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(1), 264-267.
- Mitchell, H. D. (2016). *Predicting NCLEX-RN performance: An exploration of student demographics, pre-program factors, and nursing program factors* (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository, Louisville, Kentucky. (Paper 2413)
- Mohammadi, J. (1994). *Exploring retention and attrition in a two-year public community college*. Martinsville, VA: Patrick Henry Community College (ERIC Document No. ED382257).
- Moody, J. (2004). Distance education: Why are the attrition rates so high? *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 5(3), 205-210.
- Mujtaba, B. (2011). Faculty training and development practices in distance education to achieve high performance through extraordinary teaching. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 1(6).
- Napier, N. P., Dekhane, S., & Smith, S. (2011). Transitioning to blended learning:

understanding student and faculty perceptions. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network*, 15(1), 20-32.

American Higher Education. (1984). *Involvement in learning: realizing the potential of American higher education: final report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education*. National Institute of Education, US Dept. of Education.

Nortvig, A. M., Petersen, A. K., & Balle, S. H. (2018). A literature review of the factors influencing e-learning and blended learning in relation to learning outcome, student satisfaction, and engagement. *Electronic Journal of E-learning*, 16(1), 46-55.

O'Banion, T. (2011). *Pathways to student success and completion* (PowerPoint). Retrieved from <http://mus.edu>.

O'Keefe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2011). *The excellent online instructor: Strategies for professional development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pappas, C. (2013). The adult learning theory-andragogy-of Malcolm Knowles. *eLearning Industry*. Retrieved from <http://elearndindustry.com/theadult-learning-theory-andragogy-of-malcolm-knowles>.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: Volume 2; A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pascarella, E. T., Duby, P. B., & Iverson, B. K. (1983). Validation of a theoretical model of college withdrawal in a commuter institution setting. *Sociology of Education*, 56(2), 88-100.
- Patterson, B., & McFadden, C. (2009). Attrition in online and campus degree programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 12(2), 1-8.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Pianta, R., Downer, J., & Hamre, B. (2016). Quality in early education classrooms: Definitions, gaps, and systems. *Future of Children*, 26(2), 119-137.
- Polly, D., Wang, C., McGee, J., Lambert, R. G., Martin, C. S., & Pugalee, D. (2014). Examining the influence of a curriculum-based elementary mathematics professional development program. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 28(3), 327-343.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2014). Best practices in psych biographical research. *Qualitative Psychology*, 1(1), 77.
- Porter, M. (2016). *Accountability, quality, and student success in online education: A Literature review of Empirical Studies*. Florida International University, USA.
- Ragan, L. (2007). *Establishing online instructor performance best practices and expectations*. Online: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/>.
- Reason, R. D. (2009). An examination of persistence research through the lens of a

- comprehensive conceptual framework. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 659-682.
- Relan, A., & Gillani, B. B. (1997). Web-based instruction and the traditional classroom: Similarities and differences. *Khan*, 62, 41-46.
- Rennie, D. L. (2012). Qualitative research as methodical hermeneutics. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 385.
- Roseler, K., & Dentzau, M. (2013). Teacher professional development: A different perspective. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 8(3), 619-622.
- Roueche, J. E., Baker, G. A., & Brownell, R. L. (1971). *Accountability and the community college: Directions for the 70's*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges.
- Samuel, K., & Scott, J. (2014). Promoting Hispanic student retention in Texas Community college. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 25, 1-12.
- Schrum, K., Kortecamp, K., Rosenfeld, J., Briscoe, K., & Steeves, K. (2016). Assessing the effects of historic site-based professional development on history teaching and learning. *History Teacher*, 50(1), 33-53.
- Schwartz, H. L., & Holloway, E. L. (2012). Partners in learning: A grounded theory study of relational practice between master's students and professors. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 20(1), 115-135.
- Simpson, O. (2013). *Supporting students in online open and distance learning*. Routledge.
- Sorensen, C., & Donovan, J. (2017). An examination of factors that impact the retention

