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The Impact of Students' Academic and Social Relationships on College Student Persistence

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by

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The purpose of this research study was to determine the connection between students'

relationships and their choice to persist at a post-secondary institution. Although other

literature has centered around why students chose to leave an institution or the

importance of student involvement and engagement, this study focused on who is most

influential in encouraging students to work toward their degree attainment. The study

includes results of the influence of peers, family, college faculty, and college student

affairs staff on student persistence decisions. This research sought to make a contribution

to the literature on retention and attrition issues at colleges and universities. Findings

from the research study demonstrated that students who are persisting through college

tend to have positive relational influences on their persistence decisions and also have

had positive college experiences and interactions with both their social and academic

social relational groups. Findings showed that overall students had positive interactions

with both social and academic relational groups both on and off campus that influenced

their decisions to persist in college. However, findings also showed that relationships

that were more socially associated, such as those with family and friends, had a stronger

influence on students' persistence choices than did students' relationships that were more

academically associated, such as those with classmates, faculty, and student affairs staff. In other words, students' human relationships over which the university had the least amount of control are the ones that students believe have the greatest influence over their success in college.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The nation's unemployment rate, 8.5 % in 2009, was the highest it has been since 1980 (Cardona, 2009, ¶ 1). Although colleges have reported their highest application and enrollment rates in recent years, universities are "not immune to the slumping economy" (¶ 2). While students put forth efforts to improve their job prospects by enrolling in colleges (¶ 2) under "severe economic conditions," the high enrollment rates could fall as students struggle to pay tuition (¶ 17). University budgets have been more easily maintained at institutions where retention rates are higher (Williford & Wadley, 2008, p. 1). Retention rates of students at colleges and universities have also impacted institutional reputations because the numbers have been publicized through periodicals like *U.S. News &World Report* (p. 2).

Money and reputation based on numbers should not be the concern of colleges and universities in regards to student retention; the altruistic and purposeful reason retention is important to institutions is its relationship to student success (Tinto, 1987, p. 15). Braxton (2003) defined student success as the extent to which students have achieved their goals (p. 317). Several factors have been shown to have significant impact on student retention, and these factors can be aligned into two main categories – academic and social. Student involvement, high expectations, and feedback have been shown to increase academic success (Astin, 1985). Students who perceive themselves to be academically successful – especially when meaningfully engaged in their academic work – are more likely to persist in school, which helps colleges maintain and/or increase retention rates (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000).

When viewed through a social lens, the relationships that students build and maintain during their college experiences also influence retention rates (Oseguera & Shik, 2009; Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2007; Roberts & Clifton, 1992; Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, & Rahtz, 2006; Tinto, 1975). In addition, recent research has increased the availability of measurement instruments that assess the quality of life of students during their college experiences. Roberts and Clifton (1992) created a measurement instrument that focused on the quality of life of college students in general but with a main focus on their academic experiences. Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, and Rahtz (2006) designed a measurement of quality of college student life that focused on both academic and social aspects and the importance of facilities and services.

Context of the Problem

Colleges and universities in the United States today are finding themselves in a condition where concerns for student quality of life and the relationships that they are building are of growing importance. When looking to the bottom line, colleges must sustain their budgets; working to retain students is a way for colleges to accomplish this aim. Furthermore, colleges need to strengthen their focus on the main purpose of their existence: the students. Although students are consumers of the educational services that are offered through colleges, they also strive for a high quality of life while attending the institution. The quality of life of college students can be affected by their academic and social experiences. Colleges should consider the importance of relationships that students on their campus are forming (or possibly not forming) as these could likely have an impact on student retention.

The purpose for conducting this research was to determine which human relationships that college students have more strongly influence their decisions to persist in college and to ultimately continue in their education toward degree attainment.

Problem Statement

Students who enroll in colleges with the goal of seeking a degree are not consistently persisting to attain that degree. In addition, a portion of students choose to quit school because they are less involved academically and socially and, in comparison to those who do choose to persist, perceive their school's attempts to support and engage them as being less than those who do persist in college (Williford & Wadley, 2008). In other words, a portion of non-persisting students leave college because they are not satisfied with the quality of college life, a factor that the relationships in the students' lives can either positively or negatively influence.

Research Questions

1. Are students satisfied with their college experience?

2. Are the relationships that students have with friends, family, and college staff and faculty important in influencing them to persist in college?

3. Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment?

Definitions

The following definitions apply to this research study:

Retention is the rate at which students choose to stay at a particular institution in an effort to work toward degree attainment (Nuss, 2003, p. 77; Cardona, 2009, ¶ 3).

Attrition is the rate at which students choose to leave a particular institution. Students may persist toward their degree at a later time ("stop-out") or different institution (transfer); other students choose to leave school and not pursue their education further (Williford & Wadley, 2008). Despite the choice an individual student makes, that student could still be contributing to the attrition rates of that school. Some colleges discriminate among students who leave for different reasons through exit surveys. However, for the purpose of this research, the definition for attrition was simply the rate at which students leave an institution.

Quality of college life is defined as the level of satisfaction that college students have as a result of both academic and social influences during their college experience (Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, & Rahtz 2006).

Delimitations

The data were collected through a survey. The survey was accessible only to students of sophomore status at a mid-Plains research university. Since the survey was completed by individuals who had chosen to persist through a second year of college, the information gathered reflects the influence of significant relationships that students who are persisting toward the goal of degree attainment value in their college experiences.

Limitations

Since the data were gathered through a survey, there were limitations to the results. The survey was completed on a voluntary basis and volunteers may not reflect the general population. Data may have been gathered from students who have had either extreme relational influences or were more inclined to want their experiences documented. In addition, the survey format may have created a limitation because of a

low response rate. The data were also limited because most of the survey questions asked students to rank answers on a Likert scale or to mark only from the choices provided; the survey did not give students an opportunity to address alternate responses by providing any open-ended questions or space for participant comments.

Because the research was conducted at one mid-Plains university, the results were limited by data available from the existing population of students. Results obtained from a volunteer sample representative of the demographics at one particular university may not be directly applicable to colleges with other demographic proportions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The goal of this study was to explore the influence of the impacts of college students' various relationships on their decisions to either remain in or depart from the institution in which they are enrolled. This review includes published research on factors that have an effect on the attrition and retention of college students. The review is divided into the following sections: (a) History and Theory of Empirical Studies of College Student Retention, (b) Student Quality of Life and Measurement Instruments, (c) Importance of Student Relationships, and (d) Attrition Intervention Programs.

History of Theory and Empirical Studies of College Student Retention

Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of college student departure has been the standard among theoretical views on college student attrition and retention (Braxton, 2003, p. 326). Tinto (1975) used Durkheim's Theory of Suicide, which explained suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are not integrated into society, to explain college student departure. Tinto explained that when students have insufficient interactions with others in the college and their goals and values are not aligned with those of the college, students are more likely to leave the school. When considering the various factors of Tinto's theory, one could use his work either descriptively or prescriptively. Tinto's theory showed that the interactions between student and the institution, both academic and social, play a role in a student's departure decision. His theory first considers that students enter college with a variety of individual attributes, pre-college educational experiences, and family backgrounds. These factors influence the next elements of Tinto's theory – the student's initial commitment to the goal (purpose for attending) and

commitment to the particular institution. Tinto's theory is then split into two systems of interactions – the student interacts in both academic (grades, intellectual development) and social (peer interactions, interactions with faculty and staff) contexts during the college experience. The student becomes integrated into one or both of these systems; however, lack of integration into both or only one increases the likelihood that the student will depart the institution.

Researchers have utilized Tinto's model to produce a growing body of work in the study of attrition and retention (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980a; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Getzlaf et al, 1984; Fox, 1986; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000). Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) and Getzlaf, Sedlacek, Kearney, and Blackwell (1984) conducted studies to validate the theory posited by Tinto; work from both groups of research showed validation for Tinto's theoretical model of student departure. Other researchers worked to design instruments to measure the various dimensions of Tinto's model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980a; Fox, 1986). Other researchers looked into the influence of Arnold Van Gannep's rites of passage on Tinto's work (Christie & Dinham, 1991; Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000). Van Gannep's rites of passage included three stages – separation, transition, and incorporation – that Tinto used in his interactionalist model. Tinto's theory included the passage through these three stages as students became committed to their institutions.

However, Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) believed that although the propositions made in Tinto's theory were sound, the aspect of how social integration occurs was not explained. Because of this gap, Braxton et al. elaborated on Tinto's theory. They used the research of others as well as their own studies to look more closely

at student integration. Braxton et al.'s research focused mostly on academic integration, but also explained that when students are actively integrated in their learning they are also more likely to have time to become socially integrated. The research showed a significant influence of active teaching on the academic integration of students. The results added to Tinto's work by showing that even though the degree of commitment that a student brings to college can influence his/her social integration, the other member of this relationship, the school and its faculty, can also play a role in fostering academic integration which leads to higher rates of student persistence.