- online students at a For-Profit University. *Online Learning*, 21(3), 206-221.
- Spady, W. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange*, 1, 64-65.
- Spady, W. (1971). Dropouts from higher education: Toward an empirical model. *Interchange*, 2(3), 38-62. doi: 10.1007/bf02282469.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stone, C. (2017). *Opportunity through online learning: Improving student access, participation and success in higher education*. Retrieved from the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education website <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/opportunity-online-learning-improving-student-accessparticipation-success-higher-education/> Taylor.
- Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. (2019). Older, online and first: Recommendations for retention and success. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 35(1).
- Sutton, R. (2014). Unlearning the Past: New Foundations for Online Student Retention. *Journal of Educators Online*, 11(3), n3.
- Tan, M., & Shao, P. (2015). Prediction of student dropout in e-learning program through the use of machine learning method. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 10(1), 11-17.
- Testa, D., & Egan, R. (2014). Finding voice: the higher education experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(3), 229-241.
- Thomas, L. (2012). *Building student engagement and belonging in higher education*

*at a time of change*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

- Thompson, M. N., & Subich, L. M. (2011). Social status identity: Antecedents and vocational outcomes. *The Counseling Psychologist, 39*(5), 735-763.
- Tichenor, R., & Cosgrove, J. J. (1991). Evaluating retention driven marketing in a community college: An alternative approach. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 18*(2), 73-81.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student leaving. *The Journal of Higher Education, 59*(4), 438-455.
- Tinto, V. (2001). Rethinking the first year of college. *Higher Education Monograph Series*, Syracuse University.
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice, 8*(1), 1-19.
- Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Tobin, T. J. (2014). Increase online student retention with universal design for learning. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 15*(3), 13-25.
- Tomei, L. A. (2006). The impact of online teaching on faculty load: Computing the ideal class size for online courses. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education,*

14(3), 531.

- Trammell, B. A., & LaForge, C. (2017). Common challenges for instructors in large online courses: Strategies to mitigate student and instructor frustration. *Journal of Educators Online*, 14(1), n1.
- Trigwell, K., Prosser, M., & Taylor, P. (1994). Qualitative differences in approaches to teaching first year university science. *Higher Education*, 27(1), 75-84.
- Vandeyar, S. (2017). The Teacher as an agent of meaningful educational change. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 373-393.
- Voogt, J., Westbroek, H., Handelzalts, A., Walraven, A., McKenny, S., Pieters, J., & De Vries, B. (2011). Teacher learning in collaborative curriculum design. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(8), 1235-1244.
- Walpole, M. (2011). Academics, campus administration, and social interaction: Examining campus structures using post-structural theory. In A. Kezar (Ed.). *Recognizing and serving low-income students in higher education: An examination of institutional policies, practices and culture*, 99-120. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Warren, J., Rixner, S., Greiner, J., & Wong, S. (2014, March). Facilitating human interaction in an online programming course. In *Proceedings of the 45th ACM technical symposium on Computer science education* (pp. 665-670). ACM.
- Warmbrod, J. (2014). Reporting and interpreting scores derived from Likert-type scales. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 55(5), 30-47. doi:10.5032/jae.2014.05030
- Wilbur, T. G., & Roscigno, V. J. (2016). First-generation disadvantage and college

enrollment/completion. *Socius*, 2, 2378023116664351.