In addition to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory, Bean's Student Attrition Model has also been utilized by researchers to study student attrition and retention on college campuses (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Bean (1982) asserted that student attrition could be better understood by comparing attrition to turnover in a workplace organization. In his work, Bean identified ten determinants that are most likely to produce variations in student attrition: intent to leave, practical value, certainty of choice, loyalty, grades, courses, educational goals, major and job certainty, opportunity to transfer, and family approval of the institution. When students have positive experiences, such as having their confidence raised by earning good grades, then the students are likely to develop positive beliefs and attitudes about the institution and are more likely to persist (Kahn & Nauta, 2001, p. 634). Bean (1982) provided "practical recommendations" that institutions could implement in an effort to reduce attrition (p. 318). Bean's (1982) suggestions included developing motivation and learning skills in students, showing students the value of any chosen major, creating a desirable image of the school, and developing students' educational goals (pp. 318-319). Included in Bean's suggestions

was the importance of creating students who would be loyal to the institution by helping them to make connections to faculty, staff, and cocurricular programs as well as creating outreach programs to students' parents and other prospective students. The revisions to Bean's work show that background characteristics also contribute to academic and social integration (Eaton & Bean, 1995).

Astin's (1999) theory on student involvement also has implications for those interested in retention and attrition issues in higher education. Astin (1985) defined student involvement as the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 36). One of the main tenets of Astin's theory is that "Students learn by being involved" (p. 36). Astin (1999) described that a "highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy into studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518). Effective education practices are designed to engage students to become more involved, thus causing the students to exert more energy into the overall educational program (p. 518). Astin (1999) explained that the theory of student involvement is rooted in college student persistence – students who are involved persist in college and students who are not involved often leave college. Astin pointed to some of the factors that are related to increased student involvement: living on campus in a residence hall, belonging to a social fraternity or sorority or participating in other organized campus social activities, and holding an on-campus part-time job. (If the student works off-campus, then the effect is the opposite – the student is more likely to dropout.)

In addition to Astin's work on student involvement, Kuh's research on student engagement also has value when addressing the issue of student retention. Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) said, "Student engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development" (p. 2). Specifically, the researchers studied the relationship between student engagement and academic performance. Their results showed a positive link between student engagement and "desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades" (p. 23). Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2007) conducted a research study to determine the connection between student engagement and student success and college student persistence. Kuh et al.'s (2007) research results pointed to two conclusions. First, their results corroborated previous work conducted by Kuh indicating a relationship between student engagement and positive academic outcomes such as grades and persistence between the first and second year of college (p. 555). The second conclusion posited that student engagement had more significant effects on lower ability students to persist to a second year of college at the same institution (p. 555). Kuh et al. stressed the importance of institutions developing quality policies and programs promoting worthwhile student interactions with classmates and university faculty and staff.

In 2008, Williford and Wadley published work demonstrating a connection between theory and practice. Williford and Wadley (2008) used the work of Tinto, Braxton, Bean, Astin, Kuh and other retention theorists in combination with the practical knowledge that improving retention rates improves a college's ability to sustain its budget, works to maintain America's workforce, improves a college's public image, and ultimately guides individual students toward achieving their goals, a college's real

purpose. Williford and Wadley, both working at the Office of Institutional Research at Ohio University, used multiple methods in their studies. They designed a questionnaire focused on identifying factors influencing students' decisions to not return to their university, they utilized the university's Involvement Study and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and they also studied the influences of the university's residential learning communities (RLC) and supplemental instruction (SI) by comparing the data of students involved with these programs to the data of students not involved with the programs. The survey data exposed reasons why students were choosing to not return to their university; four of the top six reasons were related to personal adjustment issues. The top-rated reason was "I did not feel like I fit in" (p. 8). In regards to student engagement, Williford and Wadley's (2008) work showed that students who did not feel engaged with their peers in academic work in and out of the classroom were more likely to leave the university. Students who chose to leave were typically students who did not feel involved academically or socially. The study found that RLC and SI involvement did impact student retention, especially the retention of students arriving at college with lower academic abilities. However, students who utilized these campus programs also arrived with a greater commitment to achieving their goals than did students who did not participate. Williford and Wadely also stressed the importance of schools realizing what the central issue of retention was – not budgets or stable enrollments, but the students themselves.

Student Quality of Life and Measurement Instruments

Because part of both the theoretical and practical work related to retention seems to have a connection to the relationship between goal attainment (instead of attrition) and

student satisfaction, theorists and practitioners would find value in considered the quality

of students' lives at colleges. Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, and Rahtz (2006) reported on the

results of a study designed to develop and validate a measure for quality of college life

(QCL) of college students. Sirgy et al. clarified that they were not working to determine

the quality of life (QOL) of college students but to come up with a method to effectively

measure QCL. The conceptual model of QCL outlined two types of student experiences

in college – satisfaction with academic aspects and satisfaction with social aspects.

(Interestingly, Sirgy et al.'s model visually resembled Tinto's model of Interactionalist

Theory.) The researchers used a focus group of 15 students in designing the conceptual

model of QCL. The researchers also used the focus group to help them test their

questions and design their hypotheses before conducting their study at three major

universities (a small private college, a large state college, and a medium-size "Ivy

League" college). In regards to satisfaction with academic aspects of college, the

researchers developed a formative measure from the data gathered from the focus group

involving the following indicators: (a) satisfaction with faculty, (b) satisfaction with

teaching method, (c) satisfaction with classroom environment, (d) satisfaction with

student workload, (e) satisfaction with academic reputation, and (f) satisfaction with

academic diversity. The formative measure addressed social aspects with the following

indicators: (a) satisfaction with on-campus housing, (b) satisfaction with international

programs and services, (c) satisfaction with spiritual programs and services, (d)

satisfaction with clubs and parties, (e) satisfaction with collegiate athletics, and (f)

satisfaction with recreational activities. The researchers also determined that satisfaction

with both academic and social aspects of colleges does influence overall student feelings

about their college life. The researchers also developed two hypotheses from these findings to test with the three universities – H1: The greater the student's satisfaction with the academic aspects of the college, the higher the student's QCL; H2: The greater the student's satisfaction with the social aspects of the college, the higher the student's QCL. The researchers also noted that the focus group indicated that QCL may be influenced by campus facilities. Based on the data gathered from the focus group in regards to facilities and services, Sirgy et al. developed a formative measure including the following indicators: satisfaction with library services, satisfaction with transportation and parking services, satisfaction with healthcare services, satisfaction with book store, satisfaction with telecommunications, and satisfaction with recreation center. The researchers also developed two hypotheses from these findings to test with the three colleges – H3: The greater the student's satisfaction with facilities and services, the higher the student's satisfaction with academic aspects of the college; H4: The greater the student's satisfaction with facilities and services, the higher the student's satisfaction with the social aspects of the college. Sirgy et al. found support for all of their hypotheses and suggested that colleges and universities could use this information to assess the social health of their institutions and to identify problems and areas of strength.

Roberts and Clifton (1992) preceded Sirgey et al. (2006) in working to develop an instrument to study the quality of life of college students. Roberts and Clifton explained that attrition rates at colleges and universities are related to the students' perceptions of the quality of life at their schools; however, they believed that little work at been done in regards to studying this connection and designing a measure for college and universities to use to assess and address this issue. Roberts and Clifton believed that the useful

measure they set out to design needed to be related to both the goals of the institution as well as the experiences of students. In their work, they tended to focus specifically on the students' classroom experiences while at college. Roberts and Clifton considered various dimensions related to the quality of life of university students throughout their work; however, they selected the following four dimensions as part of their measurement instrument: (a) positive affect dimension, (b) interaction with students dimension, (c) interaction with professors dimension, and (d) negative affect dimension. The reactions to their measurement were viewed positively, but Roberts and Clifton still believed that more informal, qualitative work needed to be competed with the measurement.

Importance of Student Relationships

Both Roberts and Clifton (1992) and Sirgy et al. (2006) focused on the importance of studying students' perceptions of the quality of college life. Through their work, practitioners can see the value in assessing the quality of college life at their schools in order to address issues with attrition and to increase retention. Roberts and Clifton's work tended to focus on designing an overall measure of the quality of life of students, but a major focus of their work was in the classrooms. Sirgy et al. looked at the issue in another perspective, considering the importance of both academic and social aspects of college life, by considering campus facilities and services in their work. However, another element that these authors indicated is important to consider when assessing and addressing attrition issues and student retention is the impact of the relationships that students build during their college experience.

In 2007, Ramsay, Jones, and Barker examined the relationship between student adjustment to college life and the support types, sources, and levels that the students

received during the first year of their university experience. Ramsay et al. (2007) noted

that there is value in allowing students to face challenges; students also need support

during times of transition. College students need to be able to see that their school's

environment offers them support in order to reduce the stress associated with

transitioning into a challenging environment. Ramsay et al. examined the following

support types: emotional, practical, information, and social companionship support. They

considered the following research questions: (1) What is the relationship between level of

adjustment and the amount of support type for the groups? (2) What are the various

sources of each support type for the groups? and (3) What are the perceived levels of, and

satisfaction with, each support type for the groups? The groups that the researchers

looked at were divided by age (young or mature-aged) and by origin (local or

international). The sources of support possible were defined as being either from a

partner, friends, professionals, family, or no one. In regards to emotional support, most

individuals received support from friends (45.8%), followed by partners (21.4%), family

(20.6%), no one (7.3%), and professionals (5.0%). Practical support was mostly received

from friends (39.5%) as well, followed by family (25.9%), no one (14.8%), partners

(10.7%), and professionals (5.8%). Informational support was mostly received from

professionals (58.6%), followed by friends (28.0%), no one (7.5%), partners (3.8%), and

family (2.1%). Social companionship support was mostly received from friends (61.2%),

followed by partners (21.6%), no one (13.5%), and family (3.7%). Ramsay et al. also

found that in some of the areas students would have liked more support; the following is

a list of support types in which students would have liked more support and the percent of

students from the study who would have liked more support: emotional support (30.4%),

practical support (32.1%), informational support (56.2%), and social companionship support (48.0%).