- Wilkins, A. C. (2014). Race, age, and identity transformations in the transition from high school to college for Black and first-generation White men. *Sociology of Education*, 87, 3.
- Willging, P. A., & Johnson, S. D. (2004). Factors that influence students' decision to drop out of online courses. *Journal for Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 13(9), 115-127.
- Willging, P. A., & Johnson, S. D. (2009). Factors that influence students' decision to drop out of online courses. *Journal for Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 8(4), 105-118.
- Witterholt, M., Goedhart, M., Suhre, C., & Van Stream, A. (2012). The interconnected 104 model of professional growth as a means to assess the development of a mathematics teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(5), 661-674. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2012.01.003
- Wladis, C., Wladis, K., & Hachey, A. C. (2014). The role of enrollment choice in online education: course selection rationale and course difficulty as factors affecting retention. *Online Learning*, 18(3), n3.
- Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2013). *Adaptability to online learning: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas*. (CCRC Working Paper No. 54). Community College Research Center. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Yang, D., Sinha, T., Adamson, D., & Rose, C. P. (2013). "Turn on, tune in, drop out": *Anticipating student dropouts in massive open online courses*. Proceedings from

the 2013 NIPS Data-Driven Education Workshop, Lake Tahoe, NV.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Yoder, S. (2011). Why America's college students don't graduate. *The Fiscal Time*.

Yukselturk, E., Ozekes, S., & Turel, Y. K. (2014). Predicting dropout students: An application of data mining methods in an online education program. *European Journal of Open, Distance, and e-Learning*, 17(1).

DOI: 10.2478/eurodl-2014-2008.

## Appendix A: The Project

### Professional Development Training: Connect Project Three-Day Training (Fall 2019 Return Week)

---

#### **Project Purpose**

The purpose of the training is to equip faculty, staff, and administrators with the necessary knowledge and skills to increase student retention and success. This professional development is based on the data results.

#### **Project Goal**

The goal of the professional development training is to assist staff, faculty, and administrators with understanding student retention, and learning ways to connect with students.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

The learning outcomes are associated with the themes (academic, personal, and institutional).

- Explain the rationale for having the training based upon data results
- Understand institution's core values
- Define student retention
- Understand student population
- Review campus resources
- Identify community resources
- Connect student scenarios to institutional practices

#### **Targeted Audience**

The targeted audience will be the administrators, staff, and faculty that interact with the student population at the institution.

Professional Development Timeline	
Meeting Time	Event
<b>Day 1</b>	
8:00 a.m. - 9:15 a.m.	Introduction/Breakfast Rationale for Training
9:15 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Break
9:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	Define Student Retention Define Student Success
10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Break
11:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m.	Conceptual Framework
12:30 a.m. -12:45 p.m.	Break
12:45 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Research Questions Research Participants Data Collection
2:00 p.m. -2:15 p.m.	Break
2:15 p.m.-3:00 p.m.	Questions/Concerns Review
<b>Day 2</b>	
8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m.	Ice-Breaker Project Study Findings At-Risk Potential Students
10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Break
10:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Understand Institution Mission Statement Vision Statement Core Values
11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Break

11:45 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Institutional Concern Recognizing Student Population How can we help?
2:00 p.m. -2:15 p.m.	Break
2:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Questions/Concerns Review
<b>Day 3</b>	
8:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.	Campus & Community Resources
9:15 a.m. -9:30 a.m.	Break
9:30 a.m. -10:45 a.m.	Withdrawals/Drop Out
10:45 a.m. -12:00 p.m.	Advising/Gathering Information
12:00 p.m. – 12:15 p.m.	Break
12:15 a.m. -1:30 p.m.	Faculty/Student Interaction
1:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.	Break
1:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.	Scenarios
2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Review, Questions/Concerns Survey

## PowerPoint

# The Connection Project

JOHNETTA BANKS  
PRESENTER

## DAY 1

### Goal

- ▶ The goal of the professional development training is to assist staff, faculty, and administrators with understanding student retention, and learning ways to connect with students.

## PURPOSE

- ▶ Faculty and staff (advisors) attending the 3-day professional development training will be able to:
  - Build a positive rapport with students.
  - Identify students' needs prior to the semester beginning.
  - Provide on-campus and off-campus resources for students.
  - Be familiar with how to navigate the Learning Management System to facilitate online courses.
  - Teach in different learning modalities.