Oseguera and Rhee (2009) also studied the importance of the relationships that students have on their likelihood to persist in college. Although students' individual attributes, such as background characteristics, experiences, and attitudes, influence a student's likelihood to persist, Oseguera and Rhee posited that the peers and faculty members that students interacted with could also have an influence on retention issues. This particular study showed that even though the faculty climate did not have a strong impact on a student's likelihood to stay, the impact of the peer climate was significant. If the overall climate of students is that of students who intend to not stay, then an individual student's likelihood of leaving the school is also increased. This was found to be true even after the researchers took into account the student's individual attributes.

Liu (2010) also considered the importance of relationships in regards to retention by studying the effects of alienation on first-year student retention. The study showed that there was a strong connection between a student's feelings of alienation-belonging and his/her decision to stay at or depart from the university. The more a student felt that he/she belonged at the school, the more likely the student was to persist; however, if the student scored low on this scale, or felt alienated, the student was not prone to persist. Some of the factors that showed a decrease in student alienation were students living in on-campus housing, active learning, and a sense of campus support.

Attrition Intervention Programs

In light of the research pointing to the importance of relationship-building and learning opportunities that involve interactions with peers, faculty, and university staff,

several institutions have created programs designed to foster more engaging campus

environments through programs with the aim of addressing retention and attrition issues

as well as issues related to student success. Some of those program types include

learning communities and freshmen or first year experiences.

Zhao and Kuh (2004) examined the relationship between participating in learning

communities and student engagement. Kuh's other research studies have shown

connections between student engagement and positive academic outcomes and student

persistence (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006, Kuh et al., 2007).   Zhao and Kuh (2004)

surmised that most learning communities "incorporate active and collaborative learning

activities and promote involvement in complementary academic and social activities that

extend beyond the classroom" (p. 116). The researchers sought to confirm the positive

link between learning communities and student success. Zhao and Kuh utilized the

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to conduct the research study. The

results showed, "Learning communities are associated with enhanced academic

performance, integration of academic and social experiences, gains in multiple areas of

skill, competence, and knowledge, and overall satisfaction with the college experience"

(pp. 130-131).

Freshman or first-year experiences are another intervention some institutions have

undertaken to address student retention and attrition issues. Jamelske (2008) conducted a

research study to determine the influence of a university first-year experience (FYE)

program on student grades and retention. The specific university where Jamelske

conducted his work implemented a FYE program to "add both curricular and

extracurricular components to existing core courses in an effort to integrate students into

the university community" (p. 388). Enrollment in the courses studied was capped at 20 students and each of those courses was assigned a student peer mentor (p. 388). Jamelske noted some complications with the design of the program – first, a significant amount of extra work was required from professors to "infuse the suggested additional activities into their existing courses" (p. 388); and second, in spite of the defined goals of the FYE program, instructors of the courses were not held accountable for meeting these goals (p. 388). Because of these specific issues with the FYE program at the university where the researcher was conducting his study, the researcher restricted his analysis to only the FYE courses where the program goals were likely being pursued. Before Jamelske restricted his analysis to only certain FYE courses, the results showed that students in FYE courses had higher GPAs than non-FYE students but that there was not positive effect on student retention rates for those students involved in the FYE program. However, once Jamelske reduced his sample to include only the FYE courses where the goals were likely being pursued, then the results showed a positive influence on both student GPA and student retention to the second year of college. Jamelske also noted that the FYE program yielded a higher impact on students who were considered below average.

Sidle and McReynolds (2009) also considered the effects of a freshman year experience on student success and retention. The research study was conducted at a predominately white institution in the Midwest. Sidle and McReynolds sought to compare students in a freshman-year experience course with first-year students who elected not to enroll in the program but who matched those enrolled with the following attributes: enhanced ACT composite score, age, originating county, high school rank,

high school grade point average, University-determined course placement, ethnicity, and gender (p. 436). Sidle and McReynolds found that students enrolled in the freshman-year experience persisted to their sophomore year at a significantly higher rate than their counterparts. Although the researchers conceded that students who tend to enroll in freshman-year experiences tend to also be more highly motivated prior to enrolling, they also explained that freshman-year experience courses provide students with additional, significant curricular opportunities. The freshman-year experience course curriculum "includes such topics as understanding the goals of the university, planning a career and choosing a major, making ethical decisions, and learning time management skills to support academic success" (p. 442). Sidle and McReynolds also showed that the amount of expenditures on a freshman-year experience course would be recovered in one year because of the increase in retention rates of those students involved.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose for conducting this research was to explore the importance of the impacts of students' various relationships on their decisions to persist in college toward degree attainment. The results demonstrated to what degree students' varied relationship types influence them in choice and action in regards to their staying at or departing from college in which they are currently enrolled. The researcher had two expectations for the study results:

1. The relationships tied more closely to the students' social lives (i.e., family and friends) will have a stronger impact on students' decisions to persist in college than the relationships that students have that are more closely tied to the college (i.e., relationships with classmates, faculty, and other university staff).

2. Even though social relationships are more apt to strongly influence students' life decisions, academically founded relationships, such as those with classmates, faculty, and other university staff, will also have a positive influence on student persistence decisions.

The sample was too small to test.

Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed in this research study:

1. Are students satisfied with their college experience?

2. Are the relationships that students have with friends, family, and college staff and faculty important in influencing them to persist in college?

3. Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment?

In order to address the sample background information and the three research questions for both levels of analysis, the survey questions were organized by their relevance to each in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Questions Correspondence to Survey Questions.

Research Question	Survey Questions	Partial Usage of Questioned Listed
Sample Background Information		
Demographics	1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 16	
Time Allocation	4, 5, 6, 7, 8	
RQ1: Are students satisfied with their college experiences?	9 (partial)	People look up to me. I like learning. I have acquired skills that will be of use to me. The work I do is good preparation for my future. I am given a chance to do work that really interests me. I really like to attend classes each day. I really get involved in my course work. I find that learning is a lot of fun. I am treated respect. People care what I think. I find it easy to get to know other people. Mixing with other people helps me to understand myself. People think highly of me.
	10 (partial)	I believe that I am well-adjusted to life at the university. I believe that I will graduate from this university. I have had a positive experience so far with the university.
	13 (partial)	College is what I expected it to be.

RQ2: Are the relationships that students have with friends, family and college staff and faculty important influencing them to persist in college?	9 (partial)	Professors treat me fairly. Professors take a personal interest in helping me with me work. Professors help me do my best. Professors are fair and just. Professors listen to what I say. Other students accept me as I am. I get along well with other students in my classes. Other students value my opinions when working in groups. I enjoy working on projects with classmates.
	10 (partial)	Non-teaching staff at the school care about me as a person. Non-teaching staff treat me fairly.
	13 (partial)	My family asks me about college life. My family expects me to be successful at college. My family supports me with my academic endeavors.
	15, 17	
RQ3: Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment?	18, 19, 20	

Population/Sample

The population from which this sample was drawn was full-time sophomores at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. UNL's total student population consists of approximately 25,000 students; according to the University of Nebraska- Lincoln Fact Book 2010-2011, the entire school population was 24,610 (p. 55). The entire undergraduate population was 19,383 (p. 51). The number of students classified with freshman standing, who would have the potential for being considered sophomores for the 2011-2012 term, was 4,980 (p. 55). Of those, 2,729 were male and 2,251 were female (p. 55). Readers should recall that because of attrition rates, not all freshmen from the 2010-2011 term would have persisted toward sophomore status.

The Fact Book provided other demographic information for the student body population that is also relevant to this research. Of the 19,383 undergraduates enrolled in the 2010-2011 academic year, 16,204 were White and 1,917 were considered minority students. This population information is relevant to understanding the data collected from the sample because it shows a limitation on the applicability to of the data to other colleges who may have different population demographics.

A random sample of 300 students who were enrolled in their second full year at this mid-Plains university was solicited to complete this survey. An equal number of male and female students were asked to complete the survey – 150 male students and 150 female students. The sample had completed four full semesters as fulltime students at the university; the survey was conducted shortly after their completion of their fourth semester. (Some of the sample may have also been enrolled in summer courses but were considered to have completed their sophomore year at the university.) The Office of

Registration and Records created a random sampling of emails. A university employee

sent the email invitation to participate to the random sampling of students. The email

linked the solicited students to a web version of the survey. After two weeks, a reminder

email of the invitation to participate in the research study was sent to the sample by the

same university employee. Copies of email invitation and the reminder email are

included in Appendix B.

Instrument

A researcher-created survey of questions utilizing a Likert scale was designed to

collect the data. Some questions were based on the work of Roberts and Clifton (1992)

who sought to design a measurement instrument for the purpose of assessing the quality

of life of college students. The Likert scale questions designed by Roberts and Clifton

(1992) seemed to focus on overall student satisfaction with quality of life at college as

well as satisfaction with academic and classroom settings. Since the purpose of this

study was to focus on a larger variety of relationships (more than just academic

professors), the survey was modified to include questions related more specifically to

particular relationships that college students could have. The survey included questions

about relationships with family, relationships with academic faculty, relationships with

peers in regards to academics and social lives, relationships with non-teaching staff,

relationships with residence hall staff (if applicable), and relationships with

advisors/coaches of clubs ands sports (if applicable). A copy of the instrument used is

included in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

Approval for data collection for this research study was obtained from the University of Nebraska- Lincoln Institutional Review Board under IRB# 20120512449 EX (see Appendix C) before the data collection commenced. Once approval was obtained, the Office of Registration and Records took an random sampling of the population of sophomores and compiled a list of the sample students' email addresses. A list of the sample's email addresses was sent to a secretary in the Department of Educational Administration. The secretary served as the third party that emailed the students about the opportunity to complete the survey. The researcher prepared both the text for the initial email invitation to participate in the research study as well as the reminder about participation that the secretary used when emailing the students. The initial email sent to possible participants asked them to connect to a web-link to the survey. The reminder email was sent two weeks later. Both the initial email and the reminder email contained information regarding informed consent; participants understood that submission of the on-line survey implied consent to the use of their responses. A total of three weeks was available for students to complete the survey. Data collected from the online survey were viewed and saved electronically.

Data Analysis

All data were collected in the form of an on-line survey that utilized Likert scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and a question asking students to rank variables into an order of most influential.

The researcher considered the downloaded survey data for general observations about how students ranked in the Likert scales the degree of their satisfaction with their

college experience and the relationships that they have. The data, both response numbers and percentages of responses, were outlined in tables showing general participant background information, the level of satisfaction that the respondents had with their overall college experience, the levels to which students were making relationships in general during their college experience, and the levels of influence that specific relationships had on respondents overall persistence in college.

Only 8.7% of those solicited responded to the survey, and only 7 % completed the entire survey.

Chapter 4

Results and Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance of the impacts of students' various relationships on their decisions to persist in college. Specifically, this study's participants, traditional students who had completed both their freshman and sophomore academic years, were asked to consider the relationships they had with their family, friends, classmates, faculty, and other staff on their campus and to consider which of those relationships more strongly influenced them to persist in their education at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. This researcher considered the existing body of attrition and retention literature, much of which had focused on influences of student departure; this researcher chose to consider relationships that have had positive impacts on student persistence. This research sought to make a contribution to the existing body of literature on student retention by considering the human relationships that students have that most strongly influence their persistence in college.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the idea that students' various relationships, with family, friends, classmates, university faculty, and other university staff, would have an impact on students' college persistence. The researcher wanted to know how strongly each of those relationships influenced the students' likelihood of persisting in college and working toward degree attainment. The research was guided by the following research questions:

Question 1: Are students satisfied with their college experiences?

Question 2: Are the relationships that students have with friends, family and college staff and faculty important in influencing them to persist in college?

Question 3: Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment?

Results from Survey Data

Results are displayed in tables by actual response numbers and percentage of responses to survey questions. The tables are organized by data represented the respondents' demographic and time allocation information and the data's relevance to the three research questions. Explanation of data presented in the tables and their relevance to the researcher's expectations of the results. This researcher had two expectations:

1. The relationships tied more closely to the students' social lives (i.e., family and friends) will have a stronger impact on students' decisions to persist in college than the relationships that students have that are more closely tied to the college (i.e., relationships with classmates, faculty, and other university staff).

2. Even though social relationships are more apt to strongly influence students' life decisions, academically founded relationships, such as those with classmates, faculty, and other university staff, will also have a positive influence on student persistence decisions.

No hypotheses were tested in this research study.

Student demographic and time allocation information. The first sets of questions in the survey addressed respondents' demographic and time allocation information. The data collected show general information about the participants in the survey. This researcher selected participants who had persisted through two years of

post-secondary education. Students who have persisted in college tend to be from

families that are not low-income and families where at least one parent has had some

college experience. Students who persist also tend to be engaged in campus activities

through either living on campus and/or participating in extra curricular activities. The

survey data supports previous research in these areas of attrition and retention studies.

The sample's background information is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' Demographics.

Descriptor	
Sex	
Male	12 (48%)
Female	13 (52%)
Residence Status	
In-State	19 (73.1%)
Out-of-State	7 (26.9%)
Receiving Pell Grant	
No	21 (80.0%)
Yes	5 (19.2%)
Parent College Experience	
Completed Degree	18 (81.8%)
Some College Experience	2 (9.1%)
No College Experience	2 (9.1%)
High School Provided College Preparation	
Yes, with information and guidance	14 (63.6%)
Yes, with information	2 (9.1%)
No	2 (9.1%)
Lived in a Residence Hall	
Yes	18 (81.8%)
No	4 (18.4%)
Participated in Extra Curricular Activities	
Yes	17 (77.3%)
No	5 (22.7%)

Besides demographic information, respondents were also asked about their time allocation. Since students who are more involved and engaged in campus activities – both academic and social – tend to experience more success than students who lack involvement and engagement, persisting students' time allocations should show that time is spent being meaningful involved and engaged in campus programs and with campus faculty and staff. The data show that students spend a majority of their time on campus with peers at campus social events and with classmates working on assignments for courses. Most students reported meeting with both university faculty and staff once or twice a semester each. The data representing the sample's time allocation is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants' Time Allocation.

	Never	Once or twice a semester	A few times a month	At least once a week
Meet with instructors outside of class	1 (3.8%)	16 (61.5%)	7 (26.9%)	3 (11.5%)
Meeting with university staff (non-teaching)	4 (15.4%)	18 (69.2%)	2 (7.7%)	3 (11.5%)
Work on assignments with classmates	4 (15.4%)	7 (26.9%)	5 (19.2%)	11 (42.3%)
Participate in campus events with peers	3 (11.5%)	5 (19.2%)	12 (46.2%)	6 (23.1%)
Participate in campus ministries events	15 (57.7%)	6 (23.1%)	3 (11.5%)	2 (7.7%)

Research Question 1: Are students satisfied with their college experiences? The research study sought to address this research question by asking participants a series of questions asking them to rate overall levels of satisfaction with their college experience as well as their levels of connectedness and satisfaction with relationships related to their educational experience. Although the information gathered to address the first research questions does not in itself directly address either of the research expectations, the responses to related survey questions do point to some evidence supporting the second expectation:

> Even though social relationships are more apt to strongly influence
>
> students' life decisions, academically founded relationships, such as those
>
> with classmates, faculty, and other university staff, will also have a
>
> positive influence on student persistence decisions.

Hinged on this expectation is the suggestion that students who are persisting in college will have positive relationships and overall positive college experiences.

The results showed that the sample of persisting college students is, for the most part, satisfied with the college quality of life. The data show that students agree that the things they are learning and the skills they are acquiring as part of their college experience have value. The sample indicated that most respondents liked learning and believed that they were being treated with respect at their institution. However, not all results in the quality of college life category were reported as positively. For examples, although students did indicate that they saw value in their coursework for their future, some also indicated that they did not enjoy going to class each day. Other students indicated that they were not given a chance to complete work that they found interesting,

and a small number reported that they either did not find learning fun or that they did not

get involved in their coursework. Related data are outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Student Quality of Life/Satisfaction with College Experience.

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The things I learn are important to me	0	0	0	13 (59.1%)	9 (40.9%)
People look up to me	0	0	12 (52.2%)	11 (47.8%)	0
I like learning	0	0	2 (8.7%)	16 (69.6%)	5 (21.7%)
I have acquired skills that will be of use to me	0	0	2 (9.1%)	15 (68.2%)	5 (22.7%)
The work I do is good preparation for my future	0	0	5 (22.7%)	12 (54.5%)	5 (22.7%)
I am given a chance to do work that really interests me	0	2 (9.1%)	4 (18.2%)	10 (45.5%)	6 (27.3%)
I really like to attend classes each day	0	3 (13.6%)	7 (31.8%)	11 (50.0%)	1 (4.5%)
I really get involved in my course work	0	1 (4.3%)	7 (30.4%)	9 (39.1%)	6 (26.1%)
I find that learning is a lot of fun	0	1 (4.5%)	5 (22.7%)	15 (68.2%)	1 (4.5%)
I am treated with respect	0	0	2 (9.1%)	17 (77.3%)	3 (13.6%)
College is what I expected it to be	1 (4.5%)	0	6 (27.3%)	8 (36.4%)	7 (31.8%)

Also related to the first research question were data related to students' overall sense of their relationships during their college experience. As previously stated, students who persist in college are more likely to indicate a sense of social connectedness to others at their university. Although most of the persisting students in this sample reported a general agreement of positive human interactions, some participants did not have positive results. The data suggest that most students have had a positive experience with the university so far and have built positive connections with other people during their experience. However, the data also suggest that some of the students are struggling to make connections with new people during their college experience and are struggling to become adjusted to college life. The data are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. Satisfaction with Relationships in College.