## Learning Outcomes

- ▶ The learning outcomes are associated with the themes (academic, personal, and institutional).
  - ❖ Explain the rationale for having the training. (data results)
  - ❖ Understand institution core values.
  - ❖ Define student retention.
  - ❖ Understand student population
  - ❖ Identify campus resources.
  - ❖ Identify community resources.
  - ❖ Connect student scenarios to institutional practices.

## What is Student Retention?

- ▶ Student retention is defined as a student who remains in school and complete their studies (obtain a degree). But, if a student fails to complete their studies, it affects the success of the institution causing low student retention rates.

## U.S. Retention Rate Increase

- ▶ From 1980 to 2011, there was an increase in college entrance for students from 9 million to 20 million in the United States (Tinto, 2012). But, during that time the number of students who graduated from the colleges with a bachelor's degree only increased marginally (Tinto, 2012). In fact, Tinto (2012) explained that one out of every four students will enter a higher education institution and will fail to receive a degree. In reviewing

## U.S. Retention Rate Increase-2

In reviewing previous research data, about 41% of academic administrators have agreed that retaining students in online courses compared to traditional courses has become a greater issue (Ferdousi, 2016), which caused a national concern for retaining students and encouraging them to continue until graduation (Tinto, 2012). For the United States, to remain competitive the institutions need to develop action plans that address student retention (Tinto, 2012).

## U.S. Retention Rate Increase-3

A consistent concern in higher education has been the issue of student retention. It is unclear in the current literature as to the factors which impact student decisions to remain in their collegiate studies, especially in the online world of college study. Students that attend community college for numerous of reasons and many of the students come from challenging backgrounds, and that could possibly impact their educational goals (Corum, 2010). It appears that retention will likely be a concern for many years to come for community colleges especially since the growth of enrollment has increased educational performance accountability for institutions (Foss, Foss, Paynton, & Hahn, 2014).

## What is Student Success?

- ▶ Tinto (1993) defined student success as a student that feels welcome and belonging to an institution. The student will feel as if he or she belong.

## Conceptual Framework

- ▶ For the study, the conceptual framework chosen was Tinto's Student Integration Model (1993). The model has been utilized to explain student retention in community colleges (Tinto Student Integration Model, 1993). The model provides a more descriptive reason as to why students decide to leave college or continue the educational path (Cabrera, Nora, & Castendreda, 1993). Tinto (1987) created retention principles for higher degree education institutions.

## Conceptual Framework 2

- ▶ The principles state that colleges should:
  - Provide each incoming student with the necessary skills for their academic journey;
  - Build positive rapport with students outside of the classroom;
  - Promote systematic retention strategies;
  - Consider retention options to maintain student early;
  - Be committed to the student population;
  - Consider that retentions strategies be educationally focused (Tinto, 1987, pp. 138-140).

## Conceptual Framework-3

- ▶ While the Tinto Student Integration Model primarily focuses on the academic side of college, it also takes into consideration the social aspects such as daily routines and personal needs. Students are more prone to withdraw from college because they are not able to build a foundational relationship with their college community (Tinto, 1975). Tinto Student Integration Model guided the project study by providing the foundational explanation for student retention in blended and online learning within the community college level.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ▶ The overarching question that guided the qualitative case study was: What factors impact students' decisions to take online courses at the higher education level?
- ▶ The following sub questions were addressed:
  - What factors motivate continuation of studies online?
  - What factors impact the decision to withdraw from online courses?

## Research Participants

- ▶ Ten student participants were selected to interview to capture their experiences while taking online courses. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) a student must have been enrolled in an online learning course and have dropped or failed an online course within the semester, and (b) a student must be in their first or second semester of courses.

## Data Collection

- ▶ The primary sources of data for the study included a face-to-face student interview to gain a better understanding of the students' perceptions.

## DAY 2

## Findings

- ▶ The analysis of the data generated the following student cited obstacles: personal, academic, and institutional concerns.

## Findings-Continuation

### ► Theme I-Personal

Family Obligations  
 Lack of Financial Support  
 Lack of Family Support  
 First-Generational  
 Work Obligations  
 Lack of Transportation

No Motivation  
 No Role Model  
 No Laptop/Computer  
 Lack of Self-Discipline

## Findings Continuation-2

### ► Theme II-Academic

Lack of Interaction with Faculty  
 Lack of Interaction with Staff  
 Lack of Online Knowledge  
 Lack of Self-Discipline  
 Poor Time Management  
 Poor Study Skills  
 No Sense of Belonging

No Laptop  
 Did Not Purchase Textbook

## Finding Continuation-3

### ► Theme III-Institutional

Lack of Support (Academic Advisors, Tutors, etc.)  
 Lack of Technology Support  
 No Sense of Belonging

## Finding Continuation-4

- ▶ Dr. Mari Normly (2014) voiced that by the second-year of college, 16-19% of students have withdrawn from the institution.
- ▶ Students come to the institution looking for someone to guide and map their life and/or for simple answers.
- ▶ When students are not greeted or receive unpleasant gestures or responses the student leaves more confused than when they arrived.
- ▶ Students can often lack the necessary communication skills to converse with staff and faculty, causing the institutional processes to be more difficult than successful.

## At-Risk Students

- ▶ A at-risk student is one that is considered to be academically failing and withdrawing from courses or school.
  1. This type of student often feels that he/she is connected or have a sense of belonging, or do not value the educational process.

### Reference

At-Risk, *Educational Reform for Journalists, Parents, and Community Member*, Retrieved on May 31, 2018. <https://www.edglossary.org/at-risk>.

## Potential Students

- ▶ An at-risk students could also have:
  1. Serious health concerns
  2. Transient Students
  3. Disability students
  4. Pregnancy
  5. Domestic violence

Perna, L. W. (2010) Understanding the working college student. *American Association of University Professors*, pgs. 1-5.  
<https://www.aaup.org/article/understanding-working-college-student>



## Institutional Information



## Institutional Mission Statement

- ▶ As a comprehensive community college, provides exemplary education through higher education programs, workforce development, educational support services, continuing education opportunities and community partnerships. We promote student success and professional development while practicing good stewardship.

## Institutional Vision Statement

- ▶ The Institution strives to empower people to improve their lives and communities through exemplary education. The college is committed to building a diverse and inclusive learning community that promotes student success, good stewardship, employee achievement and positive global impact.

## Institution Core Values

- ❖ Dedication to student learning and success.
- ❖ Commitment to integrity through honesty, fairness, and transparency.
- ❖ Demonstration of outstanding customer service, good stewardship, and sustainability.
- ❖ Cultivation of teamwork, mutual respect and common purpose.
- ❖ Celebration of diversity and community.

## Institutional Concern

- ▶ At the local community college student retention became a major focus especially in online courses. The student population in the local community college has grown with no signs of slowing down (Tinto, 2012; Kasworm, 2012; Allen & Seaman, 2015). The school which is the focus of this study revamped educational opportunity to stay competitive with surrounding institutions. Online learning continues to be a popular choice of delivery for students, the administration at institutions agree that it posed greater challenges for student retention (Allen & Seaman, 2015).

## Institutional Concern-2

- ▶ Students who are normally C-average or better earning students are less likely to pass online courses as compared to a traditional course (Hart, Friedman, & Hill, 2015). The district was trying to gain an understanding of what factors impacted student success in the online courses. The community college's administration team have been charged with developing retention strategies to combat the problem. In the qualitative case study, I investigated the relationship between student retention and online learning. The study aided in helping to understand what factors influences students drop-out and persistence.