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
People care what I think	0	1 (4.5%)	6 (27.3%)	14 (63.6%)	1 (4.5%)
I find it easy to get to know other people	1 (4.5%)	2 (9.1%)	5 (22.7%)	13 (59.1%)	1 (4.5%)
Mixing with other people helps me to understand myself	0	2 (9.1%)	3 (13.6%)	14 (63.6%)	3 (13.6%)
People think highly of me	0	0	11 (50.0%)	11 (50.0%)	0
I believe that I am well-adjusted to life at the university	0	1 (4.5%)	5 (22.7%)	9 (40.9%)	7 (31.8%)

I believe that I will graduate from this university	0	0	1 (4.5%)	8 (36.4%)	13 (59.1%)
I have had a positive experience so far with the university	0	1 (5.0%)	1 (5.0%)	10 (50.0%)	8 (40.0%)

Research Question 2: Are the relationships that students have with friends, family and college staff and faculty important influencing them to persist in college?

The study sought to address this research question by asking participants questions about the different kinds of relationships that they have that could impact their college persistence decisions – relationships with faculty, classmates, student affairs staff, and family. The results for this research question directly relate to both of researcher's expectations of the results:

1. The relationships tied more closely to the students' social lives (i.e., family and friends) will have a stronger impact on students' decisions to persist in college than the relationships that students have that are more closely tied to the college (i.e., relationships with classmates, faculty, and other university staff).

2. Even though social relationships are more apt to strongly influence students' life decisions, academically founded relationships, such as those with classmates, faculty, and other university staff, will also have a positive influence on student persistence decisions.

The first data set relating to the second research question is a data set demonstrating how the sample students responded to questions about their interactions and relationships with university faculty. The study focused on persisting students, and

the results indicate that students who have persisted through their second year of college

tend to agree that their contact with university faculty is positive.   Respondents all

agreed that professors at the university treated them fairly. Although the other responses

weren't as strong, students also indicated that university professors were willing to help

them with their work, that the professors were fair and just, and that the professors

listened to students. The data are outlined below in Table 6.

Table 6. Relationships with Faculty.

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professors treat me fairly	0	0	1 (4.5%)	16 (72.7%)	5 (22.7%)
Professors take a personal interest in helping me with me work	0	0	5 (22.7%)	15 (68.2%)	2 (9.1%)
Professors help me do my best	0	0	4 (18.2%)	14 (63.6%)	4 (18.2%)
Professors are fair and just	0	0	3 (13.6%)	17 (77.3%)	2 (9.1%)
Professors listen to what I say	0	0	6 (27.3%)	14 (63.6%)	3 (13.6%)

In order to address the second research question, the sample was also asked about

their relationships with classmates. Like relationships with faculty, students who are

persisting in college are predicted to have positive interactions with classmates.

Although the data in Table 7 show that overall students seemed satisfied with their

relationships with classmates, they did disagree with some of the relationship factors.

Students agreed that they felt accepted and indicated that their classmates valued their

opinions when they were working in groups. However, as the data in Table 7 indicates, some students also answered that they either had neutral feelings or did not enjoy working with classmates on group assignments. This piece of data is interesting because the previous research addressed in the literature review indicated that students who are more likely to persist are those students who are involved and engaged with course material in a more social manner – like completing group assignments. Another interesting piece of data showed that a small group of students also indicated that they did not get along well with their classmates – this was surprising as the persisting students were predicted to have more positive relationships in their on-campus interactions. Table 7 outlines the sample's results to questions about classmate relationships.

Table 7. Relationships with Classmates.

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Other students accept me as I am	0	0	1 (4.5%)	19 (86.4%)	2 (9.1%)
I get along well with other students in my classes	0	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	15 (68.2%)	1 (4.5%)
Other students value my opinions when working in groups	0	0	6 (27.3%)	15 (68.2%)	1 (4.5%)
I enjoy working on projects with classmates	2 (9.1%)	4 (18.2%)	7 (31.8%)	9 (40.9%)	0

Another area of relationship satisfaction questions related to the second research question that participants were asked about was relationships with student affairs staff. All members of the sample were asked general questions about non-teaching university staff. However, since not all students in the sample had either lived in a residence hall or participated in extra-curricular activities, not all students were asked all questions; participants were only asked questions that related to their experiences with the university. Even though students indicated having experiences with different student services personnel, students who are persisting in college were still predicted to indicate hat they had positive relationships and interactions with non-teaching university staff. As expected, a majority of students either indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements relating to positive relationships with non-teaching staff. However, there were results in the data that showed some areas with lower scores. When the students were asked questions relating to students affairs staff taking a personal interest in the students as individuals, some respondents indicated that they not believe staff took a personal interest in their individual well-being. The corresponding data are outlined below in Table 8.

Table 8. Relationships with University Staff (Non-Teaching).

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Non-teaching staff at the school care about me as a person	0	2 (9.1%)	8 (36.4%)	9 (40.9%)	3 (13.6%)
Non-teaching staff treat me fairly	0	0	10 (45.5%)	10 (45.5%)	3 (13.6%)

Residence hall staff care(d) about my well being	0	0	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	5 (27.8%)
Residence hall staff take/took a personal interest in me as an individual	0	2 (11.8%)	4 (23.5%)	7 (41.2%)	4 (23.5%)
My advisor, sponsor, or coach treats/treated me fairly	0	0	2 (11.1%)	10 (55.6%)	6 (33.3%)
My advisor, sponsor, or coach asks/asked about my well being on a regular basis	0	2 (11.1%)	4 (22.2%)	8 (44.4%)	4 (22.2%)
My advisor, sponsor, or coach encourages/ encouraged me to do well in my academic endeavors.	0	0	1 (5.6%)	11 (61.1%)	6 (33.3%)
My advisor, sponsor, or coach thinks I will be successful	0	0	2 (11.1%)	9 (50.0%)	7 (38.9%)

Also related to answering the second research question were data reflecting students' perceptions of their relationships with their families. A majority of students indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the factors indicating a positive familial relational influence on their persistence in college. The data do show a small group of participants indicating neutral feelings about some of the factors related to family relationships, and the data also show one participant disagreeing with one factor – that this student's family does not ask him/her about his/her college life. The data are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9. Family Relationships.

Factor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My family asks me about college life	0	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	7 (31.8%)	11 (50.0%)
My family expects me to be successful at college	0	0	1 (4.5%)	7 (31.8%)	15 (68.2%)
My family supports me with my academic endeavors	0	0	1 (4.5%)	5 (22.7%)	16 (72.7%)

Research Question 3: Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment? The researcher sought to address this question by asking the sample to first rank the kinds of relationships in the order that they believed represented who most strongly influences them to persist in college. Also to address this research question, study participants were asked to indicate which human relational groups they would utilize for support with both academic and personal issues. The data related to these research questions supports the researcher's first expectation of the results:

> The relationships tied more closely to the students' social lives (i.e., family and friends) will have a stronger impact on students' decisions to persist in college than the relationships that students have that are more closely tied to the college (i.e., relationships with classmates, faculty, and other university staff).

The first data set relating to the third research question represents student responses when asked to rank the kinds of relationships they had in order of which ones they perceived to have the most influence on their persistence in college. In the student

rankings, a relationship ranked with a "1" was thought to have the least amount of influence, and a relationship ranked with a "6" was thought to have highest amount of influence over a student's persistence in college. Once the students ranked the relationships in order of influence in college persistence, the rankings for each relationship type were averaged together. Then the relationship types were placed in order of their average rankings; the order of average rankings for the relationship types was: self (4.82), family (4.19), friends (3.77), faculty/instructors (3.62), and classmates (2.67). This data supports the researcher's expectation in that both of the relationships associated with the students' social lives, family and friends, were ranked higher on average than the relationships associated with the students' academic lives, faculty/instructors, classmates, and university non-teaching staff. Illustrated in Table 10 are the order of the average rankings as well as the actual number of students and percents of students who ranked each of the six relationship descriptor groups with each of the six different levels of influence.

Table 10. Ranking of Relational Influences on College Persistence.

Relationship Descriptor	Ranking Average	Ranked 1	Ranked 2	Ranked 3	Ranked 4	Ranked 5	Ranked 6
Self	4.82	2 (9.1%)	0	3 (13.6%)	2 (9.1%)	3 (13.6%)	12 (54.5%)
Family	4.19	0	6 (28.6%)	1 (4.8%)	3 (14.3%)	5 (23.8%)	6 (28.6%)
Friends	3.77	0	2 (9.1%)	7 (31.8%)	7 (31.8%)	6 (27.3%)	0

		2	3	4	5	6	1
Faculty/ Instructors	3.62	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	4 (19.0%)	5 (23.8%)	6 (28.6%)	1 (4.8%)
Classmates	2.67	4 (19.0%)	7 (33.3%)	4 (19.0%)	4 (19.0%)	2 (9.5%)	0
Non-teaching university staff	1.90	13 (65.0%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (5.0%)	7 (31.8%)	0	2 (10.0%)

Another set of survey questions related to the third research question asked students which human relational groups – social or academic – they would go to for support for both academic and personal issues. The researcher posited that the results from these two questions would lend further support to the third research question by showing which relationships students most relied on for support in certain situations.