## Recognizing the Student Population

- ▶ Mexicans
- ▶ Hispanics
- ▶ African Americans
- ▶ Africans
- ▶ Caucasians
- ▶ Africans
- ▶ Asians

## How Can We Help?????

- ▶ In advising, ask the Who, What, When, Where, and How a student came to the decision to attend college. Ask questions that allow you to capture important details that can help one to be successful.
- ▶ An Advisor should explain the degree and certificate programs, based on their responses to the questions (Who, What, When, Where, and How). The student usually selects programs that they are passionate about.
- ▶ Advisors should set monthly meetings to follow-up with the student to ensure that he/she are still on the right path.
- ▶ Faculty should be approachable and open for interaction, connection, and communication with students.

## How Can We Help?????

- ▶ Courses should have realistic scenarios that allow students to connect their reality to match their studies.
- ▶ Staff and Faculty should be knowledgeable of where to direct students who are in need of campus or community resources.
- ▶ Lastly, be a student motivator.

## Day 3

### Campus Resources

- ▶ Define and what do they do?

## Disability Services

- ▶ The [Disability Services Office](#) at each college offers a variety of accommodations for students with disabilities or special requirements. Services are coordinated to fit individual needs and may include:
  - Sign language interpreting
  - Computer-aided real-time translation (CART) services
  - Note-taking services
  - Reader/scribe services
  - Use of assistive technology
  - Loan of specialized equipment such as audio tape recorders and talking calculators
  - Providing large-print materials

## Disability Cont.

Academic and career advisement services, testing arrangements, registration, and information and referral services are available.

Students requesting services are responsible for providing current educational or psychological/medical [documentation](#) from a qualified professional verifying disability and need for services. New students are encouraged to contact the [Disability Services Office](#) at least one month before classes begin.

Students with disabilities attending college have a right to appeal decisions concerning physical and academic accommodations by submitting a written petition to the designated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator. For more information, contact the [Disability Services Office](#).

## Career Services

- ▶ Career Services helps students review their strengths and explore the connection between degree and career through career development. Our job readiness teaches resume writing, job interviews and coaching one-on-one. We also provide job placement assistance. The following is offered by Career Services:
  - Job Fairs include up to 65 employers and are open to students, alumni and community.
  - Individual coaching for resume writing, dress for success and employment contacts.
  - Employment recruiting through major employers in the DFW area.
  - Employer Panels who help students understand what it takes to get hired. Assessments and interpretations.
  - Appointments are not needed but encouraged.

## Veteran Services

- ▶ Facilitate veteran students acquisition of skills and resources related to reaching their higher education goals.

## Financial Aid Services

- ▶ Programs eligible for federal financial aid include:
  1. Associate, bachelor's, graduate or professional degree programs
  2. Programs lasting at least two years that are acceptable for full credit toward a bachelor's degree
  3. Training programs lasting at least one year that lead to a degree or certificate (or other recognized educational credential) and prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation

## TRIO Services

- ▶ The TRIO (SSS) program is funded by the Department of Education to provide services to First Generation and Low-Income students that will help them be successful in college while pursuing an Academic Degree and/or Certificate. We also provide services to qualified students with Disabilities.
- ▶ **Mission Statement**

TRIO-Student Support Services promotes self-reliance and empowerment through our academic support and individual guidance for students pursuing an Associate's degree and successfully transferring to a four-year college or university.



## Office of Student Life

- ▶ The Office of Student Life invites all students to take an active role in the college experience and presents a variety of programs and activities for students and the surrounding community. These programs include lectures, art gallery visits/receptions and performances that provide students with a stimulating co-curricular education. Programs often are coordinated with the various instructional divisions to supplement the student's academic experiences. Leadership training and opportunities, diversity training, and volunteer opportunities are also available. Students can participate in a variety of college organizations, student government, or serve on various college committees.

## Instructional Labs

- ▶ Instructional Support promotes student success by providing learning assistance and instructional resources designed to support the educational experiences of students.