The first type of issue students were asked to consider was an academic issue. Students were allowed to respond with multiple answers in regards to who they would go to for support. The supporter choices were ranked in order of the frequency of selection in Table 11. Although the researcher expected that relationships associated with students' social lives would have a stronger influence on students, and although the last set of data also supports this idea, the results for this question vary from the last question's results. When students were asked who they would go to for academic support, the answers, in order of most frequently answered, were: instructor/faculty member, classmates, family, non-teaching staff, and then peers (not classmates). Although this data does not support the researcher's first expectation of the research results, the results do lend support to the second research expectation that the

relationships associated with the college would also play a role in influencing students. The data are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Support with Academic Issues.

Supporters	
Instructor/Faculty Member	13 (59.1%)
Classmates	6 (27.3%)
Family	5 (22.7%)
Non-teaching staff	5 (22.7%)
Peers (not classmates)	4 (18.2%)

The sample was also asked who they would go to for support with a personal issue. This question was also intended to lend support to the third research question. This question was presented in the same manner as when students were asked who they would go to for academic support. The supporters students indicated they would go to for support with personal issues are listed in the order of most frequent responses: peers (not classmate), family, and non-teaching staff. Both response options instructor/faculty member and classmates received no student selections. Since students were allowed to select multiple options for this survey question, these data are especially important. No respondents indicated a consideration toward instructors/faculty members or classmates when needing support with a personal issue. While the question regarding who students would go to for academic support did not mirror the initial student rankings of who they perceived as having the most influence over their persistence in college, the results for this question were similar to those rankings. Students' responses indicated that they were more likely to go to human relational groups that were associated with their social lives for support with personal issues. The corresponding data are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12. Support with Personal Issues.

Supporters	
Peers (not classmates)	16 (72.7%)
Family	11 (50.0%)
Non-teaching staff	2 (9.1%)
Instructor/Faculty Member	0
Classmates	0

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the importance of the impacts of students' various relationships on their decisions to persist in college. More specifically, this study considered the relationships of traditional students who had already persisted through their sophomore year at a mid-Plains major research institution. These participants were asked to consider the relationships they had with their family, friends, classmates, faculty, and other university staff on their campus and to consider which of those relationships more strongly influenced them to persist toward degree attainment. The researcher sought to make a contribution to the existing body of literature on student retention by considering the positive impacts that relationships can have on student retention and investigating which of those relationships have the strongest impact on students persisting toward degree attainment.

This chapter will include conclusions, implications, and recommendations hinged on this research study. These interpretations have developed from the researcher's analysis of the data from the surveys completed by the participants. The implications and recommendations are based on the survey data and the existing body of literature on student attrition and retention. The recommendations for implementation and further research call for faculty and staff of post-secondary education institutions to be cognizant of the impact of both off- and on-campus relationships that students have and the impacts, both positive and negative, that those relationships have on students' decisions to remain within or depart from their institution and their decisions regarding degree attainment. The research also suggests that college administrators utilize their knowledge

of the importance of student relationships when designing and implementing professional development opportunities for faculty and student affairs staff as well as when planning and operating student programs.

Conclusions

The study considered three research questions:

Research Question 1: Are students satisfied with their college experiences?

Research Question 2: Are the relationships that students have with friends, family and college staff and faculty important in influencing them to persist in college?

Research Question 3: Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment?

These questions were used as guides when the data collected in the surveys were considered.

Research Question 1: Are students satisfied with their college experience? This question has been addressed in study through the quality of college life questions in the survey. The questions in the survey that addressed overall quality of student life were based on the questions designed by Roberts and Clifton (1992) who conducted research to design a measurement instrument for the purpose of assessing the quality of life of college students. Roberts and Clifton (1992) designed survey questions that focused on student satisfaction with academic and classroom settings as well as overall student satisfaction with their college experience. The results from this research study indicated that students who have persisted through their sophomore year have experienced overall college life satisfaction. The survey data showed that students tended to strongly agree

that their college experiences will have value in their futures. They also tended to agree, although not as strongly, that the course work they are completing has value.

The results of this portion of the research study corroborated the work of other researchers who have studied college student retention and attrition (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1980; Bean, 1982; Getzlaf, Sedlacek, Kearney, & Blackwell, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). College students who have persisted through their sophomore year and plan to persist toward degree attainment expressed overall satisfaction with their college life experiences. These students were inclined to feel a connection to the university and believe that their expectations of college have been met.

Research Question 2: Are the relationships that students have with friends, family and college staff and faculty important in influencing them to persist in college? This research question was addressed throughout the survey. The researcher modeled the questions related to students' relationships and the impact of these relationships on college persistence after the work of Roberts and Clifton (1992). Although Roberts and Clifton (1992) focused on the overall quality of college student life, this researcher wanted to see if student relationships also played a role in college student life satisfaction and students' motivations to persist toward degree attainment. The researcher expected that students who had already persisted through their sophomore year of education would likely respond so that survey results reflected an existence of relationships that encouraged students to persist toward degree attainment. The survey data showed this group of students did have relationships, with family, peers, faculty, and university staff, that encouraged them to persist in college. These data confirm the work of previous

research suggesting that students' relationships influence their decisions about persisting in a post-secondary education (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980b; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008; Williford & Wadley, 2008; Jamelske, 2009; Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Liu. 2010).

This researcher found different results for the different kinds of relationships that students had and the importance of these relationships to their overall success in college. The data showed that although a majority of these persisting college sophomores had been able to build relationships during their college experiences, others believed that making new connections during their college experience was difficult and they indicated that the college experience was not what they expected it to be. Since only a few respondents indicated difficulty in forming new relationships, these data corroborate previous research showing that students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to persist (Liu, 2010).

Students were asked to consider the impact of different kinds of relationships on the quality of their college life as well as the impact that these relationships have had on their success in college. When considering in-class relationships, students tended to agree that their professors wanted them to succeed and treated students with respect while being fair and just. A majority of students also perceived their relationships with classmates as being relationships of acceptance and saw that their opinions were valued by their classmates. These results reflect previous research signifying a connection between positive interactions in classes and student retention (Tinto, 1975; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008). However, students in the

study did not enjoy working on group projects with their classmates. There could be factors outside of the reach of this research study that have influenced students' view on working in groups for coursework. Perhaps the students do not like relying on classmates when their grades are at stake; perhaps the students have had negative experiences when working in teams in previous educational settings. However, these results could also reflect the students' on-campus relationships, showing either lack of communication on the part of the professors or the university of the non-academic goals of a liberal arts institution regarding teamwork and problem solving or a lack of student-placed importance on classmate relationships.

The research study also addressed students' perceptions of their relationships with non-teaching staff at their university. Although the survey results did not show outstanding differences among the students' perceived relationships with college teaching faculty, the Likert scale survey results did show a lower degree of perceived care from non-teaching college staff. Students did believe that college non-teaching staff treated them with respect and fairness; however, the data also indicated that students did not perceive a level of personal care about student well-being from these staff members.

Pervious research has shown that students with strong family support, especially from families where at least one parent has had college experience, tend to be more likely to persist toward degree attainment (Ishitani, 2006). Previous research has also shown that students whose parents had college experience tended to have a stronger understanding of what the college experience would be like and what their role as a college student would be (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Collier & Morgan, 2007). The results of this research study corroborate pervious research because

a majority of the participants had parents with college experience, and a majority of the students also indicated that college life did reflect their expectations. The results of this research study showed that students who had persisted through their sophomore year and believed that they would persist toward degree attainment had a strong perception of family support. These students tended to agree that their families asked about their college life, expected them to be successful in college, and were supportive in their academic endeavors.

Research Question 3: Who do college students identify as being most significant in encouraging them to persist toward degree attainment? The research study addressed this research question when participants were asked to rank the relationships they had in regards to the importance of their success as college students as well as through survey questions asking participants who they would go to for assistance with both academic and personal issues.

Students were asked to rank the relationships in order of the greatest influence on their success; when responses were averaged together, the ranking was: self, family, friends, faculty/instructors, classmates, and non-teaching university staff. The top three, self, family, and friends, were non-academically, socially categorized relationships; while the three ranked at the bottom half, faculty/instructors, classmates, and non-teaching university staff, were the relationships that had more direct ties to the university. These data are important to college faculty and student affairs staff because they show that the human relationships over which the university has the least amount of control are the ones that students believe have the greatest influence over their success in college.

However, when students were asked to consider who they would go to for support with particular kinds of issues, the ranking order did change to some degree. When students were asked to consider who they would go to for support on an academic issue, they ranked the five choices in the following order: faculty/instructor, classmates, family, non-teaching staff, and then peers (not classmates). In this ranking specifically regarding academic support, students tended to rank faculty and classmates higher than they had when asked to rank who they believed to have the strongest influence on their overall success in college.

When students were asked to who they were more likely to go to for support with personal issues, the order changed again. The new order was: peers (not classmates), family, non-teaching staff, and with faculty/instructor and classmates tied at the bottom. The results of this survey questioned tended to mirror more strongly the results of the previous question when students were asked to rank what relationships they believed influenced their overall college success. Again, students have placed more influential power into relationship groups that are further away from the university's influence. These results are significant to college professionals, including faculty, student affairs staff, and college administrators, because they indicate which human aggregates most strongly influence students' decisions to maintain enrollment at their chosen university.