## Testing Centers

- ▶ The Testing Center provides assessment (TSI, THEA, and ESOL Compass) and instructional testing to new and current students. We also offer GED to the General Public.

## Continuing Education Services

- ▶ Continuing Education programs deliver flexible, diverse, visionary instruction responsive to the needs of the public, private and corporate community. Continuing Education programs provide workforce training, personal and professional development courses and other outreach programs to enhance individual, community and economic development.

## Educational Departments

- ▶ Social Science
- ▶ Arts, Communication, (ARCO)
- ▶ Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM)
- ▶ Nursing
- ▶ Dual Credit
- ▶ Trinity Garza High School (Early College High School)
- ▶ Informational Technology Department (IT Dept.)
- ▶ Sports Department (Basketball, Softball, Baseball, and Soccer)

## Community Resources

- ▶ The following information can be obtained at the Welcome Center in the S-building:

Transportation (DART, Train, Uber, Lyft)

Mental Health Centers

Local Hospitals

Local Child Care Centers

Local Pharmacies

Texas Workforce Commission

Texas Department of Health and Human Services

North Texas Food Bank

2-1-1

## Gathering Information from Student

- ▶ Advising (Open Dialogue Session, Seek Information, and Create Plans)
  1. What do you know about college? Why are you here?
  2. Did your parents attend college? First/Second generational student
  3. Are you married, family, children, etc.? Children or elderly parents, who care for them while you are at work? When we add school who will care for them?
  4. What is your support system? What motivates you?
  5. Do you have a disability? Mental health concern?
  6. What are your short and long term goals for life? School? Career?
  7. What degree are you seeking an Associate in Arts, Associate in Science,

## Gathering Information 2

Associate in Applied Science, or a Certificate?

8. Do you prefer to attend classes online, hybrid, or face-to-face?
9. What are your study habits like? Do you have an hour set aside for each course hour you take to study?

## Faculty/Student Interaction

- ▶ All interaction with students should always be positive.
- ▶ Emails responses should be answered within 24-48.
- ▶ Faculty should provide quality feedback to students online/hybrid in the discussion/gradebook, etc.
- ▶ If teaching online/hybrid make sure to login at least three to four times.

## SCENARIOS

Jacob comes to the institution to get information about enrolling in welding. His dad, uncle, and cousins are welders, so he has seen this all of his life. Upon entrance he is greeted by Kellie. She ask, "How can I help you?" He explains that he has an interest in Welding and really need to enroll. Kellie asked, "Have you completed an application?" Jacob responds "Yes!" Kellie states "Okay, do you have your ID number? Jacob looks confuse. Kellie explains that every students have an ID number. She ask, "What is your full name, and date of birth?" Jacob provides his personal information. She is able to locate Jacob in the system, she states, "Your next step is to meet with an advisor." She walks Jacob to the Advising Center, and express to Catherine that Jacob is here to enroll.

## Scenario 1-1

- ▶ How did Kellie do?
- ▶ Can you think of anything that she could have done different?

## Scenario 2

- ▶ Leslie, who is an Advisor, calls Jacob to her office.  
Leslie: "Hi, my name is Leslie. I will be the Advisor that will assist you today. How can I help you?"  
Jacob: "I think I want to pursue a Welding degree. My dad, uncle, and cousins are welders."  
Leslie: "Okay, we have a welding degree. It is a Associate in Applied Science Degree. The courses are offered Monday thru Friday from 8am-12 noon, and 5pm-10pm. Does that sound like something you are interested in?"  
Jacob: "I think morning, but I'm not sure because I work on Friday. Can I miss school on that day?"  
Leslie: "Let's register and if the time does not work for you then you can come back."  
Jacob: "Okay."  
Leslie: "Here is your receipt. Classes will begin in August. Good Luck!"

## Scenario 2-2

- ▶ What do you think about Leslie and Jacob Interaction?
- ▶ Is there anything that could have been done different.