Implications

In view of the research study, there are various implications for university faculty, student services personnel staff, and university administration to consider. Included in this section are suggestions for faculty and staff professional development as well as

highlighted information that university faculty and staff should think about when designing and implementing policies, curriculum, and programs for students.

Given the survey results showing a low student ranking of importance on non-teaching university staff, the university may want to consider addressing this issue in student affairs professional development. Komives and Woodard (2003) wrote, "American higher education was distinctive from the beginning in that it was based on the belief that the student's character as well as scholarship must be developed" (p. 1). Student affairs has a history in American higher education as a profession dedicated to the purpose of fostering student development (Woodard & Komives, 2003). If students are not making strong connections with student services personnel, then perhaps colleges need to address this in their professional development. Student services personnel, such as those professionals in advising, retention services, student involvement, student activities, residence life, etc., should, as professionals, have a background in student development theories and keep abreast of current research and literature in their field (McEwen, 2003). Student affairs professionals who what to provide superior customer service to students will be engaged in professional development focusing on student development to strengthen their abilities to build relationships and communities and to provide challenge and support for students.

Also, because students tended to rank off-campus relationships, such as those with family and friends, as being important to their overall college success and suggested that these groups of people would be most important in helping with personal issues that the students may face during their college experiences, this researcher believes that the university could make a stronger commitment to both helping to connect students' off-

campus relationships to their campus lives and to helping students make a more successful transition to college campus life. The campus could help students' families connect to their student's university life by offering detailed campus orientation programs and working to continue building relationships created at parent/family orientation programs throughout the students' academic experiences. Galsky and Shotick (2012) provided some examples of ways that universities can better serve both students and their families: establish a student affairs office that addresses parent relations, provide data about the college that is easily accessible to parents, and establish an active parents' board.

The university can also work to foster more social engagement that is more developmentally significant to students during their first few semesters on campus. Although the results showed that that students were participating in campus events, the data also showed that a few of the students were still struggling to form new peer relationships. Student integration into the social communities of the university is central to student retention (Braxton, 2003). Student affairs personnel need to design and implement policies and programs, such as orientation programs, residence hall programs, and social programs for community students, which allow students to socially engage with their peers (p. 331). Braxton (2003) explained, "Student affairs practitioners should encourage such informal interactions among students, especially those students that appear socially isolated" (p. 331). For students who are not making strong connections to their peers, colleges need to have policies and programs in place that foster relationship building – this means that polices and programs need to go beyond the surface of just

having orientations, hall meetings, social programs, etc. and instead focus on the depth of the programming in truly fostering relationship building.

Although students did indicate that their relationships with classmates were relationships where they felt that they were respected and had opinions that others valued, they also indicated that they did not enjoy working in group projects with their classmates as part of their coursework. This is an issue that could be addressed with campus faculty. Perhaps faculty could consider the kinds of group work being assigned to students in their courses. Previous research has shown that collaborative work fosters student academic success (Astin, 1999). Astin's (1999) work on student involvement in higher education has shown that when students are actively involved in expending energy in working with classmates and faculty that student development is fostered. However, perhaps the students are not being clearly connected to the objectives of teamwork fostering more real-world examples of how the coursework will relate to future projects in work situations. When college faculty help students to understand the value of a liberal arts education, then students can better understand the objectives and goals of their university (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009).

Another recommendation developed as a result of this research is that university faculty and instructors need to be made aware of the influence they have on overall student satisfaction and development. Even though the results indicated that students find value in their coursework and feel respected and listened to by the faculty, the research also showed slightly lower results when students were asked if they felt personal connections to the university teaching staff. Collaboration between university faculty and university student affairs staff could strengthen the relationship between academic

success and overall student development. Increasing links between coursework and out-of-the-classroom experiences could result in impacts in overall student perceptions of satisfaction of their quality of student life and overall success at the university.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the future, efforts to conduct longitudinal research should be made to further progress the knowledge base of college student retention and persistence and the connection between persistence and student relationships. The longitudinal research should begin with students who are in the transitional phase between secondary and post-secondary educational work and should continue through students' collegial experiences. This research could further show the importance of students' precollege experiences and relationships and their impacts on college persistence. Although significant research has been conducted with samples of students during the transitional time between high school and college and into their sophomore years, a longitudinal research study following students from this point to students' degree and employment attainment would add to the literature on the subject of college student quality of life and retention. Longitudinal research would have the advantage of showing which factors, including kinds of relationships, more significantly affect college students in their transition into college life and which factors have more lasting effects on overall college student satisfaction with their education.

As colleges continue along the trend of developing more learning communities, especially ones that go beyond the freshman year experience, more research should be conducted to address the connection between academic success and student identity development. Identifying which kinds of learning community experiences foster the

most significant gains in both academic achievements as well as overall college student development could prove beneficial to colleges looking to create a more stream-lined and effective program of study with the increasingly diverse body of students.

More research is also needed in assessing the impact of student affairs professionals on college student development and students' overall educational experiences during their post-secondary experiences. Researchers could consider the roles that student services personnel are supposed to be filling from the point of view of the institution as well as the roles students see those professionals filling. Students in this research study did not seem to place significant influential importance on student affairs staff, so perhaps further research could address this disconnect between the mission of professionals in student affairs in regards to student development and the view that students have of student affairs professionals' roles on campus.

Final Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to consider which relationships had positively influenced college students to persist in their education. Specifically, the research study focused on traditional students who had completed their freshman and sophomore academic years. The research addressed the impacts of student relationships with their family, friends, classmates, university faculty, and student affairs staff on their college campus. The researcher sought to make a contribution to the existing body of literature on college student retention and the influences of student relationships on retention. Findings from the research study showed that students who had persisted through their sophomore year of college did agree that they had had positive relationships that did influence them and provide support to them to persistent toward degree attainment. The

research also showed that students ranked some relationships as having a stronger influence in their college success than others. Students ranked themselves as being the biggest factor in their college success. Following self, family and friends were ranked by students, respectively in that order, as having the next strongest influences on college student success. Students ranked faculty/instructors, classmates, and non-teaching university staff, in that order, as being the three least influential in their overall persistence in college. However, the research also suggested that students rely more heavily on different people for support in different areas – relying mostly on faculty/instructors and classmates for academic support and relying mostly on family and friends for support with personal issues.

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Appendix A

Online Survey

1. What is your sex

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. I am a student from:

☐ Within the state

☐ Outside of this state

3. Are you receiving the Pell Grant?

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. How often do you meet with your instructors outside of class?

☐ At least once a week

☐ A few times a month

☐ Once or twice a semester

☐ Never

5. How often do you meet with universtiy staff?

☐ At least once a week

☐ A few times a month

☐ Once or twice a semester

☐ Never

6. How often do you work on assignments for classes with peers outside of class hours?

☐ At least once a week

☐ A few times a month

☐ Once or twice a semester

☐ Never

7. How often do you participate in campus events with peers?

☐ At least once a week

☐ A few times a month
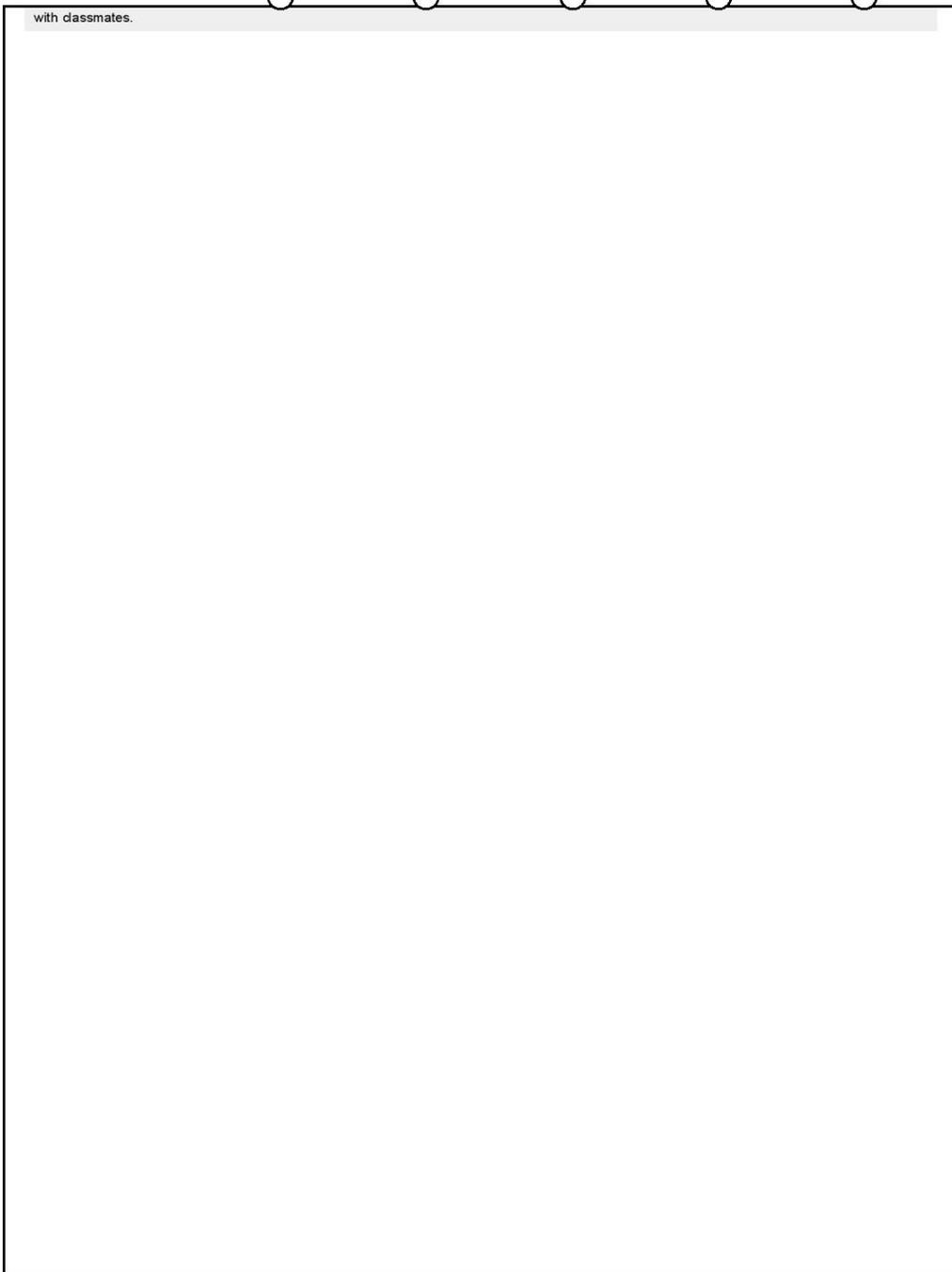
☐ Once or twice a semester