## Scenario 3

- ▶ Melissa is taking ENGL 1301 class online. Professor Dunlap gives an assignments that Melissa does not understand. Melissa debates whether or not she should ask the professor, since one of her peers stated that the professor always advise to read the syllabus and offer no guidance. Melissa decides to go to the professor.

Melissa: "Good Morning, Professor Dunlap. My name is Melissa, and I am in your ENGL 1301 class that meet on Tuesday and Thursday from 12 pm-1:30 pm. I am having problems with the assignment."

Dunlap: "I have a meeting in 5 minutes. Did you read the syllabus? It has the instructions, if you are unable to keep up in the course, you will need to drop."

Melissa: "I read syllabus, but still need some pointers."

Dunlap: "I don't give pointers. My meeting is about to start."

Melissa walks off and is devastated about her interaction with the professor, and later withdrew from the course.

## Scenario 3-1

- ▶ What are some the concerns in the scenario?
- ▶ How could it be handled differently?
- ▶ How would you have assisted Melissa?
- ▶ Are there any concerns about the professor?

## Scenario 4

- ▶ Catherine is in her 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester pregnant, and has started to have complications. Catherine is also taking two online classes. Catherine emails her professors and states she is unable to finish assignments and needs extensions. One professor agreed to provide extensions, while the other professor advised Catherine to drop the course. The student decides to escalate her situation and speak with the dean. The dean moves the student to another online course. However, Professor Blue becomes furious and stated that he should have determined whether or not the student should be allowed to move to another course?

## Scenario 4-2

- ▶ What are some concerns in this scenario?
- ▶ Should the Dean have resolved the complaint so quickly without speaking with the professor?
- ▶ How should the professor handle the complaint?
- ▶ Do you agree or disagree with the professor? Why?

## Scenario 5

- ▶ Jessica has decided that she wants to attend college after high school. She knows that she does not want to go far and wants to stay at home with her parents; but, she is not sure about anything else. She decided to go to Mountain View to get information.  
 Jessica: "Good Morning, my name is Jessica."  
 Leslie: Good Morning, my name is Leslie. I am your advisor. "How can I assist you?"  
 Jessica: "I am interested in attending college, but I am scared. My parents have never attended college so they can't help me in fact I was the first to graduate from high school. So, I chose a community college because I felt that I need to go local and build my confidence first."  
 Leslie: Thank you for sharing that information.  
 What should Leslie's next step be?

## Scenario 6

- ▶ Joshua is taking ENGL 1301 class online. Joshua posted a message to Professor Dunlap in the discussion thread like the syllabus stated he could do, if he had a question about something. The syllabus stated that the professor would respond within the 24-48 hours. The professor never responded.

What should the professor do to correct the action? Should Joshua be penalize for not completing the assignment on time? Especially if he was waiting on clarification? Why not?

## Questions/Concerns

- ▶ Review
- ▶ Questions/Concerns
- ▶ Survey

## Appendix B: Professional Development Evaluation

Course Date	
Course Name	Connection Project
Trainer	Johnetta Banks

Please rate your training Course based on the following criterion:

Course Content	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This training has improved my confidence as a staff/faculty member.	<input type="radio"/>				
I learned skills/concepts that I will be able to apply when working in My program/servicing role.	<input type="radio"/>				
This training was relevant to me and my role.	<input type="radio"/>				
Training Team	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The trainer was confident and prepared.	<input type="radio"/>				
The trainer was knowledgeable.	<input type="radio"/>				
The materials were presented in a way that understood.	<input type="radio"/>				
Overall Impression	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Overall, this is an excellent training.	<input type="radio"/>				
I would recommend this course to additional staff and faculty.	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>What did you find most interesting in the training?</b>					
<b>What did you find least interesting in the training?</b>					

Do you have any suggestions for improvement to the training?
Is there any information you would like to see in an additional training?

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_