☐ Never

8. How often do you attend programs or events through campus ministries?

- [ ] At least once a week
- [ ] A few times a month
- [ ] Once or twice a semester
- [ ] Never

9. The following ask you about your academic experiences on campus. Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
The things I learn are important to me.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
People look up to me.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I really get involved in my course work.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I like learning.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I have acquired skills that will be of use to me.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am given the chance to do work that really interests me.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I really like to attend classes each day.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The work I do is good preparation for my future.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I find that learning is a lot of fun.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professors treat me fairly.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
People care about what I think.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professors take a personal interest in helping me with my work.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am treated with respect.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professors help me do my best.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professors are fair and just.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professors listen to what I say.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I find it easy to get to know other people.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mixing with other people helps me to understand myself.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
People think highly of me.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other students accept me as I am.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I get along well with other students in my classes.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other students value my opinions when working in groups.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I enjoy working on projects	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

with classmates.

10. The following ask you about your non-academic experiences on campus. Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
Non-teaching staff at the school care about me as a person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not-teaching staff treat me fairly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe I am well-adjusted to life at the university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe that I will graduate from this university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have had a positive experience so far with the university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Did one or both of your parents attend college?

☐ No

☐ Yes, at least one of my parents had some college experience

☐ Yes, at least one of my parents finished a college degree

12. Did your high school's staff prepare you for college?

☐ No, no programs for college preparation were provided

☐ Yes, school staff provided college preparation information

☐ Yes, school staff provided college preparation information and guidance

13. The following ask you about your experience before college. Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
My family asks me about college life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My family expects me to be successful at college.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My family supports me with my academic endeavors.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My experiences in high school prepared me for this experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
College is what I expected it to be.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Have you lived in a residence hall?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. If you responded "Yes" to the previous question, please complete the following by rating your responses to each of the following statements from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
Residence hall staff care(d) about my well being.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residence hall staff take/took a personal interest in my as an individual.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. Have you ever been involved in an extra-curricular activity at the university such as a club, student government organization, athletics, etc.?

☐ Yes

☐ No

17. If you responded "Yes" to the previous question, please complete the following by rating your responses to each of the following statements from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
My advisor, sponsor, or coach treats/treated me fairly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My advisor, sponsor, or coach asks/asked about my well being on a regular basis.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My advisor, sponsor, or coach encourages/encouraged me to do well in my academic endeavors.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My advisor, sponsor, or coach thinks I will be successful.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. Rank the following in order of what you believe is the most influential to your academic success. (1 = least influential; 6 = most influential. Do not repeat numbers.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Classmates	○	○	○	○	○	○
Friends	○	○	○	○	○	○
Family	○	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty/Instructors	○	○	○	○	○	○
Non-teaching university staff	○	○	○	○	○	○
Self	○	○	○	○	○	○

19. Who are you most likely to go to for support with an academic issue?

☐ Instructor/faculty

☐ Classmates

☐ Other peers

☐ Non-teaching staff

☐ Family

20. Who are you most likely to go to for support with a personal issue?

☐ Instructor/faculty

☐ Classmates

☐ Other peers

☐ Non-teaching staff

☐ Family

Appendix B

Letters of Consent

Project ID IRB# 20120512449 EX

Dear Student,

The purpose of this e-mail is to request your participation in a survey about who influences your quality of life at University of Nebraska – Lincoln. You are being as to participate because you are sophomore with full-time enrollment at the university. Outlined below is information about the survey and your participation.

Title: Quality of Life – Student Relational Engagement

Purpose: The researcher is interested in determining the quality of student life at the university and the impact of positive relationships on student persistence and retention.

Procedures: The survey asks you to respond to a series of questions about your perceived quality of life at the university. The survey also asks you about relationships you have both on and off campus that my influence your quality of life and your decisions related to persisting at the university. The survey can be reached by accessing the provided link to SurveyMonkey and should take approximately 15 minutes.

Risk and /or Discomforts: There are no known risks associated with participation. The survey **does not** request personal identification information.

Benefits: Taking this survey may offer you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences at the university.

Confidentiality: The survey is offered on-line, is encrypted and collects no IP information. No names are requested. Information received through the survey is to be utilized for research purposes only. The researcher plans on reporting the data as part of a thesis for course credit.

Compensation: No compensation is offered.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study or before submission of the survey. Please call Lindsay Wayt, a graduate student in the department of Education Administration, (402)960-6380 or e-mail (lindsk@hotmail.com), or you may contact her faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, via phone (402) 472-0988 or e-mail (blacost1@unl.edu) with questions. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant that are not answered by the investigator or if you want to report concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review board at (402) 472-6965.

You are free to decide not to participate in the study without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not

result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Submission of the on-line survey implies consent.

The researcher invites you to click on the provided SurveyMonkey link to access the survey and share your thoughts about your experiences at the university. Thank you in advance for your input into this project.

Survey Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GD55ZPL

Sincerely,
Lindsay Wayt
Principal Investigator
lindsk@hotmail.com
(402)960-6380

Project ID IRB# 20120512449 EX

Dear Student,

A few weeks ago you were sent an email requesting your participation in a survey about who influences your quality of life at University of Nebraska – Lincoln. This email is being sent to remind you of this invitation. If you have already participated in the survey, please disregard this message. If you have not yet completed the survey, please consider completing it. Outlined below is information about the survey and your participation.

Title: Quality of Life – Student Relational Engagement

Purpose: The researcher is interested in determining the quality of life at the university and the impact of positive relationships on student persistence and achievement.

Procedures: The survey asks you to respond to a series of questions about your perceived quality of life at the university. The survey also asks you about relationships you have both on and off campus that may influence your quality of life and your decisions related to persisting at the university. The survey can be reached by accessing the provided link to SurveyMonkey and should take approximately 15 minutes.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks associated with participation. The survey **does not** request personal identification information.

Benefits: Taking this survey may offer you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences at the university.

Confidentiality: The survey is offered on-line, is encrypted and collects no IP information. No names are requested. Information received through the survey is to be utilized for research purposes only. The researcher plans on reporting the data as part of a thesis for course credit.

Compensation: No compensation is offered.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study or before submission of the survey. Please call Lindsay Wayt, a graduate student in the department of Education Administration, (402)960-6380 or email (lindsk@hotmail.com), or you may contact her faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, via phone (402)472-0988 or email (blacost1@unl.edu) with questions. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant that are not answered by the investigator or if you want to report concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Intuitional Review Board at (402)472-6965.

You are free to decide not to participate in the study without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska. Your decisions will not

result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Submission of the on-line survey implies consent.

The researcher invites you to click on the provided SurveyMonkey link to access the survey and share your thoughts about your experiences at the university. Thank you in advance for your input into this project.

Survey Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GD55ZPL

Sincerely,
Lindsay Wayt
Principal Investigator
lindsk@hotmail.com
(402)960-6380

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

![University of Nebraska Lincoln logo]

May 7, 2012

Lindsay Wayt
Department of Educational Administration

Barbara LaCost
Department of Educational Administration
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20120512449 EX
Project ID: 12449
Project Title: Importance of Student Invovlement and Relational Engagement: A student on who positively influences students to persist at their university

Dear Lindsay:

This letter is to officially notify you of the exemption determination of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 05/07/2012.

1. Please include the IRB approval number (IRB# 20120512449 EX) in the emailed consent document. Please email a copy of the consent document, with the number included, to bfreeman2@unl.edu for our records. If you need to make changes to the document please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol

that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB